DEMOS

YOUR VOICE ON IMMIGRATION

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC DELIBERATION ON WORK-RELATED IMMIGRATION FOR THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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- Professor Brian Bell (Advisory Board Chair), former Chair, Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)
- Jacqueline Broadhead, Director, Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity, COMPAS, Oxford University
- David Goodhart, Head of Demography, Immigration & Integration Unit, Policy Exchange
- Mary Gregory, Executive Director for Population Statistics and Census, Office for National Statistics
- Rob McNeil, Deputy Director and Head of Media and Communications, Oxford Migration Observatory
- Alp Mehmet MVO, Chairman, Migration Watch
- Heather Rolfe, Senior Research Fellow, British Future
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Demos's work is editorially independent; any errors remain the authors' responsibility.

Hana Kapetanovic, Aidan Garner and Miriam Levin

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos is Britain's leading cross-party think tank. Our mission is an upgraded democracy with a new deal to mend the broken relationships between state, institutions and citizens. For over 30 years, Demos has championed a more engaged, more trusted and more participatory democracy where citizens play an active role in the decisions that affect their lives. We have a long history working with national government, parliament, regional and local authorities, and neighbourhood bodies, delivering and advocating for participatory and deliberative democracy. This is in service to improving policy making, strengthening citizenry, detoxifying polarised issues, and building back trust.

This report presents the findings of *Your Voice on Immigration*, a deliberative process on work-related immigration, commissioned by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee and delivered by Demos in partnership with King's College London. It should not be under-estimated how significant it is that a parliamentary select committee opened up its work to input by members of the public, let alone on such a contentious and febrile topic as immigration. The trust placed in citizens was repaid in full through the seriousness, depth and sensitivity with which they approached the topic and their ability to find common ground across profound divides.

This is one strand of a wider programme of work Demos is undertaking on immigration. It follows *Settling Up: A new deal to unlock immigration reform and build trust*, which made the case for putting public deliberation at the heart of the government's approach to earned settlement and integration reform, and sits alongside our ongoing work developing and trialling a new model of MP-constituent engagement to open up local conversations about immigration.

Your Voice on Immigration is a practical example of **Everyday Democracy** – our pillar of work which aims to build a new operating model for democracy by making participation, deliberation and shared governance a normal part of public life. It demonstrates that when space is created within the parliamentary system for citizen participation, the public are ready to meet this challenge, and the scrutiny function of parliament can be strengthened as a result.

FOREWORD
FROM THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIR



To sponsor a public debate on immigration may seem a brave thing to do. Immigration is constantly in the news, facts noisily traded, arguments contested. But all too often we don't get far beyond the headlines, consider the context, listen to one another's perspectives and experiences. Too often people conflate irregular migration – small boats – with regular migration: people coming to the UK to study, to work, or to maintain a family. That is why we decided to commission these deliberative workshops: to promote an informed and honest debate on immigration; and to support the work of the Committee in scrutinising government policy.

In three different locations – North Tyneside, Leicester and Renfrewshire – we assembled around 30 people, reflective of the population of each area. We deliberately chose different areas with a mix of high, medium and low levels of immigration and ensured that we had a broad range of views on the topic in the room, reflective of the views of the general public. Given the breadth of the subject, we chose to focus on immigration for work – an area in which the Government has a high degree of control and can take action that has direct impacts. We asked workshop attendees to consider the balance between high and low skilled immigration, and between long- and short-term visas. In looking at these questions, we wanted participants to think about the principles on which answers should be based and to prioritise them.

This deeper understanding of viewpoints is needed because for too long debate has been dominated by the loudest voices, not just on social media. Good scrutiny requires a nuanced debate – one that identifies and considers some of the trade offs involved in making policy in relation to work immigration, including economic contribution, social integration and balancing local needs with national strategy.

By giving a platform to all voices – loud and quiet – and exploring where common ground can be found, deliberation can help detoxify and depolarise debate. It can build consensus where it often seems hard to find and point towards solutions to longstanding and difficult policy problems.

As on any policy, delivery is key. When commitments are repeatedly broken, targets not met, trust is undermined. We know that failure to deliver on policy commitments has contributed to a decline in trust in politicians, politics and political institutions. Rebuilding trust requires more than persuasion and delivery: it also means giving people an opportunity to contribute to the

decisions that affect their lives. The participants in these workshops, with their very different views and experiences, found much to agree on and have provided some clear steers on what they think should be the main principles underpinning immigration policy. We will use the detailed findings from all three events in our ongoing scrutiny on work migration.

On behalf of the Committee, I want to express our thanks to all those who delivered these workshops, at Demos, King's College London, numerous teams in the House, the experts at the events and on the advisory board, and most of all to the participants for giving us their time, insights and constructive engagement.

Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley

Chair, Home Affairs Committee



Participants from Leicester workshop

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigration is among the most prominent and most contested subjects in British politics, with around half the public consistently ranking it as one of the top three issues facing the country.[1] But the debate is often dominated by the loudest and most polarising voices, and focuses on small boats and asylum seekers when these make up a far smaller proportion of arrivals into the UK compared to those who come here for work or study.[2] This leaves little room in public debate for evidence, nuance, or serious discussion of the trade offs involved in developing an immigration policy that can command broad public consent.

To create the conditions for constructive conversation between people holding very different views, and to hear what the public concludes when they are given time and balanced evidence, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee commissioned this deliberative process on workforce migration.

Public deliberation enables members of the public to reach considered, collective conclusions. This is distinct from polling, focus groups, or interviews, which capture individuals' top-of-mind views. The approach is well established in the UK and around the world. The OECD has described its growth since the 1980s as a 'deliberative wave', identifying 733 cases across 34 countries between 1979 and 2023.[3] Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies led to new legislation on same-sex marriage and abortion; the Scottish Government has committed to holding assemblies routinely;[4] researchers at the UCL Constitution Unit have identified 42 assemblies or juries convened by UK councils and combined authorities since 2019;[5] and six House of Commons select committees jointly commissioned Climate Assembly UK,[6] which reported in 2020.

Between March and May 2026, Demos, in partnership with the House of Commons and King's College London's Policy Institute and Centre for British Democracy, ran in-person deliberative workshops with 89 members of the public across three local authority areas selected to capture different levels of work-related immigration: North Tyneside, Leicester, and Renfrewshire. Participants were recruited to reflect the demographic profile of each area and the range of views on immigration within it.

1 YouGov (2026) The most important issues facing the country 2011–2026, YouGov UK.
2 Home Office (2026) How many people come to the UK each year? Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2026, UK Government.
3 OECD (2023) 2023 trends in deliberative democracy: OECD database update, Participo, OECD Open Government Unit
4 Scottish Government (2023) Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy working group recommendations: Scottish Government response, Scottish Government
5 Preller, P. and Renwick, A. (2025) Local citizens' assemblies: why do councils set them up and what can they do?, Constitution Unit blog, University College London
6 Climate Assembly UK (2020) The Path to Net Zero: Climate Assembly UK full report, UK Parliament.

They heard from and questioned expert speakers, and deliberated in small groups on the question set by the Committee:



The government has set a goal of reducing net migration.
*'**Your Voice on Immigration**' is focusing on people who come to the UK for work; in what ways should work-related immigration be reduced?*

This report sets out participants' answers to this question through thirteen principles developed across the workshops to guide the work of the Home Affairs Committee in scrutinising government policy on workforce migration. It also explores how participants responded to two trade off questions on work-related immigration set by the Committee. Finally, the report sets out the impact of the deliberative process on participants, and concludes with areas for potential future exploration.

This report can be read in conjunction with the technical report which sets out details of workshop design, evaluation methodology, recruitment and demographic make up of the participants, and the evidence participants were given.

PARTICIPANTS FOUND SUBSTANTIAL COMMON GROUND ON WORK-RELATED IMMIGRATION

Each workshop developed and ranked ten principles to guide the Committee on work-related immigration policy, resulting in thirty in total. These were consolidated into thirteen principles. That thirty could be distilled into thirteen is itself a finding: different tables within each workshop, and workshops held hundreds of miles apart in areas with very different experiences of immigration, arrived independently at similar conclusions. Where they differed, the difference often lay in emphasis, in the mechanism proposed, or in relative priority, rather than in the underlying principle.

The thirteen consolidated principles, ranked from highest to lowest priority according to a follow-up questionnaire completed by 51.7% of participants in July 2026:

1. Prioritise training, upskilling and employment opportunities for UK residents, especially young people, before relying on migrant labour
2. Ensure there is sufficient local infrastructure to support both immigrants and existing residents
3. Plan work-related immigration using evidence and long-term workforce planning to predict labour market needs and address shortages, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances
4. Prevent employers from abusing the immigration system by ensuring effective oversight, enforcement and fair treatment of migrant workers

5. Promote an honest and balanced public conversation about immigration
6. Once they're here, treat migrant workers fairly, with dignity and respect
7. Ensure decision-making on work-related immigration is joined up across government
8. Support migrants and local communities to integrate successfully, strengthening community cohesion
9. Plan work-related immigration on a local level by taking into account local context and labour market needs
10. Provide different immigration pathways that reflect individuals' skills, circumstances and whether they intend to come for the short or long term
11. Prioritise migrants who make a positive contribution to the UK's economy
12. Provide appropriate and clear pathways for settlement for immigrants once they have work visas and are making a long-term contribution
13. Migrant workers, particularly those in medium-skilled and longer-term roles, should be able to bring their immediate families to the UK

THE PRINCIPLES ARE GROUNDED IN COMPLEX TRADE OFFS

The detail underlying each principle demonstrates the financial and social costs that were weighed up in order to develop it. Across the three workshops, supported by experts, participants considered and accepted a range of negative implications of their principles, such as higher training and wage costs, higher consumer prices, short-term shortages in sectors unable to recruit, and increased long-term settlement of immigrants with the infrastructure and fiscal obligations that follow.

VIEWS ON BOTH TRADE OFF QUESTIONS MOVED DURING DELIBERATION

The Committee asked participants to weigh two questions central to work-related immigration policy: whether to prioritise restricting visas for highly-paid, highly-skilled workers or for lower-paid workers in hard-to-fill roles; and whether to favour short-term visas or routes leading to permanent settlement. Participants voted before hearing evidence and deliberating, and after.

Participants engaged deeply with the trade offs, and demonstrated an openness to changing their mind as a result of new information and discussion with people with different perspectives from their own. Participants reported that this significantly differed from their usual experiences of the immigration debate. In both discussions they frequently concluded that the right answer could not be expressed as a binary: distinguishing between sectors, regions, types of vacancy, and the expected duration of need. On both questions participants began from an intuition – that higher-paid workers pay in while lower-paid workers cost the country, and that time-limited visas are the more controllable option – but moved away from these initial positions by the second vote, though not uniformly.

THE PROCESS CHANGED HOW PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTOOD THE ISSUE – AND HOW THEY SAW POLITICS

Participants' initial associations with immigration were dominated by irregular arrivals, but by the end they had engaged in-depth on the less considered but larger scale issue of work-related immigration. The independent evaluation found that participants' views on immigration also shifted over the course of the workshops: participants became slightly more positive about the impact of immigration on the country (from an average of 6.8 to 7.2, with 0 being very negative and 10 being very positive), as well as the economic impact specifically (from an average of 7.0 to 7.3).[7]

That public deliberation often shifts the way participants think about a topic is well-documented, with the evidence suggesting exposure to new, balanced information, internal deliberation (with oneself), and external deliberation (with others) all play a part.[8]

New information on the relative size of different immigration routes and on migrants' fiscal contribution was cited in the workshops and even months later as having affected people's views. Self-reported knowledge on immigration increased significantly, from a mean score across the workshops of 5.9 to 7.1 overall, with 0 being no knowledge at all and 10 being a great deal.

Many participants were surprised by their own ability and that of others to disagree constructively: 92% felt they had changed their mind at least a little as a result of hearing others' views. As well as participants' views on the topic shifting, views shifted also on citizen participation in politics. There was a strong increase in participants' trust in other citizens to make good political decisions (from 45% to 58%) and, by the end, more participants felt they knew enough to participate in politics (from 60% to 74%).

Participants' view of political efficacy itself shifted too. Participants' sense that the government's current immigration policies address concerns they have about immigration went up 20 percentage points, from 24% to 44% after the workshops. After taking part, more participants felt they had a say about what the UK Government does (agreement that people like them *don't* have a say went down from 56% to 46%), fewer felt the political system doesn't work (disagreement that the political system works fairly well went down from 38% to 30%) or were dissatisfied with how democracy works at the national level (dissatisfaction went down from 40% to 34%) or local level (satisfaction went up from 40% to 47%).

A trust gap remains, however. The overwhelming majority (82%) felt their conclusions should carry substantial weight with the Committee, but only half (49%) believed they would. Closing this trust gap now sits with the Committee as they take on the findings of this report. This is the real test of the impact of the deliberative workshops; whether participants' conclusions will influence the immigration policy landscape through the Committee's work, which will be assessed through the independent evaluation that follows, with results to be published at the beginning of 2027.

7 Data on the impact of the process on participants are drawn from early analysis as part of the independent evaluation – see the technical report for more methodological detail. Elstub, S., Blackett, L., and Grebby, L. (2027) Evaluation of Your Voice on Immigration, Newcastle University (forthcoming)

8 Neblo, M., Esterling, K. and Lazer, D. (2020) Politics with the people: building a directly representative democracy, APSA Preprints. Involve (2014) Changing hats: lessons from involving deliberative and participatory methods in local government, Involve.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcomes of deliberative workshops on work-related immigration held between March and May 2026 in three locations across the UK. It sets out the conclusions that members of the public reached through a structured process of learning and deliberation.

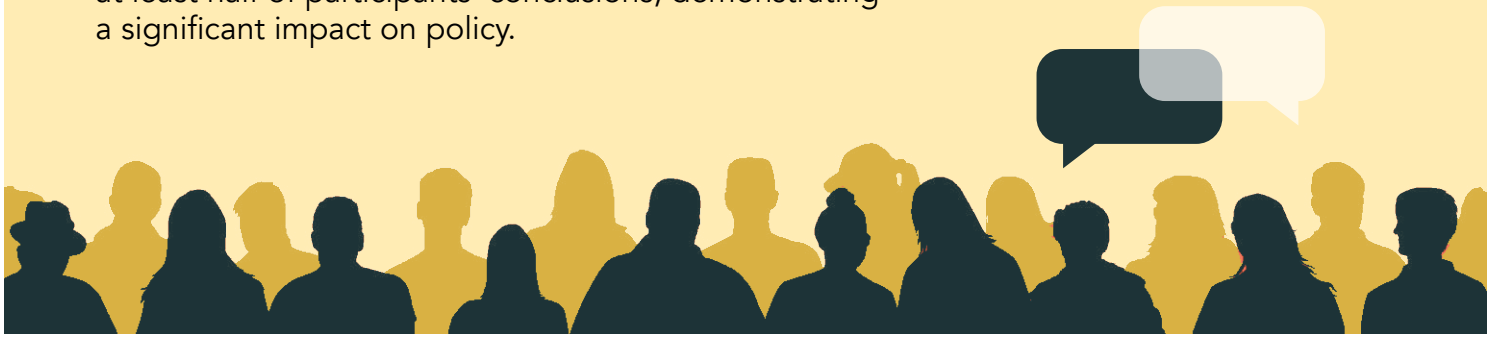
The deliberative workshops were commissioned by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee and delivered by Demos in partnership with the House of Commons and King's College London Policy Institute and Centre for British Democracy. This report has been prepared independently by Demos in partnership with the King's College London Policy Institute and Centre for British Democracy, and reflects the public's considered conclusions as expressed in the workshops.

In commissioning a deliberative process, the Committee's purpose was not simply to measure opinion on immigration – for which polling evidence is already plentiful – but to understand how members of the public consider complex issues and weigh up difficult trade offs on work-related immigration, with a view to informing ongoing scrutiny of immigration policy.

WHAT IS PUBLIC DELIBERATION?

Public deliberation is a method for engaging the public on a policy issue. It involves members of the public reaching considered, collective conclusions on an issue when given time, balanced evidence, and the opportunity to discuss it with one another. These conclusions are intended to inform the commissioner's work and decision-making. It is distinct from methods that reveal public opinion, which explore individuals' top-of-mind views, such as focus groups, interviews, or polling.

The OECD has described the growth of deliberative processes since the 1980s as a 'deliberative wave', identifying 733 cases across 34 countries between 1979 and 2023, with the number of institutionalised processes nearly doubling between 2020 and 2023.[9] This research also showed that public authorities tend to implement at least half of participants' conclusions, demonstrating a significant impact on policy.



9 OECD (2023) 2023 trends in deliberative democracy: OECD database update, Participo, OECD Open Government Unit

Home Affairs Committee

WHAT IS THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE?

The Home Affairs Committee is a cross-party committee of Members of Parliament (MPs) responsible for scrutinising the work of the Home Office and its associated bodies. It examines government policy, spending, and administration in areas including immigration, security, and policing.

An independent Advisory Board oversaw the information provided to the participants, ensuring that the evidence presented to them was balanced and accurate, and advised on the design of the deliberative process. There will be an independent evaluation report published by Newcastle University at the beginning of 2027 assessing the quality and impact of the deliberative process.

This report sets out the context and methodology, the principles that participants agreed should guide the Home Affairs Committee's scrutiny of government policy on work-related immigration, as well as areas of nuance or disagreement, participants' views on trade offs pertaining to work-related immigration, the impact of the deliberative process, and concludes with areas for further exploration.

Our separate technical report sets out a detailed methodology, and additional data.

METHODOLOGY

This section sets out a short summary of our methodology. For full details on workshop design to ensure workshops produced conclusions relevant to the Committee, provided balanced information, enabled participants to disagree agreeably and to find common ground, refer to the technical report.

The workshops

Between March and May 2026, deliberative workshops were held in three local authority areas selected to capture different levels of work-related immigration: North Tyneside, Leicester and Renfrewshire. Across the three locations, 89 members of the public took part. Participants were recruited against quotas based on local population data, so that each group broadly reflected the demographic profile of its area as well as the range of views on immigration. They deliberated on the question set by the Committee:

The government has set a goal of reducing net migration. 'Your Voice on Immigration' is focusing on people who come to the UK for work; in what ways should work-related immigration be reduced?

Each workshop ran across one and a half days. On the first day, participants heard from and questioned expert speakers on key facts about immigration and work visas, before developing principles to guide the Committee's work in small facilitated groups. On the second day, participants finalised the principles and voted individually to agree the principles they wanted to take forward as a group. They used the finalised principles to consider two trade-off questions set by the Committee, voting on their initial position before hearing from an expert and deliberating with others, then voting again. Finally, participants voted as individuals to rank the principles in order of importance. All table discussions and plenary sessions were recorded using dembrane, an AI-enabled tool built for transcribing and analysing deliberative processes. The workshops were designed with Demos's diversity, equity, inclusion and justice commitments in mind. The technical report sets out how we took this approach.

The overarching question, the trade-off questions, the expert speakers and the information presented were all agreed in advance with an Advisory Board (see page 5 for the full list of members) selected to represent a broad range of views on immigration alongside academic and policy expertise.

Statement from the Advisory Board:

As a group we looked at the methodology, information, list of presenters and process and were satisfied that it was balanced, robust and relevant to the questions the Committee asked. Whilst not everyone on the Board agreed that the workshops were considering the most pertinent questions in relation to immigration, we trust that the report will provide credible and useful information for the Committee and the public.

After the workshops

Each workshop produced ten principles, resulting in thirty in total. After the workshops, the thirty principles were consolidated into thirteen combined principles, grouping those addressing the same or closely related themes and retaining participants' language as far as possible.

Participants were invited to complete a follow-up questionnaire a few months later, confirming that the consolidated list reflected their discussions, ranking the principles in order of priority, and sharing reflections on the workshops. There were 46 responses, a 51.7% response rate; given this, questionnaire findings are included for additional insight but have been triangulated with other evidence where possible rather than treated as conclusive.

The quality and impact of the process is being independently evaluated by Professor Stephen Elstub's team at Newcastle University, drawing on participant surveys before and after each workshop, observation of the workshops, post-publication interviews with Committee members and policy stakeholders, and a nationally representative survey. A full report will be published at the beginning of next year.

CONTEXT

National context

Immigration is amongst the most prominent and most contested subjects in contemporary British politics, with around half the public consistently ranking it as one of the top three issues facing the country over the past two years.[10] However, the debate is often dominated by the loudest voices; for example, social media analysis conducted in 2024 found that the top 1% of users were responsible for 16% of tweets on immigration, rising to 23% of anti-immigration tweets specifically.[11] With the increasing presence of bots in online political debates,[12] it becomes difficult to know whether the loudest voices are even real or not. Bad actors prioritise spreading misinformation on divisive issues, and the debate centres disproportionately on the more contentious area of irregular immigration, with 'illegal' being the most commonly associated word with 'immigrants' in an analysis of language used in parliamentary and media debates.[13]

This environment leaves little space for nuanced consideration of the evidence, trade offs and finding common ground. These deliberative workshops were designed to foster a different kind of public conversation in order to inform the work of the Home Affairs Committee.

> *"I think we don't get a very balanced view of it because we get the extreme views. We get the far right, far left views on this. We don't get anything sort of what the ordinary person probably more in the middle sort of thing."* **– Leicester Participant**

By involving a more representative cross-section of the public, the workshops enabled the Committee to hear perspectives and experiences beyond the loudest voices. By bringing balanced evidence and trade offs into the debate, the principles developed by participants to guide the Committee were more informed, nuanced, and constructive. By facilitating a structured, respectful conversation driving towards clear outputs, the principles surfaced areas of common ground on a contentious topic. By focusing on work-related immigration, participants examined a topic that has received far less public attention than routes such as asylum and irregular migration (despite them making up a far smaller proportion of immigration numbers).[14] It is also an area where the Home Office has the ability to make clear and decisive policy; for example, determining who is able to come to the UK for work, under what conditions, and how the immigration system operates for work visas.

Local context

The workshops were timed to avoid coinciding with local authority elections to prevent any impact of a potentially heightened focus on immigration associated with the elections. The first set of workshops took place in Seaton Delaval (just outside North Tyneside) on 14th-15th March 2026, before the May local authority elections, the second in Leicester on 9th-10th May 2026, where no local elections took place, and the third in Paisley (in Renfrewshire) on 16th-17th May 2026, where there had been no local authority elections either, but the 2026 Scottish Parliament election had recently taken place.

10 YouGov (2026) The most important issues facing the country, YouGov
11 Nasuto, A. and Rowe, F. (2024) 'Understanding anti-immigration sentiment spreading on Twitter', PLOS ONE, 19(9)
12 Cyabra. The bot network collapse that exposed Iran's influence operation, Cyabra
13 Montiel-McCann, C. and Julios-Costa, M. (2025) A hostile environment: language, race, surveillance and the media, Runnymede Trust
14 Montiel-McCann, C. and Julios-Costa, M. (2025) A hostile environment: language, race, surveillance and the media, Runnymede Trust

Participants' initial associations with immigration

At the beginning of the workshops, participants had the opportunity to share their initial associations with immigration, which established context for participants' thinking in each workshop, and allowed for comparison from a starting point if views shifted. Initial associations tended to be dominated by irregular arrivals (with asylum seekers, small boats, and irregular crossings being key themes), rather than regular migration or work visas. The exception was where participants drew on personal experiences of regular migration, which was most common in Leicester where immigration levels are higher and therefore participants were more likely to have personal experiences to report.

> *"When someone mentions the word immigration, I think everyone kind of thinks of illegal immigration."* **– North Tyneside Participant**
>
> *"[The word that comes to mind is] expensive... the amount that I've had to spend has been over £10,000 throughout the years on different visas and stuff."* **– Leicester Participant**

The focus on irregular arrivals was felt to be driven by media coverage in particular, as well as social media content. Therwas felt by participantsbroad consensus that current coverage and debate is polarised, and – especially for those who felt more positively about the impacts of immigration – that immigration is portrayed through an overly negative lens, or that there is a focus on negative stories. Where participants mentioned news stories or anecdotes that they had heard relating to immigration, these were overwhelmingly negative.

> *"I do worry about social media, about the sort of stuff which comes through there... It is so polarised."* **– North Tyneside Participant**
>
> *"I really don't know a lot about the stats, like numbers of immigrants. But the main thing that comes to my mind is just how much the conversation is dominated by hate."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**
>
> *"[Social media] is an echo chamber, isn't it? You pick up on one thing and then that's all you see. You don't get the other side of the argument. You don't understand other people's viewpoints… It sort of mixes up migration with illegal immigration, really complicates the issue, and it makes it so muddy that you can't then pick apart what the pros of one is versus the cons of the other."* **– Leicester Participant**

OUTPUTS & ANALYSIS

This section sets out what participants collectively concluded from the workshops and how they got there. The focus of this section is the workshops' key output: a set of principles to guide the Home Affairs Committee's scrutiny of government policy on work-related immigration. The section also examines how participants weighed up two trade off questions set by the Home Affairs Committee.

PRINCIPLES ON WORK-RELATED IMMIGRATION TO GUIDE THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ten principles on work-related immigration were developed in each of the three workshops, which were then distilled into thirteen distinct principles overall to guide the work of the Home Affairs Committee. That thirty principles could be distilled into thirteen makes one thing clear: there was an immense amount of common ground between people from different backgrounds and with different views on immigration across the workshops.

In each workshop, different tables independently came to similar conclusions. Between the workshops, in completely different parts of the UK, similar conclusions emerged independently. That is not to say that there were no differences: there were nuances to each principle, principles were sometimes in tension with each other, workshops placed different levels of emphasis on different principles, and some principles emerged in some workshops and not others.

This section tells the story of the principles: where did the participants find common ground on work-related immigration, and where did they diverge?

The thirty principles: principles from each workshop

The following principles are presented in order of priority according to participants' rankings, from highest to lowest priority. The full wording developed by participants for each principle, including why it matters and the trade offs they are comfortable with, can be found in the technical report.

North Tyneside

1. Put British workers first
2. Immigration rules should not be open to abuse by employers
3. An immigration system flexible to the needs of employers
4. The system should be fair to everyone
5. A more personalised system for immigrants
6. The system should be fair to migrants once they have a work visa
7. Fair wage thresholds
8. Prioritise migrants who make a positive economic contribution
9. Community cohesion and integration
10. Migrant workers should be able to bring their families here

Leicester

1. Prioritise permanent UK residents
2. Collaboration between government departments
3. Sponsor-led with more flexibility on criteria
4. Ensure infrastructure can accommodate immigration
5. Long-term strategy with flexibility for short-term changes
6. Oversight and scrutiny of employers
7. Based on local employment needs and context
8. Different short-term and long-term pathways
9. Consistent hiring standards
10. Support immigrants and communities with integration

Renfrewshire

1. Train British young people first
2. Treat migrant workers with dignity and respect
3. Planning to address shortages and needs
4. Reframe the immigration debate
5. Prevent employers abusing the system
6. Infrastructure to support growing communities
7. Prioritise economic contribution
8. Planning at a local level
9. Support longer term migrants to integrate
10. Make it easier for some workers to bring dependants to the UK



The thirteen consolidated principles

After the workshops, the thirty workshop principles were consolidated into the thirteen principles examined in this chapter, retaining the differences in emphasis, mechanism, and relative priority recorded in each location. Participants were presented with these consolidated principles in a follow-up questionnaire, and participants felt strongly that they reflected their discussions: the mean score overall was 4.37 out of 5, with 1 being not at all reflective, and 5 very reflective. Participants were then asked to rank the principles in order of priority.

Ranked list of consolidated principles from highest to lowest priority:

1. Prioritise training, upskilling and employment opportunities for UK residents, especially young people, before relying on migrant labour
2. Ensure there is sufficient local infrastructure to support both immigrants and existing residents
3. Plan work-related immigration using evidence and long-term workforce planning to predict labour market needs and address shortages, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances
4. Prevent employers from abusing the immigration system by ensuring effective oversight, enforcement and fair treatment of migrant workers
5. Promote an honest and balanced public conversation about immigration
6. Once they're here, treat migrant workers fairly, with dignity and respect
7. Ensure decision-making on work-related immigration is joined up across government
8. Support migrants and local communities to integrate successfully, strengthening community cohesion
9. Plan work-related immigration on a local level by taking into account local context and labour market needs
10. Provide different immigration pathways that reflect individuals' skills, circumstances and whether they intend to come for the short or long term
11. Prioritise migrants who make a positive contribution to the UK's economy
12. Provide appropriate and clear pathways for settlement for immigrants once they have work visas and are making a long-term contribution
13. Migrant workers, particularly those in medium-skilled and longer-term roles, should be able to bring their immediate families to the UK

ANALYSIS OF THE THIRTEEN CONSOLIDATED PRINCIPLES

Each of the thirteen principles is examined in turn below – analysing what participants meant by the principle, why it mattered to them, how they reached it, and the trade offs they were prepared to accept in order to uphold it. This section also explores how the three locations compared, including where they agreed or diverged, where they differed in emphasis or in the mechanisms they proposed, and what they prioritised.

1 Prioritise training, upskilling and employment opportunities for UK residents, especially young people, before relying on migrant labour

This principle holds that the country should train, upskill, and employ the people already here – young people in particular – before encouraging immigration, and that workforce migration should never be used to enable employers and government to avoid investing in the domestic workforce. In the follow-up questionnaire, this ranked top overall with respondents from all three locations, with 55% placing it in their top three principles.

Across the workshops, participants agreed that genuine labour shortages exist and must continue to be tackled through workforce migration where necessary. Their objection was to immigration operating as a permanent alternative to domestic training rather than as a temporary measure while domestic capacity is developed.

This mattered to participants as they connected failures to train and employ people already in the UK with wider problems, including youth unemployment, low wages, the emigration of skilled British workers, pressure on the welfare state and housing, and resentment towards migrants. Participants wanted the system to create opportunities for people already here while retaining the ability to employ workers from abroad where those opportunities cannot meet genuine labour-market need.

How participants discussed this principle

In each location, the discussion led to a structural critique of domestic training, how some employers use immigration as a cheap labour supply, and lack of state investment in opportunities for domestic workers. Participants felt that these issues then led to greater reliance on immigration, despite not being migration policy decisions.

> *"There has to be some criteria to upskill the existing workforce where necessary to be able to fill those posts... [and to] address the issue at root cause as to why these employers are actually going abroad to recruit... it's a quick and easy fix, it's a band-aid, isn't it? And that's just allowed to continue without addressing the root cause of the problem"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

The North Tyneside participants framed this explicitly: treating skills shortages as evidence of domestic systemic failure – a lack of investment in education, apprenticeships, and attractive local career pathways. Participants concluded that the policies capable of helping them lie mostly outside controlling immigration, and focused on positive steps to enable more British workers to get jobs.

"So I'm currently doing a training course at the moment. Had they hired someone from another country to do that, I may not have got that opportunity." **– North Tyneside Participant**

Another participant in North Tyneside expressed the same preference in terms of retention, stating that the country should seek to retain its own doctors and nurses rather than recruiting from overseas to fill the resulting gaps.

Participants in Renfrewshire set out how failing to train local people creates skills shortages, which are then filled internationally, which further depresses the incentive to invest in domestic training. This was connected directly to youth unemployment, and to the cost of the welfare state – as people who cannot find work or training therefore rely more on social programmes, and framed immigration as an easy bypass valve that lets employers and the state avoid investing in the population already here.

"The 26% who come here to work, I don't think anybody really has a problem with that, but it does lead us into a bigger problem insomuch as why are we not training the indigenous population?" **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Another Renfrewshire participant expressed the balance the workshop wanted to strike, acknowledging that genuine shortages exist in certain sectors while insisting that the country must not lose focus on putting its own workforce to work. This establishes how the principle is not an argument for closing routes, but for sequencing – such that domestic training and hiring comes first, with workforce migration as back-up to fill gaps – and for avoiding dependency on migration where domestic labour should be prioritised as the first option.

In Leicester, participants found it unreasonable that highly qualified British medical graduates struggle to find training posts here and so emigrate to Australia, while the UK simultaneously recruits qualified medical staff from overseas. The apparent absurdity of that pattern did much of the persuasive work in the room.

"Why aren't we investing in training UK doctors? … when they go and find jobs, there are no jobs, but they're getting people from abroad to come and do these jobs. Why?" **– Leicester Participant**

Leicester's principle accordingly emphasised making the best use of the country's existing diverse and skilled population, reducing unemployment among young people, and preventing the emigration of highly skilled professionals the country has already paid to train.

"So if you've got people in the country who are willing to do the job, why are we not utilising them first?" **– Leicester Participant**

This was then connected to other societal problems – how a lack of opportunity for young people in the UK leads to unemployment and resentment towards migrants. Moreover, the discussion covered certain roles that British workers could fulfil but don't want to, and what the incentives could be to reduce reliance on immigration in these jobs.

> *"So then you have to ask yourself why we have so many young people unemployed and not actually wanting to step up to do some of these kind of things... They will see people coming in stealing jobs from local people, but the local people don't want to do it. So why? That's the cause of the problem"* **– Leicester Participant**

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Across the workshops, participants understood and accepted that the trade offs of this principle include incurring short-term economic costs. In each location, participants indicated a willingness to accept domestic economic costs in exchange for greater long-term workforce stability.

The Leicester formulation accepts increased costs for training and for the wages of British workers, an inability to fill urgent gaps in the short term, and reduced opportunities for those seeking to migrate to the UK. Participants in North Tyneside acknowledged that there could be short-term labour shortages, higher consumer prices, and the prospect that some businesses would fail if unable to sustain the transition to a higher-wage and better-trained labour market. Participants in Renfrewshire accepted acute short-term shortages, particularly in professions with long training pathways such as medicine, where domestic investment cannot produce qualified practitioners quickly. Participants therefore expressly accepted that some gaps would remain unfilled during any transition. The judgement was that these short-term costs were worth accepting if they reduced long-term dependence on workforce migration where domestic workers could instead be trained and employed.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The main variation between locations lies in the conditions attached rather than in the principle. Renfrewshire went furthest in seeking to make the sequencing enforceable, with participants wanting employers to demonstrate that they had genuinely attempted to recruit locally, and to coordinate with local authorities, before recruiting internationally.

Elsewhere, the emphasis was more strongly on investment and opportunity: North Tyneside focused particularly on failures in education, apprenticeships, and local career pathways, while Leicester emphasised emigration as much as immigration, and the apparent contradiction between British workers being trained domestically and leaving the UK due to a lack of opportunities, and employers simultaneously recruiting internationally for the same roles.

2 Ensure there is sufficient local infrastructure to support both immigrants and existing residents

The principle holds that the capacity of an area to absorb population growth should form part of the immigration decision-making process, rather than being addressed subsequently. Across individual workshops, principles concerning infrastructure keeping pace with migration flows were among the more highly ranked in Leicester and Renfrewshire; while no such principle was developed in North Tyneside, participants discussed many of the same challenges.

Participants described difficulty obtaining GP appointments, securing school places, and accessing social housing, and considered that a system admitting people without provision for these services fails existing residents and new arrivals alike.

How participants discussed this principle

North Tyneside participants expressed this as a question of scale, translating an abstract national figure into something recognisable.

> *"200,000 [immigrants], regardless of where anybody's coming from, [means] that that's equivalent to, you know, two large cities. You've got to have the infrastructure… schools, everything else. You've got to be able to have the facilities for creating two large cities the size of Newcastle."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Participants also considered the effect on social cohesion, as anti-migration sentiment could increase where migration appears to be the cause of local pressures. Participants concluded that immigration should be limited where local public services cannot support those arriving, even where this results in unfilled vacancies.

Leicester reached a similar position, holding that work-related visas should be restricted where infrastructure could not easily accommodate the increased population.

> *"We don't have the space for everybody. And then it has a knock-on effect on councils. I mean every, every council's going bankrupt"* **– Leicester Participant**

Renfrewshire began from the same experience – GP waiting lists, school places, social housing – but reached a different conclusion. Participants there moved away from limiting arrivals and towards funding these services and amenities, reasoning that the pressure reflects a failure to invest rather than the presence of the people arriving. Participants proposed that where the Home Office makes a net profit on visa application fees, that money should be hypothecated to the local authorities experiencing the highest levels of settlement.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants accepted that making immigration conditional on infrastructure capacity, or investing sufficiently to expand that capacity, would itself carry costs.

Leicester accepted that people would be turned away, that the system would become slower to respond to employer needs, and that investment in infrastructure takes years to deliver, meaning constraints cannot necessarily be relieved quickly.

Renfrewshire specifically accepted that directing revenue towards the places receiving migrants and linking immigration more closely to local infrastructure planning would require a more complex and administratively burdensome system.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The three workshops shared a diagnosis: that visible pressure on local public services reflects inadequate investment and planning rather than migration in itself, and that resentment arising from that failure is directed at individuals rather than at its cause.

They diverged on the remedy. Participants in Leicester concluded that where capacity is absent, admissions should be reduced. While not producing their own infrastructure principle, North Tyneside participants also generally followed this line of thinking while discussing infrastructure in relation to migration. Participants in Renfrewshire concluded that where capacity is absent, revenue generated by the system should be redirected to expand it. The difference concerns where the obligation to adjust falls: on those seeking to come, or on a state that has permitted population growth without funding the corresponding services.

3 Plan work-related immigration using evidence and long-term workforce planning to predict labour market needs and address shortages, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances

This principle starts from the premise that immigration policy is currently reactive, driven by headline figures and political pressure rather than by evidence about what the labour market needs, and that shortages ought to be anticipated rather than discovered once they are already creating pressures on businesses or services. Participants wanted the state to undertake more analysis in advance on where the skills and labour gaps would fall and to hold resulting plans steady enough for employers, migrants, and local authorities to rely on.

At the same time, participants recognised that labour markets change and forecasts are imperfect. The principle was therefore not rigid long-term planning, but evidence-led planning capable of adapting to changing circumstances.

How participants discussed this principle

In North Tyneside, this arose from expert presentations and learning how slowly the system currently moves. That shortage occupation lists are thoroughly reviewed only every three years seemed insufficient for an economy that changes far faster. Their principle was framed around agility and around the use of live data rather than periodic review.

> *"Everything needs to be much more agile… Statistics about where the gaps are. And then a great system to automatically generate call outs or alerts [where and when there are gaps]."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

The same participant described an arrangement under which sectors would move in and out of eligibility as conditions changed, citing care as a sector whose need had been met at one point and could recur. The North Tyneside framing was oriented towards employers to a greater degree than the other two workshops, seeking a system able to respond quickly to business requirements.

In Renfrewshire the framing concerned objectivity, and the removal of political rhetoric from a decision participants considered should rest on demonstrable need.

> *"[The system should ask:] What does that mean? Why do we need people… do we not have enough people to do the work that needs doing? And if not, why not? I think those are worth thinking about."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Expert input and data drove these views. Evidence that labour-market data commonly lags reality by a year or more moved participants, in Renfrewshire in particular, away from a rigidly planned approach and towards one distinguishing temporary seasonal demand, suited to short-term routes, from structural long-term shortage, which they considered to require more stable settlement routes.

Participants in Leicester resolved a tension within the principle in the course of drafting it. The tables were divided between those who regarded long-term planning as costly and ineffective in a fast-changing economy and those who regarded short-term planning as producing a reactive system that fails to invest in durable solutions. The sceptical position was expressed in terms of financial risk.

> *"My issue with the long-term thing is that… if they get it wrong then they've wasted a lot of money and a lot of resources, wasted everyone's time… I just think a ten year plan is not always going to work."* **– Leicester Participant**

The resolution was to combine the two, on the basis that a long-term plan should be sufficiently flexible to respond to short-term changes in the employment market and in global conditions.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

The costs recorded in Leicester follow from that compromise: that forecasts are difficult to produce, that inaccurate forecasts waste public money and administrative effort, and that planning of this kind is difficult to sustain across political cycles. Overall, participants accepted that better workforce planning would require greater administrative complexity and that forecasts would sometimes be wrong.

A trade off from North Tyneside concerned the distribution of the burden of flexibility. A system responsive enough to track economic conditions creates uncertainty for migrant workers, whose eligibility may change while they are establishing themselves, and makes it more difficult for local authorities to plan and provide public services such as schools and hospitals. Flexibility and certainty are in direct opposition on this point, and participants combined them conditionally. Flexibility was acceptable provided it was governed by clear and objective data: participants indicated willingness to accept a degree of unpredictability arising from market conditions and global developments, but not from changes in political direction.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The locations differed mainly in emphasis: North Tyneside towards agility and employer responsiveness, Renfrewshire towards objectivity and insulation from political direction, Leicester towards a negotiated combination of long-term planning and short-term flexibility.

4 Prevent employers from abusing the immigration system by ensuring effective oversight, enforcement and fair treatment of migrant workers

This principle concerns the conduct of employers: participants wanted rigorous vetting of sponsors, including checks on whether a business is financially sound enough to employ the people it recruits; genuine evidence that an employer has tried to recruit and train domestically before being licensed; equal pay and conditions for both domestic and migrant workers; and meaningful consequences for employers who breach the terms of sponsorship.

It attracted support from participants holding otherwise divergent positions, because two distinct starting points – protecting domestic workers and protecting migrant workers – lead to similar conclusions. Participants landed on a position that problems within the sponsorship system could not be understood solely in terms of the behaviour of individual migrants, but required scrutiny of the incentives, responsibilities, and conduct of employers.

How participants discussed this principle

The first rationale concerns the protection of domestic workers and wages. Participants in Renfrewshire argued that unconstrained employer access to sponsored labour holds wages down, undercutting the domestic workforce, and that greater accountability is required to address this.

> *"Employers should be limited/restricted or capped and held accountable to justify the short-term importation of cheap skilled labour."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Leicester participants approached the same concern through consistent hiring standards, describing how a role commanding sixty thousand pounds domestically might be advertised overseas at a substantially lower rate, with the result that the domestic candidate loses the position. One participant characterised the practice as insulting and disputed that it constituted equal opportunity in any meaningful sense.

It was also important to people that migrants are protected and defended from exploitation. Participants in North Tyneside identified the structural vulnerability of a worker whose immigration status depends on a single employer in a country whose employment law they do not know.

> *"They're much more open to being taken advantage of if they don't speak the language, they don't know the laws. Like, if you're a migrant worker who works on farms, you won't know our country's agricultural laws or labour laws or anything like that."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

While initially placing greater focus on migrants breaking rules or 'gaming' the system, after learning how the sponsorship system operates, participants' concern moved towards the roles of employers' and their responsibilities, and towards the conclusion that rule-breaking is driven by systemic loopholes.

> *"It's the employer that's exploiting [the rules] but the government is allowing it to happen. It's the system"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

There was scepticism as to whether the current rules and enforcement on sponsorship are sufficiently robust, or whether they actually encourage certain businesses and sectors to hire workers from abroad.

> *"I can open a company and within a week I can get a sponsorship licence. So it's very easy… in effect, it's a licence to print money for me."* **– Leicester Participant**

Leicester also extended oversight into what happens after a sponsoring business fails. Participants regarded the sixty-day window in which a worker must find new sponsorship or leave as unfair when the collapse was not their doing, and as a waste of the country's own investment in having the person here.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants accepted that rigorous screening and evaluation would be expensive for government and therefore for taxpayers, and would place administrative burdens on employers, with small and medium-sized businesses least able to absorb them.

Renfrewshire accepted that heavy regulatory requirements and stricter wage conditions would reduce corporate profitability and could make some small businesses – care homes in particular – less financially viable. Leicester accepted that oversight costs could themselves produce shortages.

Leicester also accepted that workers displaced when an employer collapses should be supported into available jobs even where those jobs fall below the salary threshold for migrant workers, temporarily prioritising them over the domestic workforce, rather than sending them home. Participants adopted that position knowingly, treating support for people who came in good faith to work as a small and acceptable exception to the principle that the domestic workforce should be prioritised.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The locations differed primarily in emphasis. Renfrewshire focused particularly on preventing employers from using workforce migration to suppress wages and avoid domestic recruitment. North Tyneside placed greater emphasis on the vulnerability of migrant workers within the sponsorship relationship. Leicester focused more heavily on consistent recruitment standards and on what should happen when the sponsorship relationship breaks down through no fault of the worker.

5 Promote an honest and balanced public conversation about immigration

This principle calls for a change in how immigration is discussed in the media, by politicians, and ultimately by the public. Participants wanted the benefits and challenges around work-related migration policy set out openly, misinformation challenged from whatever direction it comes, and the public trusted to engage meaningfully with trade offs.

This mattered because participants saw an informed public conversation as necessary to legitimate immigration policy. They recognised that any settlement reached can only hold wider public consent if the public has enough information to understand and meaningfully engage with the choices involved.

How participants discussed this principle

Participants' concern was driven by dissatisfaction with the polarisation within much press and social media coverage, and particularly with misinformation shared on social media.

> *"I do worry about social media, about the sort of stuff which comes through there … It is so polarised ... deliberately set out to be divisional. ... And I think that is one of the biggest issues and challenges is social media is such a big medium now for getting information more so than probably the news and, again, that doesn't help when people say: "don't trust the news, it's all fake"."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

They identified how such coverage creates confusion amongst the public about migration numbers in total and the numbers that come through different routes (student visas, work visas, irregular migration, etc.); they judged that a focus on small boats crowds out any serious discussion of the work or study routes that account for most migration.

> *"My problem with it is that the debate around it is really polarised and we can't get to the information about immigration because of a lot of misinformed rhetoric…"*
> **– Renfrewshire Participant**

It was also noted how opinions form in the absence of reliable information, and that a strong view on immigration as a whole is easily held when the available picture is incomplete. Participants observed during the workshop itself that assumptions they had brought with them – concerning access to benefits, the significance of low pay, and the causes of pressure on housing and the NHS – were revised as they learned more about how the system actually operates.

Some participants in Renfrewshire considered a principle advocating a more positive national narrative, but the balance of discussion instead favoured transparency. Participants wanted a fuller presentation of both the benefits and the difficulties of work-related migration, together with robust correction of misinformation from any direction.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

The trade off participants acknowledged is between honesty and political simplicity. The kind of account they wanted – conditional, sector-specific, acknowledging costs on both sides – is precisely the kind that can be the hardest to sustain in public debate.

Participants concluded that the difficulty of honest communication is not a reason to abandon it, particularly since the alternative is a debate in which blame for the consequences of policy failures is misdirected at the individuals, businesses and communities navigating a system they did not design.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

This only emerged as a distinct principle in Renfrewshire, but it was well-supported in the follow-up questionnaire, in which participants from all three locations ranked it highly.

6 Once they're here, treat migrant workers fairly, with dignity and respect

This principle concerns the treatment of people admitted under the rules, covering equal pay with domestic workers for equal work, employment rights that do not vary with immigration status, protection from exploitation, and sufficient security of status to allow a person to plan.

In its own terms it does not determine whether an individual should be able to remain permanently, which participants treated as a distinct issue to be considered. It establishes a baseline expectation that, whatever the rules of entry, those admitted under them should be treated fairly and should not be regarded as a disposable workforce.

How participants discussed this principle

The principle was expressed most strongly in Renfrewshire, where it was ranked second. The discussion there began from participants' discomfort at the terms in which migration is discussed nationally, and one participant stated the alternative position directly.

> *"For me, immigration is about people, and I genuinely believe that people – all people – are good and have an intrinsic dignity."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Alongside that value-judgement sat considerably sharper discussion about how the sponsorship relationship can treat migrant workers poorly, which gave the principle its concrete content and connected it to the workshops' wider concern about employer power.

> *"In my way, I need money. Your way, they buy you for four years… For the next 2 years or 4 years, you are my slave. That's a drawback of the sponsorship system."*
> **– Renfrewshire Participant**

The North Tyneside groups reached a similar position from a different starting point, ranking the principle sixth and grounding it initially in insecurity rather than in dignity as an abstract value. The discussion there concentrated on the effect of repeated and uncertain renewal on a person's capacity to make long-term decisions, prompted by an account of a friend on the Youth Mobility Scheme for whom, in one participant's description, planning a life three years at a time proved difficult. One participant described her own circumstances, illustrating how insecure status affects decisions unrelated to employment.

> *"I was an immigrant and I came here to marry my Geordie husband and I left him like 8 years ago, but I'm terrified to get a divorce because I don't want to lose my indefinite leave to remain."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Leicester approached fair treatment through the employment relationship rather than as a standalone value, concentrating on the position of a sponsored worker whose employer ceases trading. Participants there regarded the requirement to find a new sponsor within sixty days as unfair where the collapse was not attributable to the worker, and proposed that the state should honour the remaining length of the visa without extending it.

The three locations therefore arrived at the same conclusion by different routes: as intrinsic dignity in Renfrewshire, as security and the capacity to plan in North Tyneside, and as fair dealing within a regulated employment relationship in Leicester.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants recognised costs on both sides of this principle. In Renfrewshire, some participants considered that extending equal rights and support structures to all workers could place pressure on community cohesion or increase costs to the state; the balance of discussion led to the conclusion that these standards should be maintained even where taxpayers fund integration measures and communities absorb a degree of friction associated with rapid change.

Participants in North Tyneside accepted a more structural cost. Having begun from the position that visas should be kept largely temporary as a means of controlling numbers, they concluded that treating people fairly after a visa has been granted entails accepting that more of them will settle permanently and will eventually draw on public services and infrastructure.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The divergence was principally in the reasoning used to reach the same conclusion. Renfrewshire framed fair treatment most strongly as a question of intrinsic human dignity. North Tyneside focused on security of status and the ability to plan a life. Leicester concentrated on fair treatment within the employment and sponsorship relationship, particularly where circumstances outside a worker's control cause that relationship to end. While Leicester didn't produce a dedicated 'fair treatment principle' – this sentiment was encoded elsewhere in their principle covering the oversight of employers.

7 Ensure decision-making on work-related immigration is joined up across government

With this principle, participants wanted workforce migration policy to be developed alongside other government agencies and departments that impact and are impacted by workforce migration flows, including those responsible for housing, health and social care, education and skills, business, and local government.

Participants observed that a decision to admit a cohort of workers is also a decision about school places, GP registrations, and housing supply, and about whether the domestic training capacity that might otherwise have supplied those workers is being funded.

These are interdependent decisions; hence participants considered that better sharing of data and analysis between departments and agencies would support more evidence-based policymaking.

How participants discussed this principle

The line of thinking was developed most fully in Leicester, where a related principle was ranked second, and it grew directly out of frustration about overstretched local services. Rather than attributing that pressure to the people arriving, participants directed it towards the organisation of government.

> *"There's no point in recruiting, you know, 50,000 people for a wonderful new business somewhere if there's no housing for them. What's the point?"* **– Leicester Participant**

A second participant advanced the same reasoning in more general terms, arguing that policy should embrace joined up thinking and account for effects on housing, the health service, and the law. The underlying diagnosis was of departments acting in silos, making policy and decisions related to immigration that have consequences on other areas of government, and these other areas of government making decisions that impact immigration policy, without departments joining up their decision-making, data, analysis, or evaluations.

Renfrewshire also identified a specific consequence of fragmented decision-making: restricting the dependants of international students reduces university income, which in turn narrows the capacity to train the domestic graduates that every workshop's highest-ranked principle requires. A measure intended to reduce numbers therefore operates against an objective participants prioritised.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants recognised that greater coordination would make decision-making slower and more complicated.

The Leicester formulation accepted that the principle would apply even where it makes decision-making slower and more complicated, even though they also sought a system capable of responding quickly to shortages. Participants judged that a decision taken quickly on partial information is not efficient in practice, because the costs present themselves later in the form of overstretched public services and unfilled training places.

Participants were therefore willing to trade some speed and administrative simplicity for decisions that better accounted for their consequences across government.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The locations differed less on the diagnosis than on the remedy. Leicester's account remained largely at the level of central government coordination; Renfrewshire's moved towards statutory duties and hypothecated funding, and towards local government as the place where coordination should be required to occur. A principle on this topic was not developed by the North Tyneside workshop individually, but respondents from that location ranked it fourth in the follow-up questionnaire. Likewise, Renfrewshire participants did not produce a stand-alone principle on joined-up government, but they did produce a principle on evidence-based policy and long-term planning which explored many of the same points.

8 Support migrants and local communities to integrate successfully, strengthening community cohesion

All three workshops adopted an integration principle, and all three placed it towards the bottom of their individual workshop rankings – ninth in North Tyneside, tenth in Leicester, and ninth in Renfrewshire. In the follow-up questionnaire, they collectively ranked it eighth out of thirteen. Integration mattered to participants, but it was not what they prioritised most highly. The more informative finding lies in how they defined and understood 'integration'. Across the workshops, participants agreed that successful integration matters for community cohesion and for migrants themselves, but differed in how responsibility should be distributed between migrants, government, and receiving communities.

How participants discussed this principle

In North Tyneside, the emphasis fell on language, and specifically as a practical necessity for workplace safety and everyday social contact.

> *"I think it's quite important if you're working in the community that you speak the language of that community…"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

The discussion there started with 'British values' as a framing but then moved away from this on the basis that the phrase had become an empty term and that considering culture was more useful. Participants moved to a focus on communication and mutual respect, combined with an expectation that migrant workers should be prepared to integrate and that communities should assist them in doing so.

In Leicester, participants spoke of their perception that migrant workers tend to remain within their own communities. They concluded that weak integration produces limited understanding between groups and can generate suspicion on both sides, and argued that public funds should support community-led work with new arrivals and receiving communities alike.

> *"What comes up time and time again is that people don't like immigrants because they are in their own neighbourhood doing their own thing and it makes people who live here originally feel threatened. So I guess I was just trying to think about how do we address that fear?"* **– Leicester Participant**

Participants described the objective as mutual understanding between the cultures that make up UK communities, and noted that a lack of mutual understanding can create discontent that can be weaponised.

Renfrewshire framed integration as an obligation owed to longer-term migrants, on the basis that a country benefiting from someone's labour over several years acquires a responsibility to help them make it their home. A reciprocal expectation was also placed on migrants to make efforts to integrate.

> *"I'm a guest in the UK and UK culture, they are my host, so I'm supposed to follow the customs of the house I'm in."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Participants connected isolation directly to wellbeing and productivity, noting the effect of being away from family, working alone, and becoming lonely or depressed, and argued that integration into a community makes all of this easier.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

The costs accepted differ accordingly. North Tyneside accepted that some critical vacancies might remain unfilled where applicants could not meet the language standard, in sectors already experiencing recruitment difficulty. Leicester accepted that funding integration work is an expense for the state, that not everyone will take part, and that some efforts will not succeed. Renfrewshire accepted that there is a significant upfront cost of language lessons, civic classes, and housing advice, and acknowledged more directly than the other locations that encouraging migrants to adopt British customs might cause discomfort or clash with their home cultures. Participants judged the investment and the friction worth accepting to prevent long-term social fragmentation.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The substantive division is between integration framed as an obligation on migrants and integration framed as a reciprocal process. Where integration is framed as an obligation on migrants, the policy that follows is a requirement, for example a base language standard, and the cost falls on individuals and on the sectors that cannot recruit. Where it is framed as reciprocal, the policy that follows is funded provision, and the cost falls on the public purse and on employers. Both framings were present in all three locations, but the reciprocal position was more prominent.

9 Plan work-related immigration on a local level by taking into account local context and labour market needs

Two workshops produced a version of this principle, ranking seventh in Leicester and eighth in Renfrewshire; in each case it came from the observation that a single national rule fits some places badly. In North Tyneside's discussion on fair wage thresholds, they discussed local and regional variation at length, but it was not included in the final wording of the principle.

Participants wanted the assessment of need, and in some formulations the rules themselves, to reflect the wages, shortages, and capacity of particular places rather than a national average. The shared concern was that a nationally uniform system can produce unequal effects because labour markets, wages, infrastructure, and workforce needs differ substantially across the country.

How participants discussed this principle

North Tyneside felt this most acutely, as the threshold for skilled work visas sat far above average local earnings.

> *"I was gobsmacked by the salary threshold… there's a lot of people who are competent, qualified people… who purely won't get in because of their salary. Because I don't know anybody in my work circle or social circle who is earning that sort of money. It seems way too much."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Another participant drew out the regional consequence, contrasting friends in London – one an economist in a six-figure role – with pay in the North East, and concluding that applying the same standard across the UK is inherently unequal because people are simply not paid as much outside the capital and other major economic hubs.

The proposal was a staggered threshold varying by sector and region, intended to prevent a single national figure from excluding whole regions from access to skilled workers while avoiding a threshold low enough to permit the undercutting of domestic wages.

Leicester reached a comparable conclusion in relation to the East Midlands and expressed it as a requirement of system design, rejecting salary as the determining criterion.

> *"Workforce migration shouldn't be determined by the salary threshold. It should be more dynamic depending on what skills and jobs gap need to be filled and also depending on the regional need as well."* **– Leicester Participant**

The discussion in Leicester connected local allocation to capacity, arguing that different areas have different requirements and that visas should be directed to locations where the infrastructure exists to support them and withheld where it does not. That formulation makes local planning the means by which the infrastructure principle is applied.

In Renfrewshire, participants held that local authorities, working with regional colleges and employers, have a far clearer view of actual vacancies and of a community's capacity to absorb newcomers than central government does, and grounded this in rural experience of seasonal dependence on incoming workers.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants accepted that a more regionalised system would be harder to design and administer than a single national system.

They recognised that it is difficult to determine employment needs accurately at a local level and difficult to enforce mobility restrictions that would keep migrants in the areas that sponsored them. The principle was nonetheless retained in all three locations, on the basis that a system calibrated to national averages produces more visible failures, including excluding qualified workers from regions where the salary threshold bears little relation to local pay while leaving shortages unaddressed.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

There was little divergence on the principle itself. The differences lay primarily in what local variation was intended to address. Leicester connected regional need with both labour shortages and infrastructure capacity; and Renfrewshire placed greater emphasis on the knowledge and role of local authorities, colleges, and employers in identifying need. North Tyneside focused most strongly on regional wage differences and salary thresholds – but didn't create a principle dedicated to local planning of immigration.

10 Provide different immigration pathways that reflect individuals' skills, circumstances and whether they intend to come for the short or long term

On the whole, participants did not agree that a single pathway or test can sort applicants effectively when workforce migration pertains to migrants of different skills and circumstances, and the salary threshold in particular as the device for doing it is flawed. They sought instead a system with several routes, calibrated to the sector and type of work, the circumstances of the individual, and the expected duration of the need.

Participants argued that the criteria for entry should extend well beyond pay, that the mechanism for admitting people should combine national standards with a genuine job, and that short-term and long-term migration are different phenomena requiring different treatment.

How participants discussed this principle

The most consistent argument across the three workshops was that salary is a poor proxy both for national need and for an individual's value. In North Tyneside this produced a principle for a more personalised system, ranked fifth, which developed as a response to what participants regarded as rigid salary and sponsorship rules that treat applicants as vacancies to be filled.

> *"It's about trying to be a system that's person-centred by looking at… what they're coming here to do, what they're going to do long-term… so that people don't slip through the cracks."* – **North Tyneside Participant**

Participants there drew explicitly on points-based elements like in Canada and Australia which they had heard about in the expert presentations. They argued for assessing individual potential rather than relying entirely on a pre-existing offer from a sponsor. Another participant framed the same instinct as a general preference for judgement over automatic rules, noting that a case-by-case approach was not really about migrants at all but about flexibility and nuance for employers as well.

Leicester reached a parallel conclusion, holding that the system should recognise criteria beyond salary alone.

Many participants in Leicester began by assuming that a points-based system was straightforwardly fairer than employer sponsorship; they revised this view on learning that migrants admitted on points without a specific job can end up substantially underemployed, doing work far below their qualifications. Rather than reverting to sponsorship alone, they proposed a hybrid arrangement.

> *"I think like we've kind of all talked about it a bit about having the points-based system for eligibility to then accept a sponsored job. Yeah, because then you're kind of combining the two rather than having it one or the other."* **– Leicester Participant**

The reasoning speaks to institutional design: sponsorship guarantees that a genuine vacancy exists, which points alone cannot do; national points criteria allow a rounded assessment of language and verified qualifications, which a salary figure cannot do. Combining them keeps the strengths of each.

Another line of thinking distinguished categories of migration by duration. Leicester adopted this as a separate principle on the reasoning that seasonal work and long-term professional migration require different administrative and support arrangements, and that defining routes in advance provides greater certainty for the UK and for the applicant.

Another participant described how it would work in practice: applicants meet the points, and are then able to choose from a set of jobs reflecting identified need. This was a change of design rather than of underlying value, and it illustrates a pattern visible throughout the workshops, in which better information about how a system works changed participants' preferred mechanism without changing their value-judgements on what they wanted the mechanism to achieve, or what they saw as a preferred outcome.

> *"There is a real difference between somebody who comes over for a few months to pick fruit. That's different to somebody that's coming skilled and intends to stay… Getting a visa to come in, skilled, paying your contribution… That's a different kettle of fish altogether."* **– Leicester Participant**

Renfrewshire reached the same distinction through its analysis of shortages, treating temporary seasonal demand as suited to short-term visas and structural long-term shortage as requiring stable settlement routes.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

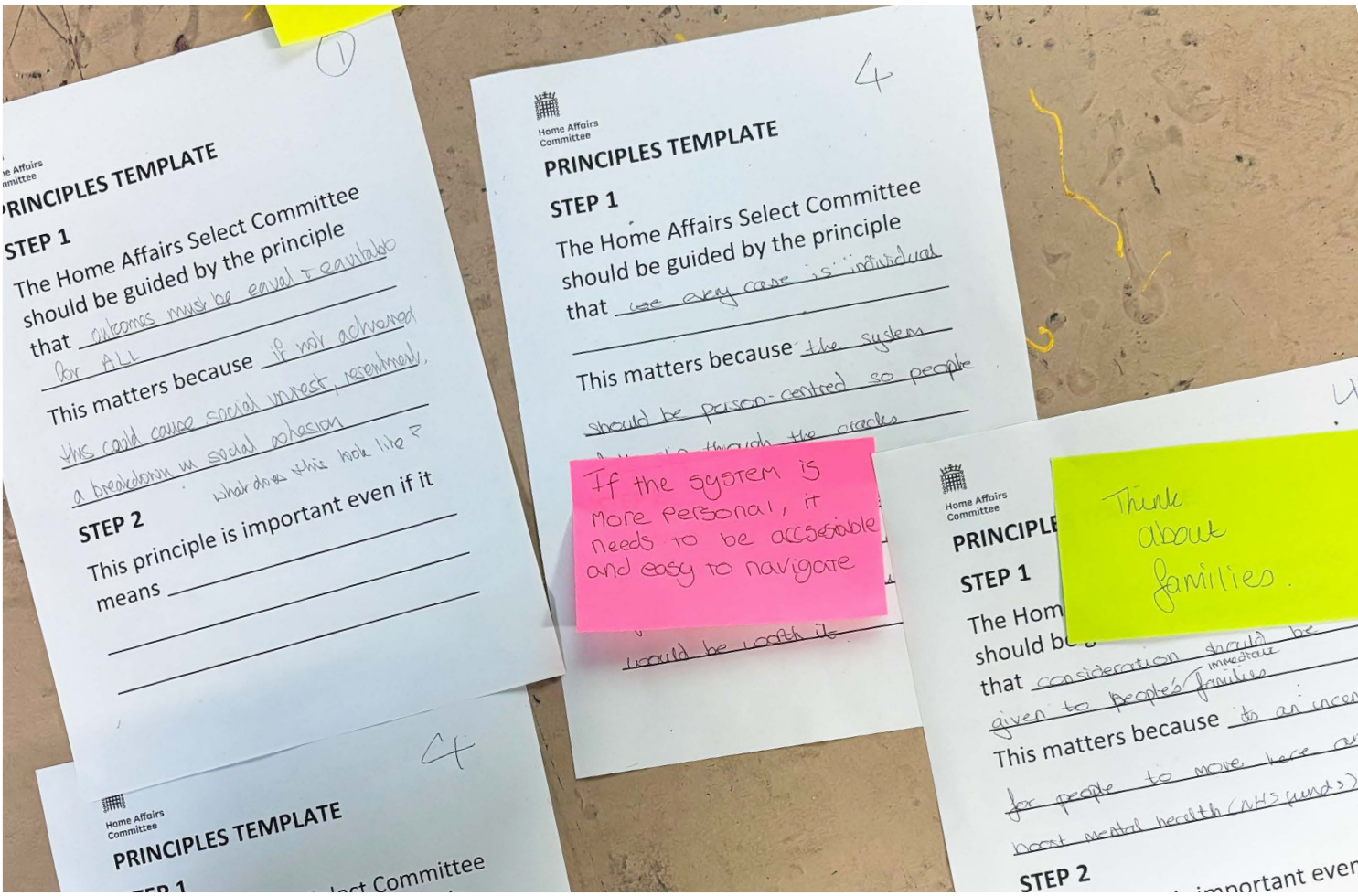
Participants across all three locations accepted increased complexity, higher administrative cost, slower processing, and a degree of subjectivity in place of automatic rules.

North Tyneside participants understood that personalised assessment could be slower, more expensive, and more subjective than following easily automated rules, but concluded that humanising the system was worth the loss of bureaucratic efficiency. Leicester similarly accepted increased administrative complexity in respect of both its proposed mechanism and differentiated pathways.

Participants considered that the costs of a less discriminating system fall on essential workers whose pay is low for reasons of sector economics rather than skill, and on the public services that depend on them, and treated this as the more damaging outcome.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The locations differed more in the mechanisms they emphasised than in the underlying principle. North Tyneside placed greatest emphasis on personalised assessment and agility. Leicester developed the most specific institutional model, combining points-based eligibility with employer sponsorship and distinguishing explicitly between short-term and long-term routes. Renfrewshire approached differentiated pathways principally through the distinction between temporary and structural labour shortages.



Draft principles from North Tyneside workshop

11 Prioritise migrants who make a positive contribution to the UK's economy

This principle holds that the system should favour migration that benefits the economy, that migrants who are admitted to live and work in the UK should put more into the public purse than they draw out, and that the country is entitled to take this into account when deciding whom to admit. Such a principle was adopted in North Tyneside, where it ranked eighth, and in Renfrewshire, where it ranked seventh. Leicester did not adopt a principle of this kind but in the follow-up questionnaire Leicester respondents ranked it similarly to those from the other two locations.

The principle rested on perceived fairness to the receiving country and on the sustainability of public services and welfare. There was also an underlying strategic argument about public confidence – that demonstrating a clear net contribution is the most effective way to build public support for work-related immigration as it answers the objection most often raised against it.

At the same time, participants did not fully define what 'contribution' should mean. Discussion moved beyond tax paid towards the broader question of what work the country cannot function without, with care work providing the standing example.

How participants discussed this principle

Economic contribution emerged as the most important factor for participants.

> *"Economic contribution is the key criteria … that an individual and the individual's contribution to the UK economy is the key criteria"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

This reflected a parallel point that people are concerned about migration potentially having a negative impact on the economy, and that there needs to be a balance such that migration as a whole is a net positive in economic terms.

> *"We really value the work that migrant workers do, but we're also worried about the impact that migrants have on the economy, how much they will take out of the economy"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

However, there was some uncertainty in defining what contribution actually entails and how it can be measured beyond just economic terms.

> *"I would like to see that people are contributing to society and being part of society in a constructive and productive way."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

As the official measure of skill rests on formal qualifications rather than on social contribution more generally, some essential work is categorised as low-skilled and is paid accordingly.

> *"Regarding the low skill side, I'm in conflict with that one. I can see, you know, the economic value to the country if somebody – low skilled workers, you know – are a net user rather than actually a net contributor."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Others in North Tyneside reversed this assumption, on grounds of necessity rather than of fairness to the individual.

> *"I think I might prefer the restriction of the high skills over the low skills because a lot of these high skill jobs, excluding some things like doctors and stuff like that, are not jobs that we, like, desperately need even though they might be beneficial to the economy… They're not essential to keep the UK running… whereas a lot of these low skilled jobs, the country won't run without them."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Participants also noted that where care is unavailable, higher-paid workers may themselves leave employment to look after relatives, meaning that undervaluing lower-paid essential work can impose wider economic costs.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

Participants recognised a trade off between prioritising fiscal contribution, which is quantifiable and defensible in public, and social or economic necessity, which is harder to measure but describes work without which other economic activity may become impossible.

In Renfrewshire, participants addressed this by qualifying the principle, accepting net economic contribution as an objective, while recognising that if prioritising high-paid, high-skilled workers reduces the numbers of lower-skilled workers, that this could produce severe short-term shortages in lower-paid essential sectors, and that this cost would fall on services the public relies on.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

This principle itself reflected greater divergence than many of the others. It emerged as a principle in North Tyneside and Renfrewshire but not Leicester, although Leicester respondents subsequently ranked it similarly in the follow-up questionnaire.

Within the locations that adopted it, participants also differed over what should count as contribution. Some placed greater weight on fiscal contribution and the tax an individual pays, while others emphasised the social and economic necessity of lower-paid work. The workshops did not fully resolve how those different forms of contribution should be weighed against one another.

12 Provide appropriate and clear pathways for settlement for immigrants once they have work visas and are making a long-term contribution

This principle reflects the view that there should be a clear and predictable route to permanent residence for those who arrive on a work visa, remain, and contribute over time. The principle applies to those making a long-term contribution. It does not propose that every work visa should lead to settlement, and participants were equally clear that genuinely seasonal or time-limited work does not require such a route. The shared principle was instead that where the UK has a long-term need for a worker and that person makes a sustained contribution, the immigration system should provide greater clarity and security about their ability to remain.

How participants discussed this principle

The reasoning behind it produced one of the clearest documented changes of position in the workshops. In North Tyneside, many participants began by favouring strictly temporary visas as a straightforward means of controlling overall numbers. Over the course of deliberation they concluded that temporary regimes make integration more difficult, and that the country cannot expect people to invest in a place, learn its language, and build relationships within it while receiving no indication whether they may remain and for how long.

Participants in Leicester approached settlement through workforce considerations rather than through rights, and produced the most specific argument about its labour-market effects. They reasoned that people on short-term routes tend to occupy lower-paid roles and are able to return home, whereas higher-skilled workers already established in the roles the country requires are those whose permanent residence causes least disruption to the gaps being filled.

> *"If you have short-term workers, they would be at the lower paid jobs and then they can go back. Whereas if they… get permanent residence, they're going to switch careers… the higher skill workers, they're already in the job but they want to stay in. If you give them permanent residence, they're not impacting [the labour gaps]."*
> **– Leicester Participant**

Renfrewshire arrived at this principle from an analysis of shortages, concluding that structural, long-term shortages require permanent and stable settlement routes while genuinely seasonal demand suits short-term visas. Its integration principle supplied the complementary moral argument: that where the UK has benefited from someone's labour over several years, the state and the community acquire a responsibility to support them in making the country their home.

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

The costs participants accepted are long-term and were identified as such. A settled population ages, producing later-life healthcare and social care obligations that a wholly temporary system would avoid. Settlement generates sustained demand on housing, schools, and health services. It also reduces the state's continuing control over who ultimately remains. Participants accepted these consequences in exchange for workforce continuity and for the integration that greater security of status enables, and in preference to a growing population of workers with no route to stability and limited reason to invest in the areas in which they live.

In North Tyneside in particular, participants explicitly accepted that treating people fairly after a visa has been granted means accepting that more migrants will settle permanently and eventually access public services.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The three workshops supported the same principle from different starting points: fairness in North Tyneside, workforce continuity in Leicester, and reciprocal obligation in Renfrewshire.

Participants agreed that settlement should be available to those making a long-term contribution, but not how contribution should be defined for this purpose, which returns to the unresolved question under Principle 11 between fiscal contribution and the wider social or economic value of someone's work.

13 Migrant workers, particularly those in medium-skilled and longer-term roles, should be able to bring their immediate families to the UK

Two of the three workshops produced a principle on family reunification, and both ranked it last. In North Tyneside it generated some of the most intense deliberation over trade offs of any principle in that room, and in Renfrewshire it was among the most controversial topics of the workshop.

Neither treated it as a straightforward entitlement. The qualifying language – particularly those in medium-skilled and longer-term roles – reflects the conditions participants attached rather than a general rule and the low ranking reflects the difficulty of squaring this with the overall framing that migration is to be reduced.

Participants nevertheless considered family presence important for both ethical and practical reasons: prolonged separation affects workers and their families, while restrictions on dependants can make the UK less attractive to skilled workers, weaken retention, and make integration more difficult.

How participants discussed this principle

Participants were concerned with the effect of separation on people asked to build a working life in a country without their partners or children. In addition to this ethical consideration, they judged how dependants policy also impacts recruitment and retention; participants reasoned that the most capable people will simply choose countries that allow them to live with their families, and that the UK will therefore lose them.

> *"We're not going to get the best neuroscientist at the RVI [Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle] if he can't bring his wife and kids… on a pure human side, you know, you're going to want your family there."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

A second participant in North Tyneside made a comparable argument concerning retention, observing that skilled workers seeking to establish themselves in the UK require the ability to bring their families or will return home.

The principle was drafted in response to the relatively recent government policy preventing certain lower-paid visa holders, including care workers, from bringing partners and children, and participants regarded the staffing consequences of that policy as negative.

Participants in Renfrewshire also connected family presence to integration and to where a worker's earnings are spent – considering that a worker separated from their spouse and children is likely to be less content and therefore less productive, and that they are more likely to send earnings out of the UK economy to support a household elsewhere; in contrast, a worker whose family is present becomes anchored in a school, a neighbourhood, and a local economy and community.

> *"If you bring your family… your kids start going here to school; you're working; your spouse is working, and you are integrating…"* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

What trade offs were participants willing to accept?

The central cost participants identified was the additional pressure that dependants who are not themselves working place on school places, health services, and housing.

Participants converged on compromises to address this. In Renfrewshire, the concession was limited to medium-skilled and highly-skilled workers on long-term pathways, restricted to immediate family – meaning spouses and children under eighteen – and permitted only where local infrastructure could be shown capable of absorbing the additional population.

The trade off was therefore not understood as an unconditional choice between family reunification and lower migration. Participants sought to accept some additional population and infrastructure pressure in exchange for better recruitment, retention, integration, and family wellbeing, while placing limits around who should qualify.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

The clearest divergence was that only two of the three workshops produced a family reunification principle, and even within those workshops it was relatively controversial and low-ranked.

Participants diverged somewhat on income thresholds. Some participants regarded rising income thresholds for family visas as a sensible protection for taxpayers and a reasonable test of self-sufficiency. Others regarded them as inhumane, and as discriminating precisely against the lower-paid but essential workers.

A participant in Renfrewshire captured the conditionality that most of the room could accept, saying that in an ideal world families would come, but that the housing and the schools have to be in place first.

TRADE OFFS ON WORK-RELATED MIGRATION

The principles developed by participants set out what they believed should guide the government's policy decisions on work-related immigration – and the Home Affairs Committee's scrutiny of those policies. They do not, however, provide definitive answers to specific policy choices. Therefore, the Committee asked participants to consider two specific trade off questions. These questions were selected because they address actual policy challenges that the state is grappling with. The Committee was clear that they did not want or need for people to reach a settled collective consensus view on the trade off questions, but they were interested in understanding people's views, why they held these views, and whether and how they changed as a result of learning and discussion.

Participants considered these trade off questions after having developed and voted on their principles, so they used these as guidance to help them think through their perspectives on the questions. For each question, participants initially voted on where they stood on an issue, and then – after hearing from an expert on both sides of the debate and deliberating in small groups – voted a second time to see if people's views had changed as a result.

The first trade off question asked:

Should the UK prioritise restricting visas for highly-paid, highly-skilled workers, or lower-paid workers doing jobs that employers are struggling to fill?

The second trade off question asked:

Should the UK favour short-term work visas so people have to leave the country after a certain period, or visas that provide a route to staying in the country permanently?

Participants heard specific presentations to inform their deliberations on each of these questions, including the case for each side of the question, with opportunities to ask the experts further clarifying questions. After the presentations, participants discussed each question in small facilitated groups, working through each side of the debate, before the workshop reconvened in plenary. At this point, they voted for a second time.

Participants were asked to vote along a spectrum to indicate their preference on each trade off: whether they leaned towards one side of the trade off, towards both, or neither. The 'neither' option allowed participants to reject the trade off as presented, but the implications were made clear to participants. For the first trade off, restricting neither type of visa would lead to increased immigration, in contradiction with the premise of the workshops' overarching question. For the second trade off, favouring neither type of visa would suggest a preference for no work visa routes at all.

The questions were designed to make the competing considerations explicit, but participants were not prevented from concluding that the binary framing was inadequate. Their attempts to qualify the options or develop combined approaches demonstrate the careful consideration and nuanced approach participants took, and provide evidence about the conditions under which different policies became acceptable.

Participants also questioned the choices they had been presented with in other ways. In both discussions, many participants concluded that the most appropriate policy could not be expressed as a binary choice between the two alternatives. They distinguished between sectors, regions, types of vacancy, and the expected duration of labour-market need. They also proposed safeguards and accompanying measures, including domestic training requirements, stronger oversight of sponsoring employers, regional or sector-specific criteria, infrastructure funding, and clearer routes from temporary status to settlement.

Note that as the number of participants differed between locations, the pattern of movement from the first to second vote within each workshop is more informative than a comparison of absolute figures between them.



Participants from North Tyneside workshop

TRADE OFF 1
SHOULD THE UK PRIORITISE RESTRICTING VISAS FOR HIGHLY-PAID, HIGHLY-SKILLED WORKERS, OR LOWER-PAID WORKERS DOING JOBS THAT EMPLOYERS ARE STRUGGLING TO FILL?

Participants in all three locations started from a similar position: treating higher-paid and higher-skilled workers as delivering clear economic benefits and lower-paid workers being an economic cost to the country. Higher earners were understood to pay more in taxation and to spend more in the local economy, and lower-paid migrant workers were assumed to draw more from public services than they contribute. While it was not the only metric – and the specific principle on prioritising economic contribution ranked eleventh of thirteen – this was the criterion participants relied on the most.

However, participants in each location disputed the equation of low pay or low formal skill with low value. They felt that low-paid jobs or those that required less training were still highly valuable in ways other than purely fiscal.

> *"Low-skill is a misnomer."* **– Leicester Participant**

A participant in Renfrewshire identified the same difficulty in the movement between two different claims, noting that care work is accurately described as low-paid, but is also described as low-skill despite those skills being necessary.

> *"All the small people who work all the jobs… we can do nothing [without them]."*
> **– Renfrewshire Participant**

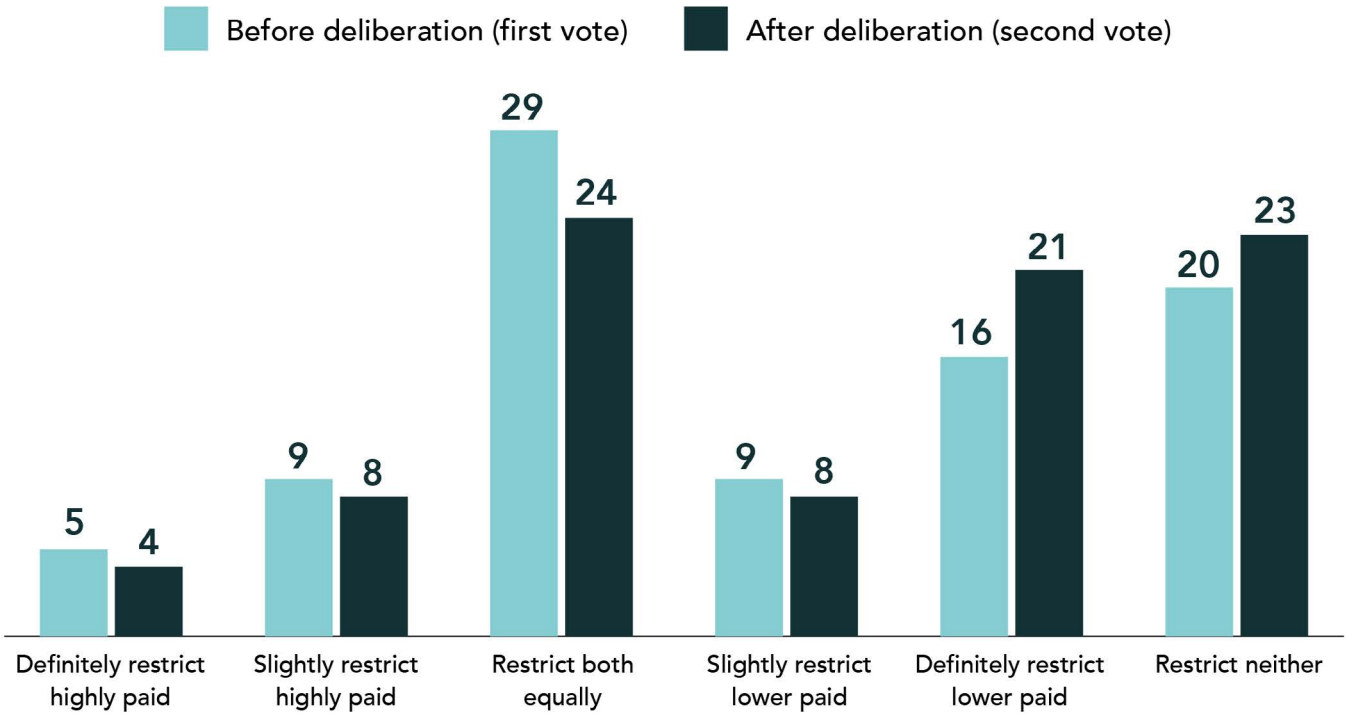
The case for protecting routes for higher-skilled workers rested on tax as well as wider economic effects. Participants argued that specialists bring innovation and knowledge transfer from which domestic workers also benefit, and that restricting these routes would risk relocating businesses and the associated growth to other countries. In Leicester, a number of participants who had initially favoured restricting higher-paid routes in order to protect opportunities for domestic graduates revised that position after considering the effect on competitiveness.

> *"You're bringing somebody from a different country with a skill base that we benefit from, but we also benefit from them sharing their knowledge and experience of how it's done in a different country... they can share that knowledge with people they've worked with."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

The case for protecting access for lower-paid roles in shortage occupations rested on necessity. Participants argued that essential services cannot operate without workers – even if pay does not reflect the importance of their work – and that an ageing population is creating a structural demand for workers in health and social care. Against this, participants identified a risk that ready access to lower-paid migrant labour suppresses wages and reduces the incentive for employers to invest in training and in domestic recruitment. Participants in Renfrewshire described this as the risk of a system in which migrant workers are underpaid and taken advantage of.

The evidence that most affected this discussion concerned the fiscal assumption from which participants had begun. Information on the no recourse to public funds condition, the immigration health surcharge, the fact that adult migrant workers arrive with their education already funded elsewhere, and data on the lifecycle of fiscal contribution together indicated a more complex position than initial assumptions allowed. This qualified the straightforward fiscal argument for preferring higher-paid workers and moved the discussion towards questions of social necessity and labour-market need.

CHART 1
HOW PARTICIPANTS VOTED ON TRADE OFF ONE BEFORE AND AFTER DELIBERATION, ACROSS ALL THREE WORKSHOPS



Across all three locations the second vote moves towards "restrict neither" with support for restricting lower-paid workers falling and defenders of both groups rising. Graphs showing the detail of before and after votes for each location can be found in the technical report.

In each of the three workshops, support for restricting both groups equally fell between the first and second votes, indicating movement away from an undifferentiated position. However, in Renfrewshire, support for restricting neither group increased and was the option attracting most support after deliberation. In North Tyneside, support for restricting neither group also increased, while support for restricting lower-paid routes was broadly unchanged. In Leicester, movement ran in the opposite direction, with support for restricting lower-paid routes increasing and support for restricting neither group falling slightly.

Why participants changed their minds

The most consistent driver of change across all three locations was through challenging the initial assumption that pay is a reliable proxy for the value of work. In North Tyneside the argument was made in terms of what the country cannot function without.

> *"I think I might prefer the restriction of the high skills over the low skills because a lot of these high skill jobs, excluding some things like doctors and stuff like that, are not jobs that we, like, desperately need even though they might be beneficial to the economy… They're not essential to keep the UK running… whereas a lot of these low skilled jobs, the country won't run without them."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

In Leicester the same recognition was expressed as a difficulty with the threshold as a measure, and with the absence of any alternative.

> *"I do struggle with the idea that it is such a high threshold and your inherent value is purely monetary-based. I would like to find room for there to be other ways people add value, but obviously that's very hard to measure."* **– Leicester Participant**

In Renfrewshire it was expressed as a matter of equality between kinds of work, and led directly to a refusal to choose.

> *"I think in terms of equality, it's like saying they're more important than the care workers and the care workers are critical as well. So I think they shouldn't restrict either."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

Care work was the key example in all three locations of work that is often fulfilled by low-paid and ostensibly low-skilled workers (including many migrants), but that is nevertheless critical to the country. This anchored several discussions away from restricting visas for such roles.

Not every participant did change their mind – some of them engaged with both perspectives but held to their original position.

> *"Initially I voted 'Reduce Neither', and I'm kind of wondering why should I vote for anything else? I know that's a heavily slanted question, but that's my view."*
> **– Leicester Participant**

The second driver was shared by all three locations but produced opposite votes: participants everywhere concluded that ready access to migrant labour reduces the incentive for employers to train and to raise wages domestically; they disagreed about the implications of that for restricting lower or higher-paid and skilled workforce migration.

In North Tyneside it was applied to higher-paid routes and was described in terms of opportunities for career progression.

> *"[Prioritising high-pay, high-skill workforce migration] might disincentivise my boss on training me more. They might go, we can just get someone from Japan in who knows this job better than [me], so we'll not train [me]… Had they hired someone from another country to do that, I may not have got that opportunity."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

In Renfrewshire the same argument was applied to lower-paid routes, on the reasoning that importing workers into an undervalued sector is what keeps it undervalued.

> *"Those jobs should be valued and be paid accordingly. But if we don't look at them in another way, then they're never going to get paid more, they're never going to get treated better. So how does bringing in migrant workers to do that job help with that? To lower the quality of it again, because we're not prepared to put the effort into our own local population."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

In Leicester it was applied the same way, and grounded in a comparison with earlier domestic employment programmes.

> *"Why can they not do something involving young people to give them work experience? In the 80s, there was a lot of work experience schemes. Aren't school leavers, local schools to these places, aren't children that leave school wanting work experience?"* **– Leicester Participant**

This is the same line of thinking across the three workshops but the effect on the voting went in two directions as participants identified different bottlenecks in different circumstances: graduate underemployment in North Tyneside, and structurally low pay in care and service work in Renfrewshire and Leicester.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

While participants underwent very similar changes in reasoning, this did not always produce similar changes in voting. All three locations were sceptical of salary as the sole measure of value and identified a domestic training disincentive. Renfrewshire and North Tyneside moved towards restricting neither group; Leicester moved towards restricting lower-paid routes more firmly than it had at the outset.

The explanation lies in what each workshop attached the training argument to. North Tyneside applied it to higher-paid routes, via graduate underemployment, and so its liberalising and restrictive instincts pointed in the same direction: away from restricting lower-paid workers. Leicester applied it to lower-paid routes, via wage suppression and the absence of work experience schemes, while simultaneously accepting that genuinely seasonal roles should be preserved. Its second vote therefore records a firmer restrictive position that is, on examination, considerably more qualified than the first – restriction of structural lower-paid routes, coupled with protection for seasonal ones and a requirement that employers demonstrate domestic recruitment efforts first.



Participants from North Tyneside workshop

TRADE OFF 2
SHOULD THE UK FAVOUR SHORT-TERM WORK VISAS SO PEOPLE HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY AFTER A CERTAIN PERIOD, OR VISAS THAT PROVIDE A ROUTE TO STAYING IN THE COUNTRY PERMANENTLY?

Participants approached the second question from a position comparable to the first, treating time-limited visas as the preferred option that allows the country to exert more control over who comes in and stays in the country. The reasoning was that short-term routes address labour shortages without contributing to long-term population growth or to future pension and healthcare liabilities, and that they preserve the ability of government to adjust migration levels. Participants in Leicester expressed that temporary routes allow the country to benefit from workers during their most productive years without incurring the later-life healthcare and social care costs associated with permanent settlement.

This instinct met resistance from participants themselves on two grounds. The first was that short-term is often a misdescription: participants in North Tyneside argued the label frequently masks a systemic, long-term employer reliance on foreign labour, such that a temporary visa is really a permanent feature of the economy dressed up as a stopgap. The second was an ethical judgement: treating people as disposable, and requiring them to live three years at a time, was seen as unfair and socially corrosive, producing insecurity and unstable, parallel societies rather than one integrated society. Participants in Renfrewshire made a comparable argument in terms of individual circumstances.

> *"Life does happen while you're busy making other plans… [it is a] shame to tell someone who has become part of a community that their time is up."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

The case for routes leading to settlement rested on integration, retention, and reciprocity. Participants reasoned that people who know they may remain have reason to learn the language, to purchase homes, and to invest in their neighbourhoods, and that those on short-term routes do not.

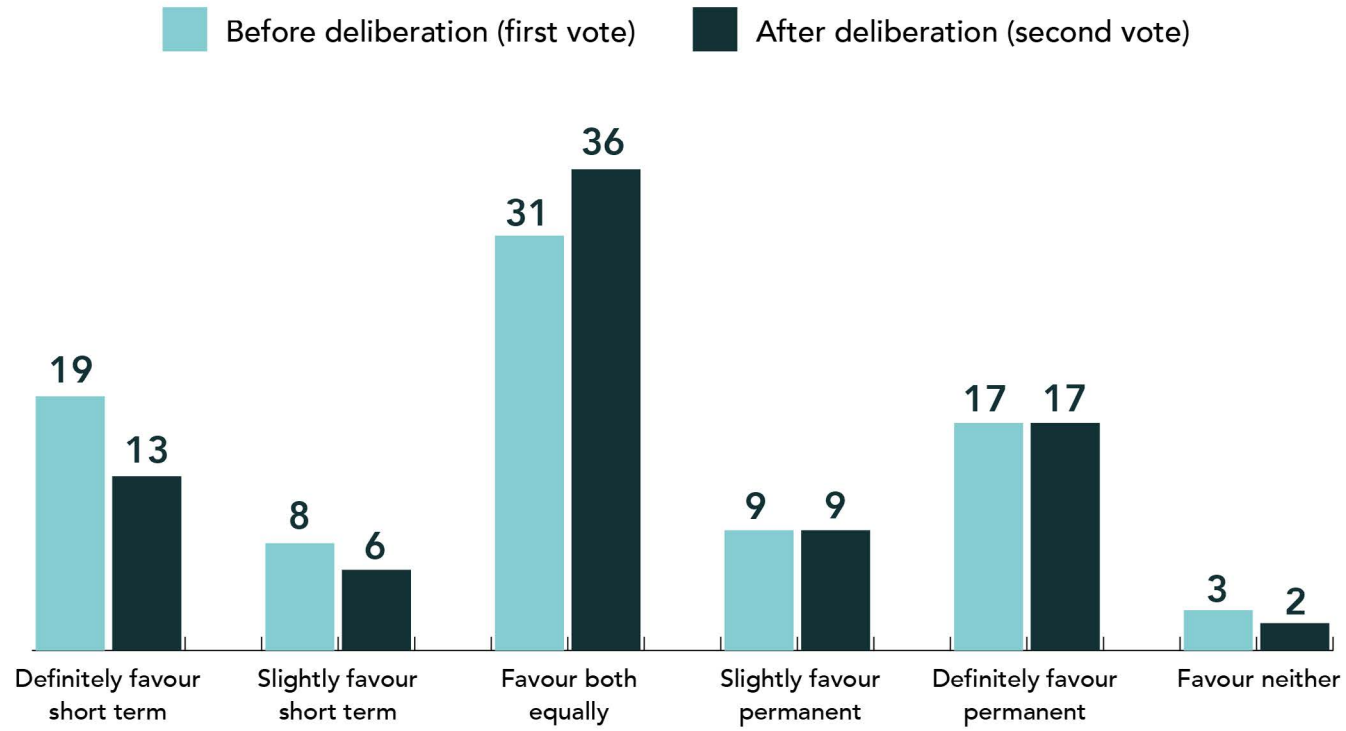
Participants also identified workforce continuity and succession planning as advantages for employers, and in Leicester expressed the reciprocity argument in terms of mutual investment, observing that workers who have already invested in the country through fees, taxation, and labour warrant investment in return.

Participants also accepted that genuinely seasonal or time-limited work, including agricultural peaks and discrete construction projects, is well suited to short-term and circular routes, provided that the terms are clear at the outset and fairly enforced. The objection was to the use of temporary status for work that is in practice permanent, and to its use where insecure status exposes workers to exploitation.

There is direct evidence of change in position on this question. Participants in Renfrewshire moved to favouring both routes equally, and one explained the basis for that change.

> *"The more we talked around the table, it became clear… there were so many positives and negatives on both sides, and it is so dependent on which sector you're talking about… that you really need both."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

CHART 2
HOW PARTICIPANTS VOTED ON TRADE OFF TWO BEFORE AND AFTER DELIBERATION, ACROSS ALL THREE WORKSHOPS



The recorded votes indicate movement away from strictly short-term routes in two of the three locations. The largest single change recorded across either question occurred in Renfrewshire, where support for favouring both routes equally increased substantially between the first and second votes and support for strictly short-term visas fell to a small minority. In North Tyneside, support for strictly short-term visas also fell, although the option attracting most support both before and after deliberation was a clear preference for permanent routes. In Leicester the distribution changed comparatively little, with support already concentrated on favouring both routes equally and on permanent routes, and the second vote showing a modest further movement in that direction. Graphs showing the detail of before and after votes for each location can be found in the technical report.

Why participants changed their minds

The most widely shared driver was the recognition that temporary status removes the reason for a person to invest in the place they are living. This was reached in every location, but through different observations.

In North Tyneside, participants linked it to housing and to the visible condition of high-turnover neighbourhoods.

> *"People with a long-term visa would have a stable home, whereas people on temporary visas go to the HMOs… there's no respect for the areas… [long-term] gives you a bit of time… learn English… benefits for the community if people are more stable."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

In Renfrewshire the same conclusion was reached from the perspective of what temporary residents have reason to do.

> *"If you're only here for a short term and you're gonna go back, why would you bother getting involved? You'd stay with the group that you came with."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**

The significance of this driver is that it converted integration from an expectation placed on migrants into a consequence of the visa system's design. Participants who wanted more integration found themselves arguing for more settlement, which was not the position that most of them had necessarily started from.

Where did participants in different areas diverge?

All three workshops broadly moved the same way on this question: away from strictly temporary routes. There was not a lot of divergence in this, but there were some differences in the emphases and the reasoning that led participants to this shift.

North Tyneside arrived at this position on moral grounds, looking at the evidence linking employer-tied visas to exploitation, and the cost and stress of renewing every few years.

> *"I think there's a danger with favouring the short-term workers that it can be quite dehumanising… only thinking about the economy and completely disregards what people are actually wanting to do that work for."* **– North Tyneside Participant**

However, Leicester's route was largely economic, as participants there looked at how effectively short-term migration actually helps to fill labour gaps. They also focused on the seemingly wasted investment in workers who will not stay for the long term.

> *"You've gone through all the hard work of getting them in and training them and using them, and then you lose them… Who's that actually hurt? Well, I haven't got an employee either now."* **– Leicester Participant**

IMPACT OF THE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

Unlike everyday public debate, often shaped by political messaging, media coverage, misinformation, and limited opportunities for more informed discussion of the issues, deliberative processes give participants access to balanced evidence, expert perspectives, and structured dialogue with people who have views and experiences different from their own. Analysing how participants' opinions evolve within this environment can help evaluate whether deliberation enables people to engage more deeply with complex issues, find common ground and reach considered conclusions.

While the goal is not to change people's minds in any specific direction, changes in views are indicators that participants have been willing to engage with new evidence, consider alternative perspectives, and reflect on the trade offs involved in complex policy issues. As detailed below, participants felt that this was distinct from how most people think about or interact with the topic. Participants also made clear that they would like to have more conversations like those in the workshops, rather than the conversations they are used to hearing or having on immigration.

The key impacts of the deliberative process on participants were:

- Participants felt slightly more positive about immigration on a national level after the workshops, and reported changing their minds on some issues
- Self-reported knowledge on immigration increased
- Positivity about citizen participation in politics increased across a number of measures, but a trust gap around real change remains

This section sets out how and why participants' views changed over the course of deliberation: on immigration itself, as well as on citizen participation in politics. It draws on findings from Newcastle University's evaluation surveys conducted immediately before and after the workshops,[15] the follow-up questionnaire sent to participants a few months after the workshop,

15 Elstub, S., Blackett, L., and Grebby, L. (2027) Evaluation of Your Voice on Immigration, Newcastle University (forthcoming)

and analysis of discussions in the deliberative workshops. Finally, it outlines the impact that is still to be seen, and will be covered in the independent evaluation: the impact of the workshops on immigration policy, and on the views of the wider public.

PARTICIPANTS FELT SLIGHTLY MORE POSITIVE ABOUT IMMIGRATION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL AFTER THE WORKSHOPS, AND REPORTED CHANGING THEIR MINDS

Across all three workshops, participants became slightly more positive about the impact of immigration at the national level, with an overall shift from a mean score of 6.8 before the workshop to 7.2 afterwards, when asked the extent to which they believe migration has had a positive or negative impact on the country, with 0 being very negative and 10 very positive. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons behind this shift in views, this section details other impacts of the process on participants, some of which are likely to have had an impact on views. The evidence in the literature points to exposure to new, balanced information, internal deliberation, and external deliberation all having a part to play in shifting the way participants think about a topic.[16]

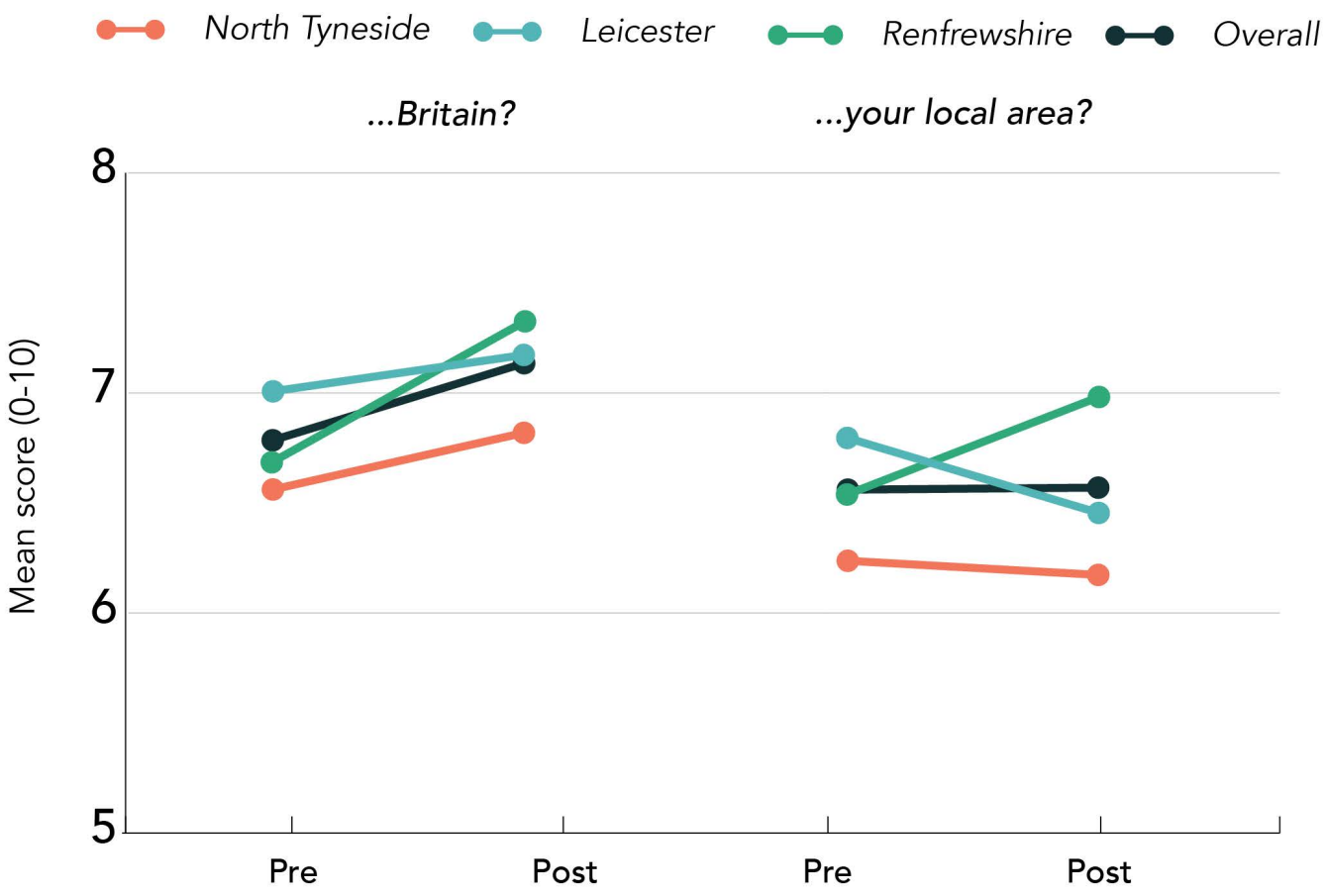
> *"I just want to say that it feels like a privilege to hear from experts but also have the opportunity to listen to people from my community who have different opinions. You spoke at the start of the day about how we often socialise with those who believe similarly to us. I think I'm feeling really challenged but also very [positive]."*
> **– Leicester Participant**



Participants from Renfrewshire workshop

16 Neblo, M., Esterling, K. and Lazer, D. (2020) Politics with the people: building a directly representative democracy, APSA Preprints. Involve (2014) Changing hats: lessons from involving deliberative and participatory methods in local government, Involve.

CHART 3
CHANGES IN MIGRATION ATTITUDES BEFORE AND AFTER THE WORKSHOPS
Responses to the question: *"On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on..."* 0 very negative to 10 very positive



Looking at changes in views on more specific elements of the impact of migration (economic, cultural, and local) may help explain some of this shift in views, revealing a more mixed picture. Views shifted most clearly, and positively, on economic impacts of immigration, suggesting this was a key driver in overall shifts in views on the impact of immigration at the national level.

Changes in views on economic impacts of immigration

Overall, after taking part, participants became more positive about the perceived economic impacts of migration, from a mean score of 7.0 to 7.3, with 0 being very negative and 10 very positive. The positive trend is likely largely due to new information received that changed perceptions, as explored on page 59.

Changes in views on cultural impacts of immigration

Changes in views on immigrants' impacts on Britain's cultural life after the workshops differed between the workshops, resulting in no statistically significant changes in the overall sample across the locations. In North Tyneside, participants appeared to become slightly more negative about the cultural impacts of immigrants (from a mean score of 7.4 to 7.1, with 0 being very negative and 10 very positive), while views of participants in Renfrewshire appeared to remain basically stable (from 7.4 to 7.5), and participants in Leicester became substantially more positive (from 7.0 to 7.9).

Changes in views on local impacts of immigration

The picture was also mixed when it came to views on the impact of immigration on a local level. Again, while there were no statistically significant differences in views before and after the workshops in individual workshops, the variation between locations points to the influence of local factors on the discussions and outcomes of the deliberations.

Participants in Renfrewshire appeared to become slightly more positive about the impact of migration in their local area, whereas the views of North Tyneside participants stayed stable before and after the workshops, and participants in Leicester appeared to become slightly more negative about the local impact of migration.

Participants' perceptions of changing views

Participants themselves reported changing their minds, with almost all participants (92%) reporting having changed their minds at least 'a little' from hearing other participants' experiences and views. The extent to which participants felt they had changed their minds varied significantly, with 24% saying they had changed their minds only 'a little', 28% 'somewhat', 24% 'quite a lot', and 15% 'very much'.

> *"People are generally willing to learn and change their mind about difficult topics, despite social media making you believe otherwise"* **– Renfrewshire Participant (Follow-up questionnaire)**

> *"I enjoyed being in a space where different opinions were welcome and equally valued and where it was ok to acknowledge that my opinion had changed based on the discussions and information shared"* **– Renfrewshire Participant (Follow-up questionnaire)**

SELF-REPORTED KNOWLEDGE ON IMMIGRATION INCREASED

Self-reported knowledge on immigration in the UK significantly increased in all three locations, from a mean score of 5.9 to 7.1 overall, with 0 being no knowledge at all and 10 being a great deal. The follow-up questionnaire reinforces this picture of a substantial knowledge gain, with several respondents reflecting on how little they had previously understood about the mechanics of the system or scale of immigration. In workshops and in the follow-up questionnaire, participants were able to point to specific pieces of evidence that had stuck with them, which provides an insight into some of the information that may have changed the way participants thought about the issue, alongside deliberation.

One fundamental part of the learning that was repeatedly referenced by participants in the workshops and months later, and therefore appears to have shaped their thinking, was the breakdown of different immigration routes. Given that initial associations focused on irregular migration, participants admitted initially conflating 'illegal' and 'legal' migration, and not being aware of the proportion of people arriving through different immigration routes. Polling finds that the public overestimates the proportion of asylum seekers by more than double – in Ipsos/British Future polling in 2025, on average people thought asylum made up 33% of all

immigration to the UK, compared to around 14% in the year ending June 2025.[17] Therefore, participants were particularly surprised by what they saw as a relatively low proportion of immigration being made up by asylum seekers, compared to work and study routes. In North Tyneside, the number of immigrants in the local area was also surprising to some who had been expecting it to be higher, given the focus on immigration in the political debate.

> *"The proportions of different types of reasons for migration surprised me a bit. Particularly the prominence of those coming for education. Also the low percentage of 'boat people' by comparison although that is what attracts the headlines and political unrest."* **– Renfrewshire participant (follow-up questionnaire)**

> *"I was always under the impression that kind of the numbers would have been a bit higher. Again, that's because of what other people basically kind of word of mouth, social media, that type of thing. It just goes to show that you you can't always trust what you see online"* **– North Tyneside Participant**

Another key piece of evidence that stuck with participants in all three workshops was a graph showing migrants' fiscal contribution over their lifecycle compared to the average British worker (the full information shared with participants is in the technical report), as many had been surprised to hear that an average-wage migrant worker makes a more positive fiscal contribution over their lifetime. Relatedly, in North Tyneside and Leicester specifically, many participants were surprised to learn about the 'no recourse to public funds' rule and NHS surcharge, having assumed visa holders would be able to access these services. This was pivotal given the focus on the importance of the economy across workshops, and is likely a key reason why overall participants felt more positively about immigrants' economic impacts after the workshops.

> *"It was almost a bit more of like a reality check more than anything... UK residents are actually costing more than they are contributing, whereas immigrants are coming in who are in the higher or medium skill bands and contributing way more."*
> **– Leicester Participant**

As a result, there was also an acknowledgement of the complexity of work-related immigration policy, which many participants described not having previously been aware of. This appears to have made their views more conditional and nuanced, with participants moving away from binaries towards qualified positions, for example by sector, pay level or circumstance.

> *"It certainly changed my perception to realise just how difficult the whole thing is."*
> **– North Tyneside participant**

17 Katwala, S., Ballinger, S., and Rolfe, H. (2025) Noise and nuance: Immigration Attitudes Tracker report 2025, British Future

POSITIVITY ABOUT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS INCREASED ACROSS A NUMBER OF MEASURES, BUT A TRUST GAP AROUND REAL CHANGE REMAINS

For most participants, the deliberative workshops felt different to the way that they see the immigration debate usually unfolding. As has been covered, the information was new to most, and participants' knowledge on the topic increased. Just as powerful and new to participants, though, was the ability to discuss the issue with people with different views, and to have the opportunity to influence the policy debate as an ordinary citizen. This impacted the way participants thought not only about immigration policy, but about how immigration – and other – policy gets made.

Depolarising the debate

Many participants reported being pleasantly surprised by the ability to have a constructive conversation and find common ground with people with different views, in contrast to how polarised they see the debate as being usually. This is reflected in the finding above that almost all participants reported changing their minds as a result of hearing others' views and experiences. This appeared to be a key reason that participants' views shifted over the course of the workshops.

> *"As humans we have more in common. And I think being here has shown me that actually, in the grand scheme of things, we do share the same views."* **– Leicester Participant**
>
> *"I've changed my mind. I went from short-term at the beginning and then I went to both equally. Because the more we talked around the table, it became clear to me that there were so many positives and negatives."* **– Renfrewshire Participant**
>
> *"I enjoyed most that I got to hear so many different perspectives from so many people from different backgrounds that I ordinarily wouldn't come into contact with, on immigration and learned so many actual facts on it rather than the hyperbole favoured by our media."* **– Renfrewshire participant (follow-up questionnaire)**

This may also be why, after the workshops, participants were more likely to trust ordinary citizens to make good political decisions (from 45% to 58%). There were also some indicative differences after taking part (see footnote for caveat on statistical significance): an increased sense that people like them can participate in politics, from 60% to 74% feeling they know enough to participate in politics, and like they have a say about what the UK Government does (agreement that people like them don't have a say went down from 56% to 46%).[18] However, some participants felt that the current political debate doesn't enable citizens to get involved in such a constructive way, leading to the fifth principle developed on improving the immigration debate.

18 The percentages reported here show participants' responses before and after the workshops. Each of these changes was statistically significant when tested individually (unadjusted $p<.05$). However, because multiple attitudinal statements were tested, the evaluation also applied a Holm adjustment to reduce the risk of identifying significant findings by chance. These changes did not remain statistically significant after this adjustment. This reflects the more stringent multiple-comparison procedure and does not negate the descriptive changes observed. On the evaluation team's advice, these findings are therefore reported as suggestive evidence of a shift rather than as statistically significant changes. The observed changes point consistently in the same direction.

"I just remember the discussions I had with people who I'd initially judged or made assumptions about. I realised after the two days that everyone in that room was able to be calm, rational, and find logical agreements while being respectful. It made me much more optimistic about the future of the UK, realising that everyone would be able to have these rational respectful discussions if we're given the chance away from frenzy" **– North Tyneside participant (follow-up questionnaire)**

"[Referring to another participant] We're fundamentally at different ends of the spectrum, so our skill is to understand, but working through it together, we're actually a lot closer with what really matters. The way we approach it is slightly different, but working through it together has actually helped us realise that we sort of want the same thing… we've made compromises that are doable, just requires a lot of talking." **– Leicester Participant**

Giving citizens a voice in policymaking

For most participants, public deliberation was a new concept. Participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences, with 92% agreeing in the survey at the end of the workshops that they had an opportunity to express their views and 93% agreeing that fellow participants respected what they had to say, even when they didn't agree with them. Participants expressed surprise about their and other citizens' ability to have a constructive and informed debate in a way they hadn't expected, as seen above. Therefore, many expressed hope that these kinds of processes would be used more in policymaking to give more citizens a say on policies that impact their lives, beyond immigration alone.

"When you have something that's essential to the country, such as immigration, education, and welfare, health, whatever, I think this process should be embedded into our democratic process as part of the whole process. [Politicians] should come out and listen to what people have to say." **– North Tyneside Participant**

"I was pretty nervous coming into this process. But actually, we don't get this kind of opportunity every day. We don't have this discussion at a community level, so actually having this opportunity feels quite meaningful, and that we've been able to have this busy two days to contribute to something. Hopefully it will give some guidance to the government." **– North Tyneside Participant**

Even the fact that the Home Affairs Committee had held such a process had a positive effect on participants' perceptions of political efficacy. By the end of the workshops, 44% of participants felt the government's current immigration policies addressed concerns they have about immigration, compared to only a quarter (26%) at the start of the workshops. It also may have improved participants' perceptions of the political system (see footnote for caveat on statistical significance). After the workshops, fewer participants felt the political system doesn't work (disagreement that 'No system is perfect but the political system in the UK works fairly well'

went down from 38% to 30%) or were dissatisfied with how democracy works at the national level (dissatisfaction went down from 40% to 34%) or local level (satisfaction went up from 40% to 47%).[19]

However, a clear trust gap remains: the overwhelming majority (82%) of participants across the workshops felt their conclusions *should* carry substantial weight ('quite a lot' or 'very much') with the Home Affairs Committee, but only around half (49%) believed they actually *would*. This was generally rooted in a broader distrust of Westminster politics – variously described as short-termist, or driven by electoral cycles rather than evidence – rather than the workshops themselves, which participants spoke of positively and, as has been seen, appears to have had a positive effect on participants' trust.

Still to be seen: impact on immigration policy, parliamentary processes, and the wider public

The evaluation so far has built an understanding of the impact of the workshops on participants. Ultimately, to close the trust gap described above, participants' conclusions must have an impact on the Home Affairs Committee's scrutiny of work-related immigration policy, and be seen to have had an impact. This will be assessed by the independent evaluators over the next few months, reporting at the beginning of 2027.

The evaluators will interview Committee members and relevant policy stakeholders, examining what influence the workshops and the principles they produced have had on the Committee's work and on wider policy thinking. There is limited evidence on the impact of deliberative processes on policy, with a 2020 study by the OECD examining 282 processes finding data on this for only 19.5% (55 processes), which may reflect another finding that only 7% of 89 deliberative processes examined had been independently evaluated.[20] This aspect of the evaluation will therefore help to address an important evidence gap.

The final strand of the evaluation is a nationally representative survey, assessing public support for participants' conclusions. 89 participants across three locations in the UK cannot represent the views of the entire country, and therefore this will be a key test of wider public legitimacy. This is another area where there is an existing evidence gap – the perceptions of members of the public who didn't take part compared to those who did – that this evaluation will help to address.[21]

19 The percentages reported here show participants' responses before and after the workshops. Each of these changes was statistically significant when tested individually (unadjusted $p<.05$). However, because multiple attitudinal statements were tested, the evaluation also applied a Holm adjustment to reduce the risk of identifying significant findings by chance. These changes did not remain statistically significant after this adjustment. This reflects the more stringent multiple-comparison procedure and does not negate the descriptive changes observed. On the evaluation team's advice, these findings are therefore reported as suggestive evidence of a shift rather than as statistically significant changes. The observed changes point consistently in the same direction.

20 OECD (2020) Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions: catching the deliberative wave, OECD Publishing, Paris

21 van der Does, R. and Jacquet, V. (2023) 'Small-scale deliberation and mass democracy: a systematic review of the spillover effects of deliberative minipublics', Political Studies, 71(1), pp. 218–237

CONCLUSION

These deliberative workshops were commissioned by the Home Affairs Committee to inform their scrutiny of government policy on workforce migration. Over the course of a weekend in three different areas, principles were developed by a broad cross-section of the public, representing a range of backgrounds, political views, and attitudes towards immigration. They are the participants' answer to the Committee's question: in what ways should work-related immigration be reduced?

Below are four potential next steps for the Committee to consider.

1. Areas for further exploration

The level of common ground found within and between workshops was striking. However, there are clear areas of divergence too and tensions that the length of the workshops did not allow sufficient time to resolve. These could serve as potential areas that the Committee may wish to explore further with the public to reconcile conflicting views. For example:

- **What should count as a migrant's 'contribution' to the UK, and how should that be weighed against the social necessity of lower-paid essential work?** Participants were split between weighting fiscal contribution and the social or economic necessity of work that is often low-paid, such as care. Participants raised this tension explicitly but did not resolve how the two forms of contribution should be weighed against each other.
- **Is successful integration primarily an obligation on migrants to adapt, or a reciprocal process the receiving community and state must also invest in?** Both framings were present in all three workshops, without reconciling the two views. This leaves open a question for the wider public about roles, expectations and responsibilities around integration for both existing communities and migrants.

On the latter suggestion, this further exploration may be of wider interest to other committees too, eg: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

There are other areas where the principles open up questions as to how they could be delivered in practice – which could be explored further with experts. For example:

- **How would a genuine attempt to recruit domestically be evidenced before an employer can bring in foreign labour, and how would this be enforced?** Prioritising UK residents was the most popular principle, but it leaves open questions around how employers can demonstrate that they have tried to recruit locally and how they can be held to account on this.

- **How would local infrastructure capacity be assessed and how would this be used to determine who/how many people can come to an area?** Participants reached different conclusions on the issue of local pressure on services – such as reducing numbers, or redirecting visa-fee revenue to local authorities. Establishing how these or other policy solutions could work in practice could help resolve this key question which is directly tied to visible local pressure and public sentiment on immigration.

2. Ensuring that the findings are heard across government

While the principles are addressed to the Home Affairs Committee, the factors that shape work-related immigration, and the consequences that follow from it, extend well beyond the Home Office. Demand for migrant labour is shaped by decisions on skills and training, on the funding of health and social care, and on pay and conditions. The effects of migration are felt in the economy, in housing, in local public services, and in community life. Participants reached this conclusion themselves, ranking the principle on joined up decision-making across government seventh and returning to it throughout. The findings on work-related immigration therefore have resonance for other select committees and departments.

3. Further consideration of the impact of locality on attitudes

Given that three locations, as diverse as they are, cannot capture the whole of the UK, the Committee could also consider expanding the range of locations to test how far these principles hold and where local context changes the answer. The nationally representative survey being conducted as part of the independent evaluation after the publication of this report will also help to assess whether the workshops and findings resonate with the wider public.

4. Continued use of public deliberation to support select committee work

The members of the public who participated in the deliberative workshops demonstrated that people can respectfully discuss topics that are emotive and value-laden, as well as complex and technical, and reach considered collective conclusions. There is value in considering on which other issues this might be useful for the Home Affairs Committee to support their work scrutinising domestic government policy. Beyond this, there is scope to consider how these processes could be utilised by other select committees, with opportunities for deliberative public participation at pre- and post-legislative scrutiny, as well as to inform inquiries.

By commissioning deliberative workshops, the Committee has enabled a different kind of conversation about immigration with the public than the usual polarised and polarising discourse. Participants who disagreed with one another found substantial common ground, considered and changed or refined their positions in light of new information, and heard from people with different perspectives.

Participants themselves regarded this as a significant outcome: they ranked an honest and balanced public conversation about immigration fifth of thirteen principles, and many hoped that processes of this kind would be used more widely in policymaking, beyond immigration alone.

That view sat alongside scepticism about whether their conclusions would be acted upon. This sends a message to the Committee that what comes next – to demonstrate that people have been heard and their conclusions acted on – is just as important as the workshops themselves.

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DEMOS

Demos is a champion of people, ideas and democracy. We bring people together. We bridge divides. We listen and we understand. We are practical about the problems we face, but endlessly optimistic and ambitious about our capacity, together, to overcome them.

At a crossroads in Britain's history, we need ideas for renewal, reconnection and the restoration of hope. Challenges from populism to climate change remain unsolved, and a technological revolution dawns, but the centre of politics has been intellectually paralysed. Demos will change that. We can counter the impossible promises of the political extremes, and challenge despair – by bringing to life an aspirational narrative about the future of Britain that is rooted in the hopes and ambitions of people from across our country.

Demos is an independent, educational charity, registered in England and Wales. (Charity Registration no. 1042046)

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