



Reforming the UK's points-based immigration system

Report from a citizens' jury

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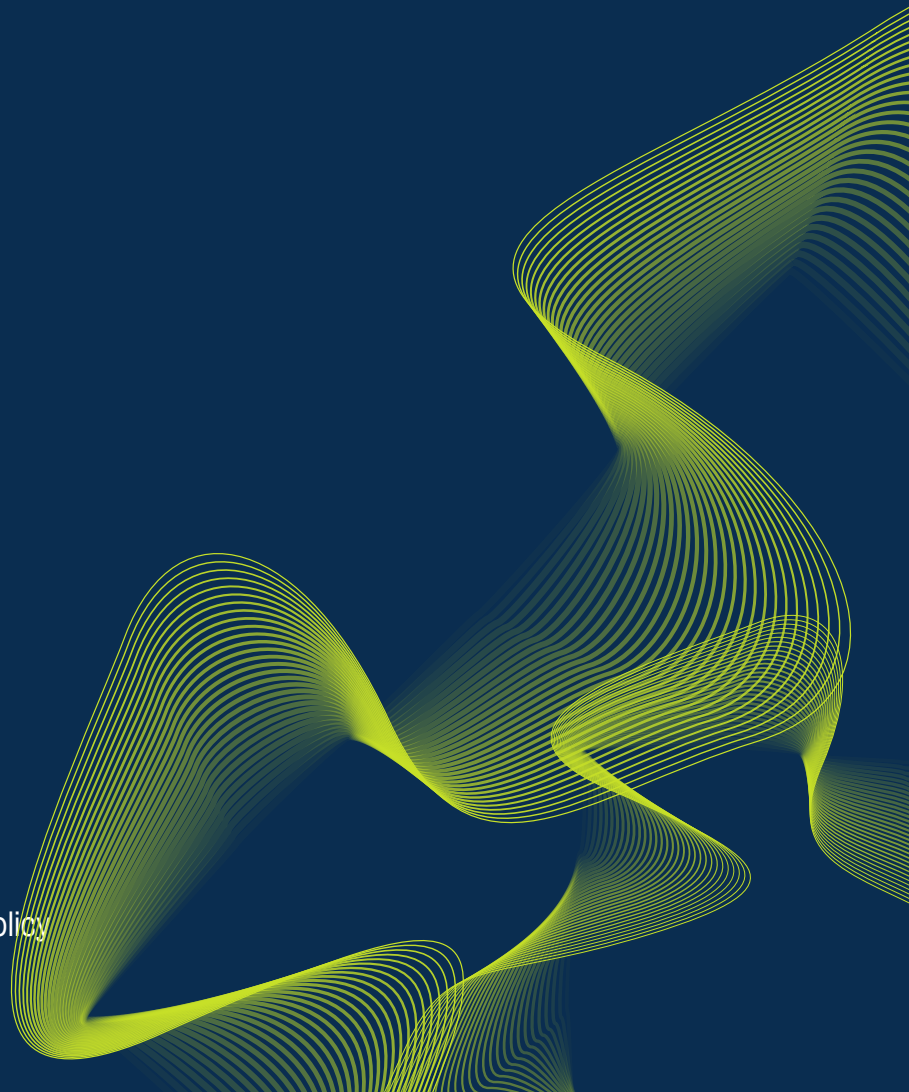


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Executive summary

This report summarises the discussions that took place at a citizens' jury held in November 2023, in which 15 members of the public came together to deliberate on whether the points-based system underpinning the UK's Skilled Worker visa should be reformed – and if so, how.

Comprised of 15 residents from St Albans and the surrounding area, the jury learnt about how the UK's points-based system works relative to systems in other countries, reflected on whether the system supports what they value about economic migration, and deliberated on the kind of reforms that might make it more effective, fair and sustainable. The jury met for two days across two weekends, engaging with experts and other local residents they might not meet in their day-to-day lives, to build an understanding of economic migration and the points-based system, and how it might be reformed.

Participants generally had limited to no prior knowledge of the immigration system, but their confidence grew

Before the workshops, most jurors reported knowing little about how the immigration system works. Their knowledge was largely shaped by what they saw on TV and social media, and conversations with friends and family members. As participants built their knowledge of visa criteria, fee structures, and immigration systems in other countries, they became more confident engaging with the topic and developing recommendations for reform.

They also expressed concern about the complexity of the current system and felt there was a lack of transparency around migration statistics. Jurors felt that media representations of immigration were often prone to generalisation and did not reflect the full picture of who is moving to the UK and why, contributing to a skewed public understanding. They therefore called for greater public access to clear, evidence-based information about immigration.

Jurors were open to people moving to the UK to work but wanted better management and transparency

Most participants entered the workshops recognising both the benefits and challenges associated with immigration. Jurors acknowledged the important role economic migration can play in filling workforce shortages, particularly in sectors like health and social care, and recognised its contribution to the economy more broadly. At the same time, they expressed concerns about pressures on public services, competition for jobs, and the government's ability to manage immigration effectively.

Jurors welcomed the idea of a points-based system in principle, particularly its potential to prioritise economic need. However, they felt the current system revolved around the job, not the person, and emphasised the need for a more flexible, human-centred approach that

considers age, long-term contribution, and individual circumstances. They wanted the system to be fairer to those already living and working in the UK, more accommodating of family needs and dependents, and questioned the emphasis on level of skill over type of skill required to fill shortages.

Participants prioritised fairness and long-term thinking when considering immigration reform

Jurors grappled with a range of trade-offs when deliberating on the types of changes they would like to see enacted within the system, often returning to questions around fairness and long-term strategy. They called for reforms that:

- Prioritise filling genuine skill shortages
- Offer clear and fair routes to permanent residence
- Increase transparency around visa fees and system costs
- Support integration and reflect long-term workforce needs

Across the workshops, there was a clear shift from a focus on immigration levels generally to more nuanced questions about how immigration is managed, who benefits, and what principles should guide reform. Their reflections offer a valuable alternative to polarised political debate, rooted in empathy, and a desire for fairness and accountability.

1 Introduction

This report provides an account of deliberations that took place at a citizens' jury held in St Albans in November 2023. The jury marked the three-year anniversary of the introduction of the UK's points-based immigration system, which determines who is eligible to move to the UK for work. A group of 15 local residents were tasked with discussing and deliberating on whether the system was effective, fair and reflective of what they value about economic migration – and, if not, what could be done to improve it.

Across two consecutive weekends, the jurors were asked to deliberate on the following question:

Does the UK's points-based immigration system capture what the public value about economic migration or should it be reformed?

1.1 Context

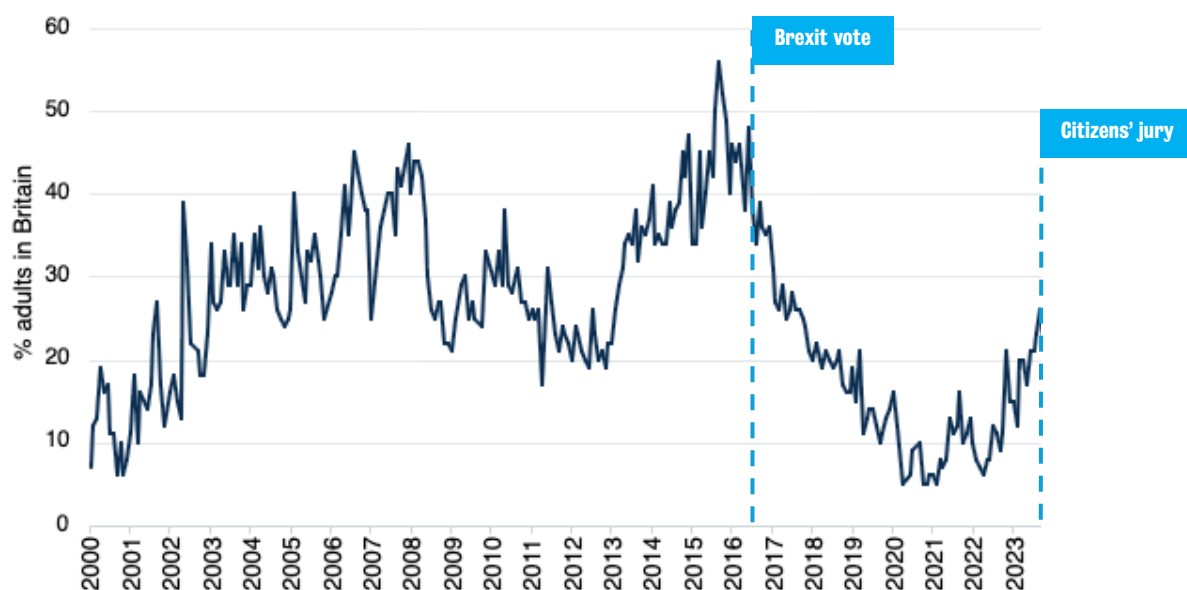
The United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) on 31st January 2021. With it came the end of free movement that allowed EU citizens to live, work and study in the UK without needing visas or permits, along with wider changes to the immigration system that enable people from any country to move to the UK to work, study, visit or join their family.

As part of these changes, the Tier 2 work visa was replaced with the Skilled Worker visa – an 'Australian-style' points-based system, where applicants qualify for a visa by scoring points based on a set of eligibility requirements, centred on a job offer. These new eligibility requirements came hand-in-hand with a fresh set of rules that applied to any non-UK and Irish citizens looking to move to the UK to work. These included the introduction of lower skill and salary thresholds, expanded criteria for new entrants, and the abolition of the cap on the number of people who could be sponsored to work in the UK under the new route.

The implementation of the post-Brexit immigration system was not without challenges. Between the two citizens' jury workshops, the announcement that the UK had hit a record-breaking 745,000 net migration figure in 2022 made national headlines ([ONS, 2023](#)). Work-related visas accounted for around 36 per cent of this – a jump of 23 per cent from the previous year ([ONS, 2023](#)). While net migration has since fallen, immigration has continued to grow in salience among the British public: after falling considerably after the Brexit referendum, immigration is once again seen as one of the most important issues facing Britain (see Figure 1).

Dissatisfaction with the management of immigration to the UK was also on the rise, with around two-thirds of people living in Britain (66 per cent) saying that they were dissatisfied with how the government was dealing with immigration ([Rolfe et al., 2024](#)). High net migration and rising concern about how immigration was being managed all formed the backdrop of the jurors' conversations.

Figure 1: Immigration salience in public opinion, 2000–2023 (Ipsos Issues Index)



Source: Ipsos Issues Index. Until September 2014, this response was recorded as 'race relations/immigration'; data from this point onwards are split.

1.2 The citizens' jury

Citizens' juries are a form of deliberative engagement, in which a small group of randomly selected citizens work together to reach a collective, informed decision on a pre-determined issue or question. The approach is often used to tackle value-laden or controversial issues, with participants scrutinising and deliberating on balanced evidence and testimony, before reaching a decision on the question they are charged with responding to ([Involve, nd](#)).

Given the polarised and politicised nature of immigration debates in the UK, we set out to test the potential for deliberative methods to support constructive conversations about immigration policy in the UK. We recruited a diverse group of 15 residents from St Albans and the surrounding area to take part, as an area whose immigration rate broadly matched the UK average. The composition of the jury was designed to reflect the demographic of the area, while also ensuring a broad range of political views, perspectives on immigration and exposure to the immigration system.

The jury took place over the course of two consecutive weekends, meeting on 18th and 23rd November 2023. Participants spent a total of 12 hours together, moving between plenary and breakout sessions in which they learnt about different systems, scrutinised evidence, considered the implications for both the UK and migrants themselves, and developed ideas for reforms. Conversations were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. Opinion shifts were also tracked through pre- and post-workshop surveys, sticker voting exercises, group post-it exercises and shows of hands.

The jurors were presented with information in a range of formats to build knowledge about the Skilled Worker visa and the supporting points-based system, including:

- **Talks from subject experts** from British Future, the Migration Observatory and House of Commons Library. These talks introduced the Skilled Worker visa, outlined what the points-based immigration system entails, presented statistics about who comes to the UK to work, and the impacts of economic migration on the UK's economy, housing and public services.
- **Presentations from a small group of residents** from the London Borough of Brent, Peterborough, and Redcar and Cleveland – all areas with higher-than-average inward migration – who acted as peer researchers, developing witness testimony on how immigration was impacting their area. This included their own perspectives as well as interviews they conducted with friends or family members. Three peer researchers presented their reflections at the workshops.
- **Fictional personas** were provided to stimulate conversation about types of people who would be eligible to move to the UK under the current skills-based system.
- **PhotoVoice task**, using images generated by participants after being asked to capture things around them that helped them reflect on how they thought economic migration contributed to life in their local community.
- **Poster summaries of different points-based visa systems**, focusing on the United States, Australia, and Singapore.

The jurors deliberated on the different trade-offs that underpin the design of points-based immigration systems, before working in small groups to develop and pitch their own system for economic migration to the UK. After the pitches, the group were invited to vote, by a show of hands, on:

- Whether they thought the points-based immigration system needed to be reformed
- Their preferred policy, based on the three proposals pitched to the group
- Whether the UK should move away from a points-based system entirely

A more detailed description of the approach and materials can be found in the supporting Technical Report, available here: kcl.ac.uk/research/citizens-jury-economic-migration

1.3 About this report

This report documents how the jurors responded to these questions, their justifications for why they voted in the way they did, and their journey to that point. This includes outlining their perceptions and awareness of economic migration coming into the workshop, their initial reactions to the UK's points-based immigration system and the principles on which they felt the system should be reformed. We try to let the words of the participants speak for themselves, reflecting the nuance and consideration that they brought to weighing up difficult trade-offs in a complex system.

2 Baseline views on immigration among jurors

Most jurors came to the workshops with limited knowledge of the systems that enable people to move to the UK for work. In the pre-workshop survey, only one juror described themselves as knowing a lot about the processes that support economic migration. While many knew that the UK had a points-based system for managing economic migration, they were unsure of how it worked in practice. For jurors who had themselves migrated to the UK, or knew friends or family members who had done so, almost all noted that the system today is unrecognisable from the one they knew of or had experienced.

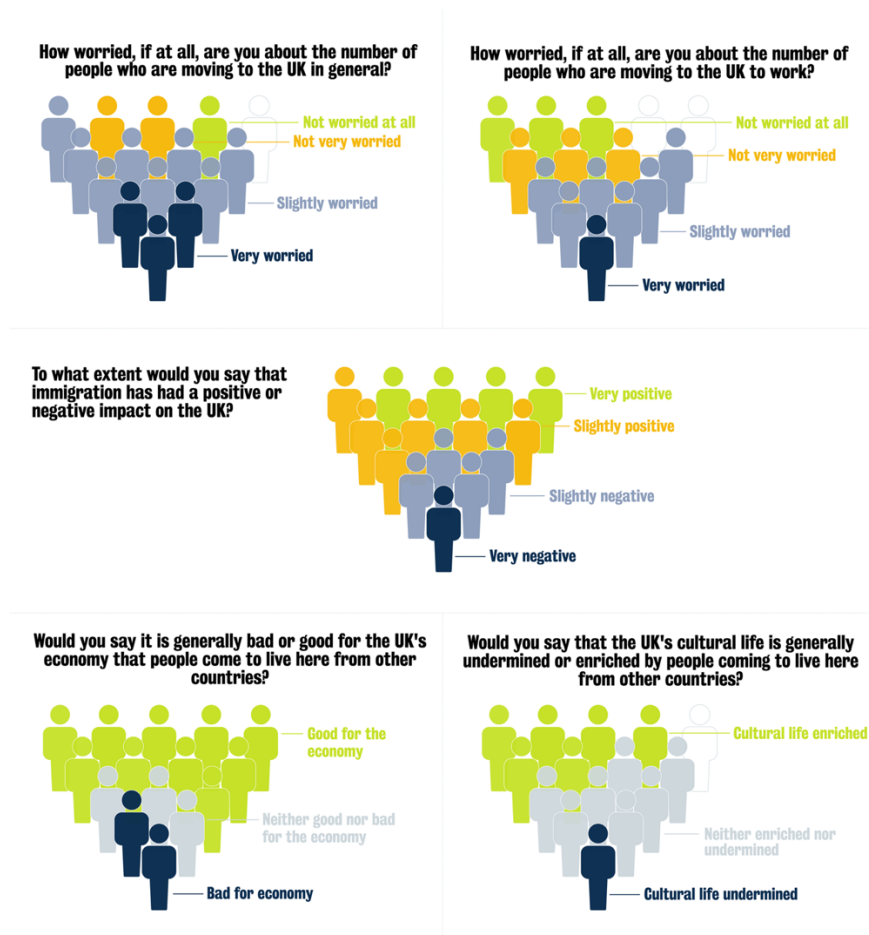
The following section digs deeper into preconceptions that jurors held about economic migration coming into the workshops, drawing on pre-workshop surveys and early small group discussions. Jurors also completed a reflective task between the two workshops, where they were asked to photograph places in their local area that reflect how they see economic migration contributing to life in their local community. Combined, these opportunities for reflection captured the range of views jurors held about economic migration coming into the workshops, providing a baseline for understanding how opinions shifted over the course of the two weeks.

Most jurors felt that immigration contributed positively to the UK, but a majority worried about the knock-on impacts of high levels of net migration

In the pre-workshop survey (see Figure 2), a majority of jurors reported having a positive outlook on the impact immigration has on the UK, with just a third of the group feeling that immigration has a slightly or very negative impact on the UK. Many specifically felt that immigration had positive effects for the economy, but were more mixed when it came to the impact on the UK's cultural life. Yet this was balanced with a general concern about the number of people moving to the UK, which all but four jurors were worried about – although this concern was slightly lower when it came to the number of migrants who moved to the UK to work (around half of the group were slightly or very worried about this).

Early discussions touched on both migration generally and economic migration. These conversations also included recognition of the humanitarian role that immigration can play, providing people with better living conditions and escape from persecution. When jurors began to consider the economic benefits of immigration, however, the focus shifted to the Skilled Worker visa. This shift often stemmed from an acute awareness of the role that immigrants play in the health and social care sector: 'when we've got to fill these roles in specific areas, ... I think it's necessary to keep everything running' (Juror, born in UK).

Figure 2: Baseline attitudes towards immigration among jurors (pre-workshop)



Source: Pre-workshop survey. For the bottom two questions, responses were given on a 0-10 scale with the end points as stated. 0-3 are grouped as bad for the economy/cultural life undermined, 4-6 as neither/nor, and 7-10 grouped as good for the economy / cultural life enriched. Blank figures represent non-responses.

Coming into the workshops, jurors were generally supportive of allowing workers to fill roles where there were clear shortages or specialist skills required. Support was also relatively high for roles in key services, temporary work and lower-skilled sectors that are hard to fill with UK-based workers, although jurors were less favourable towards employers filling any job vacancy with overseas workers (see Figure 3). Once in the workshops, the group discussed how migrants bring growth to their local area, keep key industries afloat and fill roles that face shortages or that people living in the UK are unwilling to do, such as health and social care, hospitality, construction, cleaning work and other physically demanding jobs.

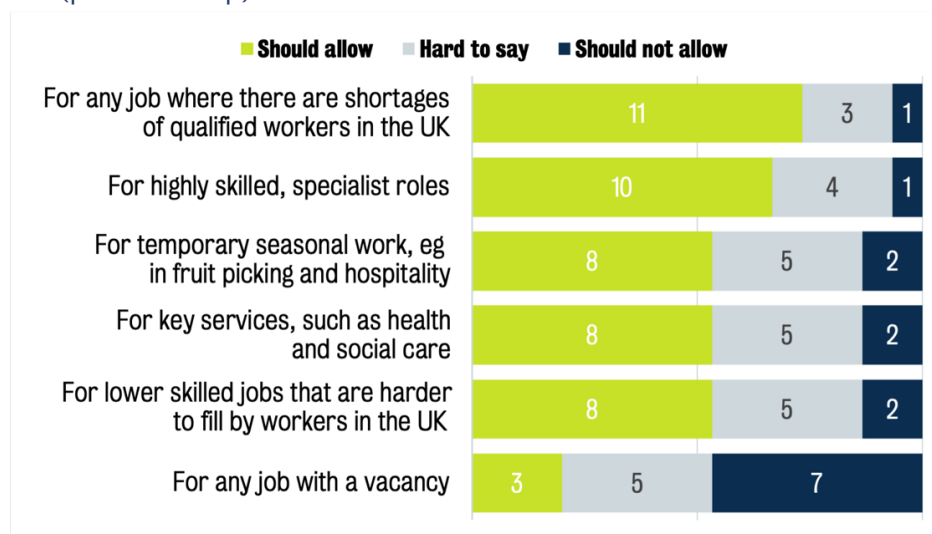
'So, you can see here obviously is where me and the kids go to, and I think, you know, like the GP surgery, and to be honest most of these places, they're all run by people who have come – you know, not necessarily from, you know, British-born, especially my GP surgery.'

– **Juror, first generation immigrant**

'So where I live, it's a very populated area, most of the people [who migrate to the UK] seem to be doing the lower-, sort of the lower-end jobs: gig work economy, taxi drivers, food delivery services.'

– **Peer researcher**

Figure 3: Circumstances under which jurors felt employers should be allowed to recruit employees from overseas (pre-workshop)



Source: Pre-workshop survey. Q: 'Current immigration policy allows employers to recruit people from overseas in some circumstances and not in others. For each of the following circumstances, please say whether the government should allow or should not allow employers to be able to recruit employees from overseas'

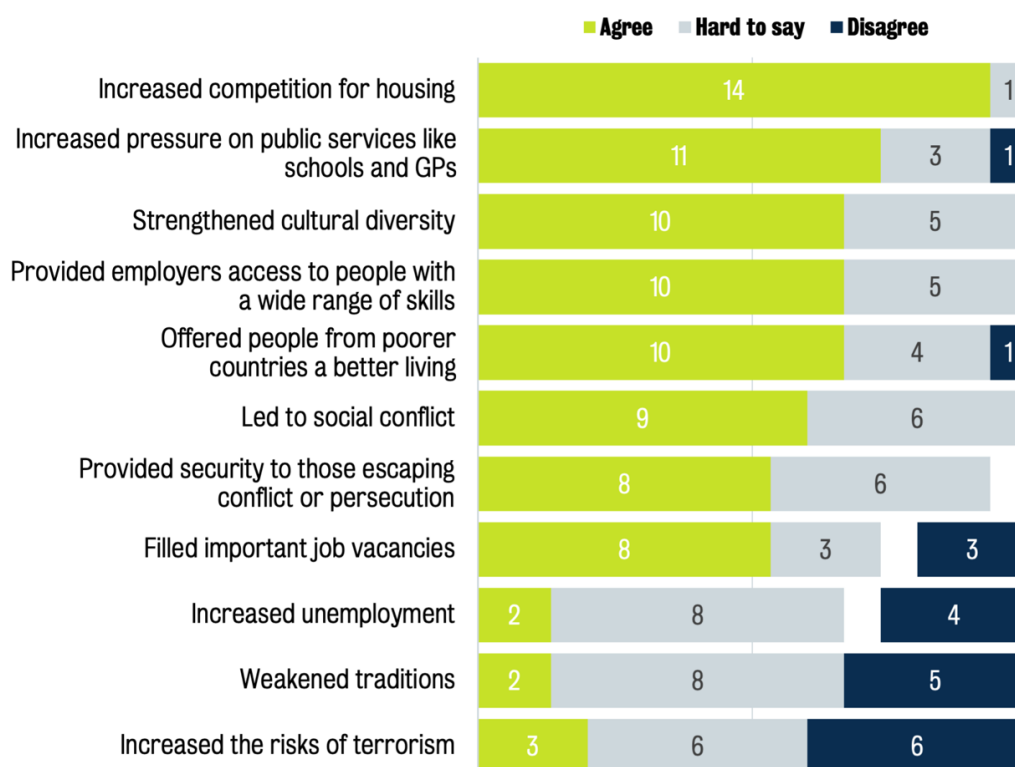
Around half of the jurors also mentioned that people often come to the UK in search of a better life, and recognised the challenges migrants face in moving to and settling in the UK – some connecting this to their own family histories: 'I do also believe, similarly, people come here for a better life. You know, I wouldn't have been here if there wasn't immigration a few generations ago' (Juror, born in UK).

Nevertheless, most jurors were worried about the number of people moving to the UK. These concerns typically centred on increased competition for limited resources, particularly housing and access to public services like schools and GPs – with pressures on public services mentioned considerably more frequently than worries about the broader economic impact of immigration, such as pressure on wages or jobs. Among the issues raised regarding public services, the most frequently mentioned was the strain that immigration placed on the NHS, although jurors acknowledged the crucial role that immigrants have in filling roles needed to keep the NHS functioning.

'I guess one of the issues at the moment is it's not sustainable at the level it's at. ... We haven't got the infrastructure, we haven't got the schools, the hospitals, doctors, the housing, we don't have the infrastructure to support that level each year.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'The care sector and the NHS, and their care workers and GPs are in such short supply and it's an ever-decreasing circle of people. And until you train new people or bring people in, it's difficult. It's the same with teachers and any sort of social services, you need to cut down the waiting lists.' – **Juror, born in UK**

Figure 4: Beliefs about what the effects of immigration have been on the UK (pre-workshop)



Source: Pre-workshop survey. Question: 'From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the UK?'. Don't knows not shown.

Concerns about strain on services also featured in jurors' reflections on life in their local area. They spoke about pressures on the NHS, housing shortages, challenges in education related to school capacity and language support, and rising crime. Yet these concerns were often described in broad terms rather than rooted in specific incidents or first-hand encounters, unlike the more personal examples they shared when discussing positive contributions of migrants. Moreover, while just under half of jurors directly linked pressure on services to immigration levels, a third explicitly acknowledged the role of other factors, particularly insufficient government funding for key services.

'I've seen hundreds of thousands of students in Luton alone over the last couple of years. So, housing wise, there is always a battle. The prices have skyrocketed. Where we were paying like £650 a month, or £750 a month, it's now costing us £1,300 £1,400 a month just to rent alone. So, it's all about, are you able to manage?' – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

'I'm stuck in traffic and I think "so many people!". There are pressures on schools and the NHS, but I'd agree ... that other things impact this, including lack of funding. The migration has an impact but there are other factors that have more of an impact. We need policies for those areas too.' – **Juror, born in UK**

Other concerns raised included fears that reliance on migrant workers was lowering wages, increasing job competition, and bringing in low-skilled labour, posing threats to job security and income. This concern was generally brought up by jurors when speaking of immigration in general, not skilled migration. Overall, while a few jurors felt there was a need to reduce net migration, most focused on concerns about governance and management rather than migrant numbers themselves.

‘Because there is a lack of skilled people in this country, whether we like it or not, we can’t stop immigration. That is not going to happen. It’s all about how you manage it.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘I would agree that there’s overpopulation, but I think the flipside is it’s just that governments should plan for that and keep up with it – and they even don’t seem to be able to do that. They bring more people in. If you get people working coming in, they’re paying tax and they’re contributing, and so therefore they [ie the government] should just manage it better. I mean they do the census every ten years, the idea of that is to say we’re going to plan it.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Jurors generally had mixed views on the cultural impacts of immigration, but saw diversity in their local area as an asset

Coming into the workshops, the group held relatively mixed views about the cultural impacts of immigration. Roughly two-thirds of jurors reported that they felt immigration strengthened cultural diversity, while a similar proportion agreed it could lead to greater social conflict (see Figure 4). Similarly, around half of the group reported feeling ambivalent about whether immigration enriched or undermined cultural life in the UK (see Figure 2); and a majority felt it was hard to say if immigration had weakened traditions, though more than twice as many jurors disagreed (5) than agreed (2) (see Figure 4).

However, when prompted to reflect on life in their local area, around two-thirds of jurors spoke positively about the cultural impacts of immigration, and only one explicitly expressed concerns about losing local culture and community feel. Jurors didn’t draw a clear distinction between skilled and general immigration when talking about culture. Overall, jurors pointed to greater diversity, exposure to new experiences, and the sense that migrants make a positive contribution to life in their communities.

‘People from different walks of life, and, you know, people from different areas coming to go to that roller disco. It’s just a very, sort of, broad mix of different diversities, and, yeah, it’s amazing, yeah.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘It’s got more of the like diverse shops and takeaways. Yeah, I just – it’s really convenient for us to get to and I just love having it there.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

This was also reflected in the photos jurors submitted between the two workshops, which captured aspects of their local area that they felt demonstrated the contribution of economic migration to community life. Most jurors submitted pictures of shops, restaurants and community spaces that they felt were contributing to their area and showed its diversity, as well as health centres and leisure facilities. The task offered a powerful reflection of how they experienced the social and cultural impact of immigration in their everyday lives, highlighting the tangible ways in which diversity is seen as an asset at the local level.

‘The local swimming pool and gym is completely diverse, which is great.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘It’s got more of the like diverse shops and takeaways. Yeah, I just – it’s really convenient for us to get to and I just love having it there. I think it really adds something to St. Albans, to be able to kind of have this diverse range of food.’ **Juror, born in UK**

Jurors felt there was a lack of transparency around migration statistics, with media representation prone to generalisation and misrepresentation

In early small group discussions, jurors expressed uncertainty about how different forms of migration to the UK were measured and how those statistics are presented. Drawing largely on information encountered in the media, jurors found it difficult to disentangle economic migration from the other routes through which people move to the UK. As one juror said, ‘it’s quite difficult to divorce in your mind, people who are coming for work, because we just don’t know if that’s the people who are coming to seek asylum, you know’ (Juror, born in UK).

Two of the three breakout groups identified a need for more information and transparency about immigration trends. On the one hand, jurors wanted to see more clarity and separation in public discourse around the impact of different migration routes, and how the government is managing them. After hearing from the experts, some jurors felt information on migration in the media was too generalised. On the other hand, jurors questioned the extent to which national-level statistics reflected their realities locally.

‘I just wonder, the amount of money generated from immigration here, how is the money being spent? ... Spent towards the NHS, towards bringing other people in, towards other things like schools, infrastructure.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘So St Albans is representative of the national picture, but actually migration, like you said, is kind of always concentrated to particular areas. So, it’s almost unrepresentative of the national picture, because yeah if you put the whole country on a map, this is what immigration looks like in one place.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘The statistics, a lot of those I personally don’t agree with, ... I just think the numbers-, because it seems even from the case studies and our personal perspectives seem a lot different to what the actual figures are.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

As jurors began to learn more about the migration system and the routes through which people were moving to the UK, these concerns became more pronounced. When presented with net migration figures, which showed a 700K peak in 2022, and the various immigration routes that contributed to this, around half the group expressed worries. Their concerns were not solely about the scale of immigration, but about the lack of nuance in how the figures were used and discussed publicly. In particular, they wanted to delve deeper into the figures to understand the impact that different migration pathways have.

‘I’ve only heard things, and I don’t know, but it would be good to see some data, because what I normally hear about migration is normally on LBC, I listen to that every morning, but it does seem alarming the level of people who are coming here as immigrants.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

‘The only thing that we hear in the news is that 750,000 people are coming to the country. Why they are coming in? Out of that, how many dependents, how many students, how many legal immigrants? So people are straight away thinking about ... is that a vast majority is coming from like refugee on the boats, but that’s not the case. And how much of those immigrants are contributing to the society, and what are they bringing in, the skills? Those are not discussed in in great details.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

Concerns about transparency were closely linked to the sources from which jurors received information about immigration, and the extent to which they trusted these sources. Prior to the workshops, almost all jurors reported obtaining information about immigration primarily through social media and television, and around half through newspapers, radio, and websites or blogs. These sources were often seen to portray immigration through negative associations or stereotypes, rather than providing access to more detailed or balanced information.

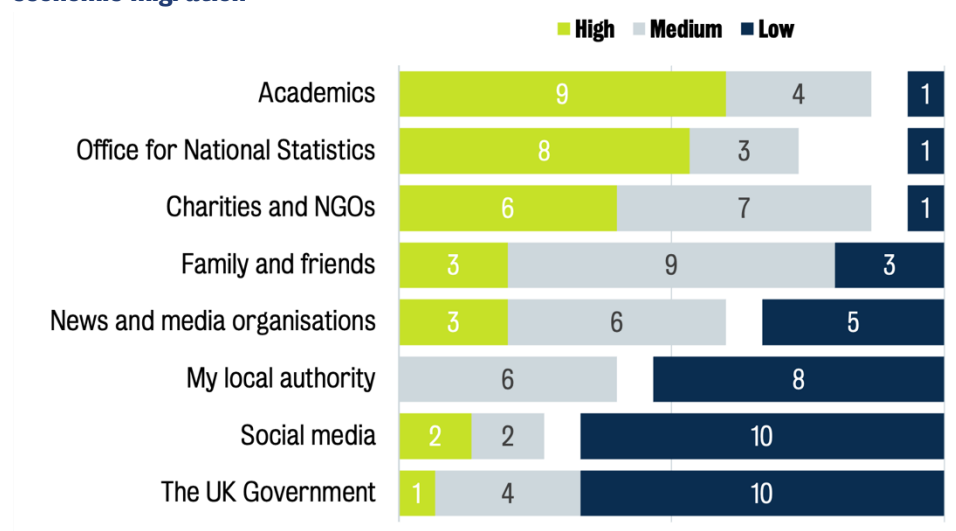
‘I think when we hear the word immigration, especially these days, it’s given a negative connotation. There’s obviously a lot of stuff going on in the world, in the media, I think that’s the kind of initial thing that people might feel.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘You say “immigration”, people think “illegal”. Because of the media.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

‘The impact on the economy as a whole is smaller than it’s made out to be in the media, it’s made out to be the worst thing ever.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

As a result, when it came to obtaining accurate information about economic migration specifically, jurors generally expressed higher levels of trust in academics, charities and NGOs, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), compared to media sources or the government (see Figure 5). Jurors’ understanding of economic migration grew significantly over the course of the workshops. While most initially claimed to not know very much about economic migration, nearly half of the group described themselves as knowing quite a lot by the end.

Figure 5: Levels of trust in organisations and individuals to provide accurate information on economic migration



Source: Pre-workshop survey. Question: 'Thinking about the following organisations and groups, which would you trust to give you accurate information about the number of people who are moving to the UK to work?'. Responses were given on a 0-10 scale, where 0 = Do not trust at all and 10 = Trust completely. 0-3 are grouped as low trust, 4-6 as medium trust, and 7-10 high trust.

3 Reactions to the UK's points-based immigration system

The UK has a points-based system through which people apply for a Skilled Worker visa. The system was initially designed to prioritise high skilled workers by combining a set of mandatory and tradeable criteria.

At the time of the Jury, people applying to work in the UK had to accumulate 70 points to be eligible for a visa. These were strongly balanced towards mandatory criteria: 50 points were awarded for having a job offer from an approved sponsor at an appropriate skill level, and sufficient English language skills – criteria that anyone applying for a work-based visa in the UK were required to meet. The remaining 20 points were made up from 'tradeable' criteria, with points awarded for meeting minimum salary levels at the going rate for the profession, being educated to PhD level and taking up roles in shortage occupations (see Table 1). Together, these elements reinforce the system's overarching focus on attracting high-skilled migrants.

Once these eligibility criteria were met, people who wished to move to the UK under the Skilled Worker visa were also required to meet certain financial conditions, including:

- Paying application fee for the visa holder (increasing with dependents), plus the NHS surcharge – both of which increase with dependents.
- Providing proof of personal savings of £1,270 (increasing with dependents).
- Securing a job offer from an employer who holds a Skilled Worker Sponsor License, who must also pay an additional Immigration Skills Charge of around £1,000 per migrant worker per year (with some exceptions).

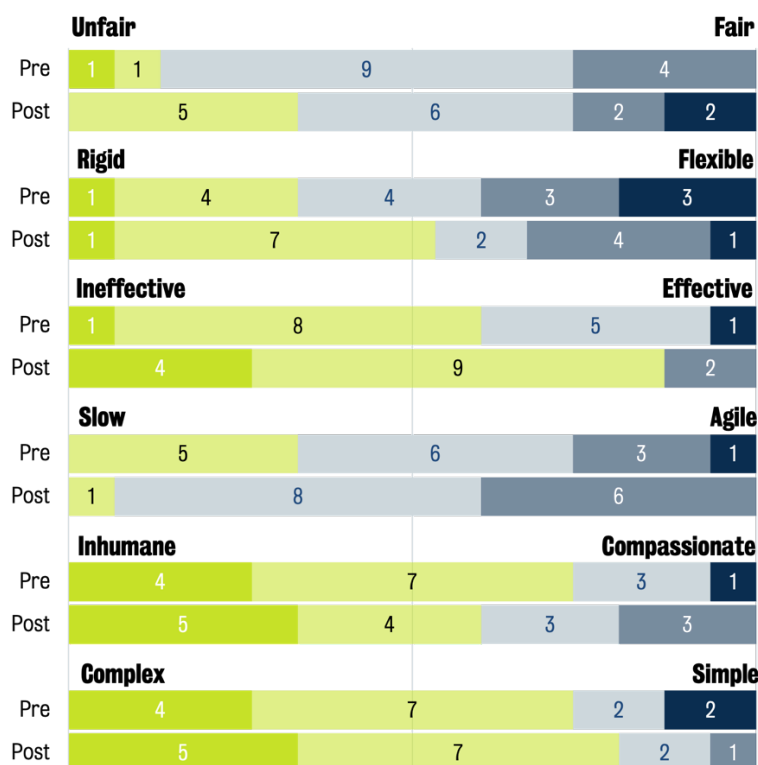
Overall, jurors became more critical about how the government was handling immigration, the more they learnt about the points-based system. In the pre-workshop survey, two in five jurors felt dissatisfied with the way the government was dealing with the number of people moving to the UK for work. However, by the end of the workshops, all but two jurors felt this way. The group came to see the current policies and processes supporting the Skilled Worker visa as ineffective, overly complex, slow and rigid, albeit with a slight increase in the number who saw the system as compassionate (see Figure 6). Yet the group were more split on whether the system was fair: after the workshops ended, roughly equal proportions of jurors described the system as fair, unfair or somewhere in the middle.

In the following section, we present juror's reactions to different aspects of the UK's points-based immigration system, including how points are allocated, how participants defined skill vis-à-vis how it is defined in the system, and the empathy that emerged among participants for people going through the process of obtaining a Skilled Worker visa.

Table 1: Overview of the UK's points-based immigration system at the time of Jury (UK Visas and Immigration, 2022).

Criteria	Type	Points
Offer of a job by an approved sponsor	Mandatory	20
Job at an appropriate skill level	Mandatory	20
English language skills at level B1 (intermediate)	Mandatory	10
Salary of £20,480 to £23,039 or at least 80% of the going rate for the profession (whichever is higher)	Tradeable	0
Salary of £23,040 to £25,599 or at least 90% of the going rate for the profession (whichever is higher)	Tradeable	10
Salary of £25,600 or above or at least the going rate for the profession (whichever is higher)	Tradeable	20
Job in a shortage occupation, as designated by the Migration Advisory Committee	Tradeable	20
Education qualification: PhD in a subject relevant to the job	Tradeable	10
Education qualification: PhD in a STEM subject relevant to the job	Tradeable	20
Conditions of the Skilled Worker visa: - Length of stay up to 5 years, after which you can extend visa - Indefinite leave to remain after 5 years - Spouse or civil partner, unmarried partner and children can join as dependant - Dependants have the right to work		
Costs Costs to the person moving to the UK: - Cannot apply for most benefits or public pension - Application fee (between £719 to £1,500) - Health surcharge (£624 per year)	Costs to employer: - Skilled Worker Sponsor Licence: costs £536-£1,476 (valid for 4 years) - Immigration Skills Charge: fee paid for each skilled employee (£364-£1,000 per year)	

Figure 6: Jurors' perceptions of current policies and processes, pre- and post-workshop



Source: Pre- and post-workshop survey. Question 'How well, if at all, would you say the following characteristics describe policies and processes that enable people to move to the UK to work?'

A points-based model instinctively appealed to jurors, but was seen to be too centred on the job, not on the person

A points-based system was welcomed in principle: in the post-workshop survey, all jurors agreed that the UK should have a points-based immigration system like Australia and Canada. However, the way the system was currently designed was generally seen as not being fit for purpose.

'I think it's good to have a system in place, rather than just let people move openly, just open the doors. Whether I agree with the way that it's being done is a different thing.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'I think it's got the right intentions. Feels like there's a lot of vagueries and sort of gaps, and potentially also loopholes like they've been saying that people can exploit. It feels like it's kind of like half cooked.' – **Juror, born in UK**

In reaching this conclusion, jurors focused primarily on the criteria on which points were awarded, spending almost twice as much time discussing eligibility criteria than other aspects of the system, such as the application process, the terms of the visa and employer responsibilities. These discussions gravitated towards skill level, but this was often conflated with shortage occupations.

Many were surprised that the system placed more emphasis on the job, than the person coming into the country. For example, the lack of criteria around age was noted by one group as posing a potential risk. When discussing different personas of people who would be eligible for a Skilled Worker visa, those who were approaching retirement age or were mid-career but in physically demanding roles (despite filling shortage occupations) were deprioritised by this group due to the potential demand on public services. Younger personas, who had the potential to be in the workforce for longer, were unanimously supported.

‘If you have more of a long-term view, she’s going to become more of a burden on society ... Someone younger would then get years of experience and last longer.’ – **Peer researcher**

‘45 [year’s old]. Again, depending on the situation, that’s probably another 30 years before you’re thinking of retirement anyway. That is literally a lifetime.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

How qualifications were verified and whether academic attainment should be weighted more meaningfully was also a common theme. Some jurors questioned how someone with fewer formal qualifications could be eligible for the same jobs and salary as someone with a PhD; whereas others questioned how the legitimacy or relevance of qualifications to the UK labour market was being checked. For example, one juror reflected on the potential for fraudulent claims in reference to tradeable points around qualifications verified solely by the employer. Similarly, a small number of jurors raised concerns about background checks and the treatment of applicants with criminal records. While the idea that serious convictions might lead to exclusion was widely supported, some jurors were unsure about whether such exclusions were currently in place. There was support for making this more explicit within the points system.

‘I guess it’s not a very fool-proof system. ... Someone could say well I have this [qualification] and that’s worth however many points, but how are we actually checking the legitimacy of it? Otherwise you might as well not have those points-based element.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘Would there be automatic exclusions? Like if you had a police conviction or something, would that automatically exclude you? ... If it’s more on the individual, perhaps that would be more taken into consideration.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Overall, jurors saw the allocation of points as a blunt instrument: once the required threshold was met, the total number of points accrued had little practical meaning. Some jurors felt that mandatory criteria, such as language proficiency, should be treated as baseline requirements, separate from the points allocation. They welcomed a clearer separation between mandatory criteria that all applicants must meet from attributes that earn points towards securing a Skilled Worker visa.

‘Why is it mandatory, if in any case you have to have some kind of foreign language test? That shouldn’t be part of the points system, that is a primary requirement for coming into

this country, if you're a student or work or anything. So, that shouldn't be points-based. It doesn't make sense. It is mandatory, what is the point?' – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

When it came to tradeable points, there was also a desire for greater flexibility in how the system recognises individual merit. Over a quarter of jurors plainly expressed their belief that the points-based system should give greater weight to individual circumstances, while others made sure to point out that weight should also be given to criteria such as health status and family structure, as part of a more person-centred approach. These conversations raised concerns that the model overlooked people's potential contributions to society or personal situations in favour of narrow job-based criteria.

'I don't think we should have, like, 70 [points] and you're good to go. I think we should have the same as other countries. Like, make it more about more points have more likelihood.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'I don't believe it should [be based solely on shortage occupation], because if we just go based on that then some people will not have the chance to come over. So it shouldn't just be based on a shortage occupation. I think there should be other factors, but it shouldn't just be on one factor, on whether the job is a shortage occupation.' – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Even the requirement for employer sponsorship was seen more negatively than not, because it anchored the visa to a specific job offer. While for some, this was because they felt employer sponsorship left the system open to abuse from unscrupulous employers, for others it narrowed the amount of meaningful opportunities to attract people to work in the UK. While jurors valued the principle of a points-based system, they felt its design needed to move away from using solely job-based metrics towards a more balanced and human approach that considered a wider range of personal, economic and social criteria.

Confusion arose around the definition of skill: participants often slipped into talking about shortages rather than high-skilled roles

While jurors instinctively valued the idea of attracting 'skilled' migrants, there was confusion around what 'skill' meant in the points-based system. Skill level and shortage occupation were often conflated, with many participants defaulting to discussions about filling workforce gaps rather than assessing individual ability. Around a third of jurors openly questioned why the system separated skill level and shortage occupation as distinct criteria, suggesting the two should be more closely aligned.

'I guess I don't understand why. So skill level is mandatory, but I feel like that should be more related to the shortage occupation? Those two things should speak to each other. So like why is just the skill level mandatory and not the occupation?' – **Juror, born in UK**

Reviewing the eligible occupation list especially, prompted mixed reactions. Several jurors expressed surprise at how extensive the list was, with some commenting that it seemed far broader than expected. Simply reviewing the list regularly was seen as insufficient to some, masking deeper structural issues such as inadequate training or pay, that might explain why certain roles remained on the shortage occupation list for extended periods.

‘I think the thing that stuck with me was the broad range of jobs and I always thought it was narrow... and last week I found out it’s actually wide open and wide.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘Yeah, there’s reviewing it and then there’s addressing the core problem. It feels like that bit’s missing’ – **Juror, born in UK**

There was also scepticism around how skill was assessed and measured in practice. Some jurors worried that the system could be exploited by either applicants or employers, with one suggesting it would be difficult to test unregulated skills or to verify claims made by employers. This led to discussions which put more emphasis on quality, not just skill level.

‘The problem with the testing is you can’t test every job profession. If you’re coming as a doctor, that’s a different thing, you have to go through exams and lab and everything and you know, because you gone through that system. But if you are coming from an IT profession or something, you know certain skills within IT from that company, which is very hard to test, to test that it’s not just someone’s uncle’s company.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘How do they judge a skill level? ... But a bricklayer, you might be brilliant, or you might build lousy walls. How do they judge whether they’re a good bricklayer or not? ... I would rather it was more on the individual than on the job.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

When jurors considered fictional personas of people who would be eligible to move to the UK under the Skilled Worker visa, they often defaulted to whether there was a shortage in a given sector, rather than the skill level of the applicant. Discussions quickly turned to filling low-paid but essential roles like care workers, nurses and bricklayers. A persona of a personal trainer was more contentious, whom many participants felt should not be eligible to work in the UK. Reactions to these personas highlighted how ‘high skill’ roles were sometimes undervalued if they were not seen as essential or in short supply.

When it came to addressing shortages in the health and social care sector, however, jurors expressed overwhelming support, with some describing the NHS as fundamentally dependent on migrant workers. Several noted that without migrant labour, key services such as healthcare would struggle to function, with one participant remarking that the NHS could not sustain itself without it. This was also tied to the value that some jobs can bring to society, with roles like medical lab technicians and carers seen not only as essential but as contributing meaningfully to public wellbeing.

‘I think we need to do a reassessment of how we’re placing value on certain jobs in our society. Why are we paying teachers, and health and social care workers such low wages?’

Because we need them all our lives from, you know, a young age to an old age.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Although there was broad support for migrants filling genuine gaps, many jurors did stress that there needed to be a more robust plan for long-term shortages to be addressed within the UK’s existing workforce. Solutions such as increasing wages, improving training, and reforming education were repeatedly raised as better ways to reduce reliance on migration. This was not just about immigration policy, but more generally about how workers are valued and supported. Improving conditions and pay were seen as key to building a more sustainable system.

‘I think the low wages across certain government jobs, and healthcare and teachers, is probably a problem. If they paid them a fair salary – because it hasn’t really gone up in the past few years, 20 years – then there wouldn’t be a skills shortage and we wouldn’t have 18 month waiting lists.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘You can’t just keep going on the short-term view of, “Oh just cherry-pick the talent from abroad because they’re well-educated in IT.” ... And then saying, “Why are we bringing so many people in from abroad?” Well, it’s because-, I don’t know, people say British people don’t want to do certain kinds of jobs. Well then make it so they want to do those kinds of jobs. Pay them more, make them more valued. ... you need to have a long-term view and I don’t think that’s what any governments are doing, and that’s why we have this problem.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Jurors expressed frustration that the government had failed to plan for long-term workforce needs. Because people wanted solutions to be found within the country, they also felt there should be a requirement for evidence that a need for the skill that isn’t covered within the existing workforce. Ultimately, many jurors felt that a better balance needed to be struck, and that the Skilled Worker visa should help fill real gaps while investing in long-term domestic solutions. The system, they felt, should be responsive to changing workforce.

The complexity of the system and constraints such as fees are discouraging and make the system hard to navigate and settle

Jurors described the UK’s immigration system as overwhelmingly complex, confusing, and at times discouraging. While most entered the workshops with limited knowledge of how the system works, several left expressing greater understanding, but also greater frustration at how difficult it would be to navigate. In one way or another, all jurors expressed surprise at the sheer number of rules, exceptions and steps involved, which felt unnecessarily complicated.

‘For the people who want to migrate here. Even if you have the skills, I feel like there’s so many other factors that are out of your control, that could lead to you not being able to migrate here, and it’s not fair. Even just having the resources to come here and build a life

here, I just feel like it's a very complicated system for something that's already complicated. A lot of people would just throw defeat when they look at this.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'What surprised me about next week was how interesting and diverse and complicated the system is... It's not giving the opportunity for people to contribute to the country, to come here. It's quite sad actually.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'It seems amazingly hard. I imagine being in a situation where you want to come into the UK, I can honestly say I wouldn't be coming to the UK if you know what I mean. Like the bar is set very high.' – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Beyond complexity, the costs associated with migration were also a recurring concern. Jurors were surprised by the total expense of moving to the UK, particularly for those with dependents. Visa application fees, the increased Immigration Health Surcharge, and the requirement to show savings in the bank were all seen as prohibitive. For example, around half of participants questioned the logic behind charging both National Insurance and a health surcharge, calling it 'a double burden' on migrants.

'They are still paying national insurance, and also paying this health surcharge, so it's like a double for them. So, putting it up I feel like adds more insult to injury. It would be good if there was some kind of rebate system for the migrants, depending on how they use the healthcare.' – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

While some felt visa fees were manageable, most agreed that for someone with dependents, total costs could exceed £20,000, making the move unrealistic. Jurors questioned the fairness of a system that penalises applicants with families. The discussion raised concerns that the current model favours single migrants and fails to support those in shortage occupations who also have dependents.

Tradeable elements such as the minimum salary threshold, while accepted in principle, were also generally seen as poorly implemented in the points-based system as it stood. For most of the jurors who raised this point, this rested on the potential to undercut the salaries of workers already in the UK (eg through the provision to pay 90% of the going rate for the profession). For others, the minimum salary of £23,040 was also seen as being insufficient to survive in the UK.

'I just thought that the salary itself was very low. And then you have to live. I mean, you know, you have to live somewhere, pay rent, because obviously you're not buying, and then you're not allowed benefits, which is acceptable, but I don't understand how they would survive.' – **Peer researcher**

'It definitely makes sense, to have some sort of system where you know, you can't just come in, you have to have a secure job, secure means to kind of look after yourself and your family.' – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Some of this was exemplified when discussing a fictional persona – Olivia – who had a PhD and met the points threshold, and was just starting out in her career. Jurors explored how

financial and family-related barriers might still prevent someone like Olivia from migrating. Olivia's case highlighted that meeting the criteria on paper therefore doesn't necessarily mean that migrating to the UK is accessible in practice. Financial independence for people moving to the UK was widely acknowledged as important by jurors; however, the system's expectations, particularly around the various costs and dependents, often made that goal feel unrealistic.

Throughout conversations, jurors felt that the current system did little to support long-term integration. In contrast, systems in countries like Australia were seen as more welcoming and person-centred, offering clearer routes to settlement. More than half of the jurors expressed a preference for systems that offered routes to permanent residence, especially when migrants have built lives, families, and careers in the UK. The UK's system was generally seen as complicated and expensive, and at times poorly aligned with the realities of people's lives. Jurors expressed strong support for a system that is simpler, fairer and more clearly designed to help migrants build a life in the UK.

'I do also think it's unfair as well. If you've come over here and set up a life, and ... working, it might not necessarily be like a, you know, high-end paid job, but they've still set up their lives and they've integrated themselves and their kids in society. And then to be told you've got to go back is a bit unfair' – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

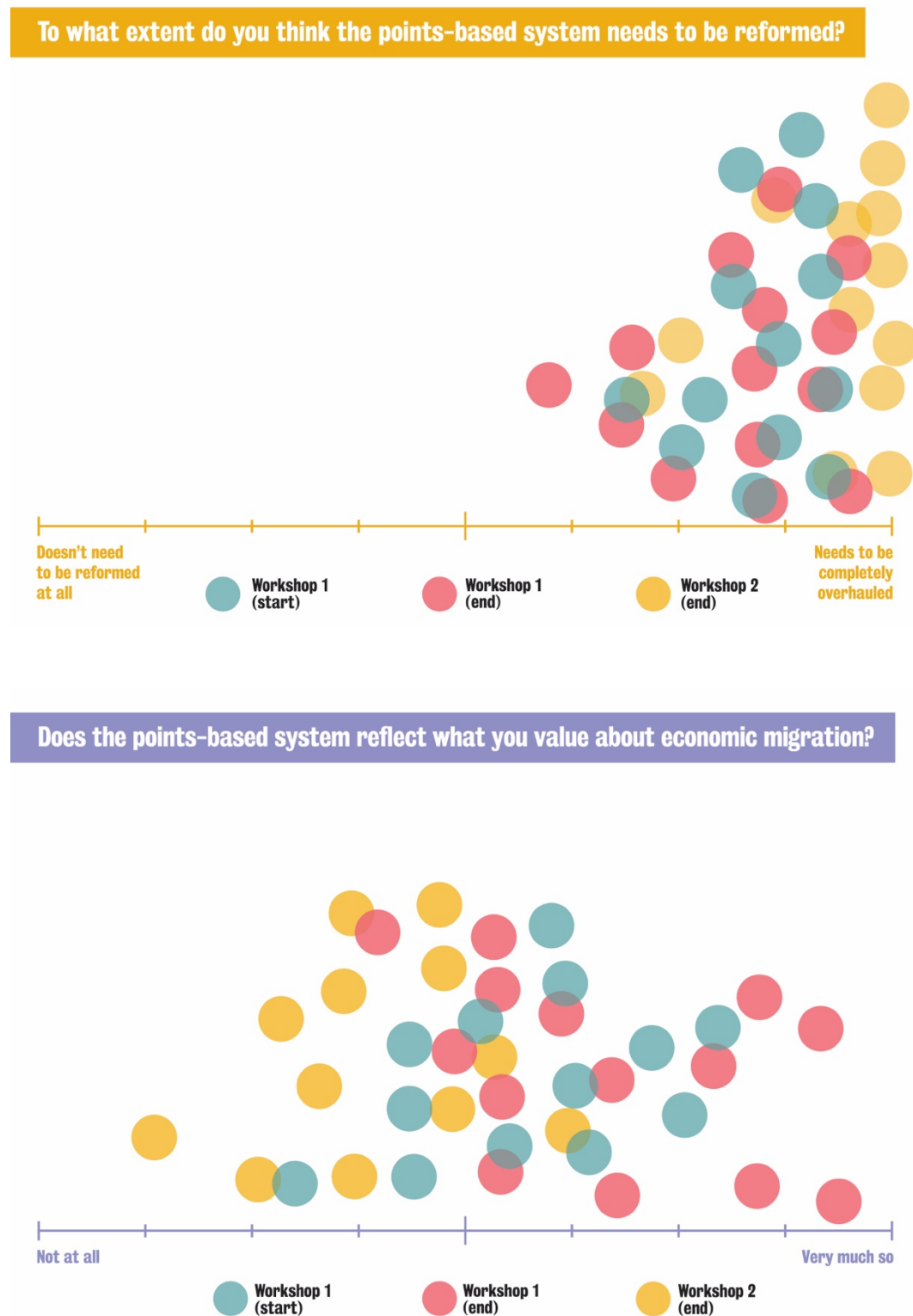
Overall, jurors felt strongly that the points-based system should be reformed

By the end of the workshops, most jurors felt strongly that the current points-based system should be reformed. Jurors became stronger in this view across the workshops (see Figure 7A), with support for reforming the system unanimous in the post-workshop survey (13 out of 15 jurors reported that the system should be completely reformed, and 2 out of 15 that it should be slightly reformed). Moreover, by the end of the workshops the group broadly agreed that the system did not reflect what they valued about economic migration – although this was a question that saw considerable movement in responses across workshops. While starting ambivalent, after learning about the UK system in workshop one, jurors became more confident that the system reflected what they valued about economic migration. But as they developed a better understanding of how the system worked in relation to systems in Canada, the United States and Singapore in workshop two, weighing up its constraints, complexity and job focus, they became more critical of its design and outcomes (see Figure 7B).

While the principle of a points-based model remained popular, participants felt that the UK's current implementation failed to make the most of what such a system could offer, and, as a result, called for meaningful reform to ensure it was both effective and fair. Jurors became more attuned to its misalignment with their value over time, especially around fairness, transparency, long-term integration, and responsiveness to genuine labour market

needs. The next section will take a deeper look into how jurors thought the points-based system should be reformed.

Figure 7A-B: Repeated sticker votes on whether the points-based system should be reformed, and whether the current system reflects what jurors value about economic migration



Source: Sticker votes. Question text in image.

4 Ideas for reforming the UK's economic migration system

As described in Section 3, all fifteen jurors voted in favour of reforming of the UK's points-based immigration system, with many calling for a complete overhaul. The continuation of a points-based system was supported in principle; however, jurors wanted to see more nuance in how points were allocated and the criteria they were applied to, to support a more holistic view of who is migrating to the UK and what they bring to the country.

The ideas presented in this section were developed during the second and final workshop, where jurors focused on evaluating different types of points-based systems, with a view to reimagining the UK's system. Two lenses emerged in how jurors weighed up potential reforms and policies. At times, jurors spoke from the perspective of the UK economy and society, ensuring that immigration delivers a clear benefit to the UK; and at other times, they considered the perspective of the immigrant themselves, and how they navigated the system (see Table 2). These perspectives and the values motivating them could sometimes come into conflict, giving rise to difficult conversations and trade-offs.

Table 2: Lenses through which reforms were considered

UK's economy and society	The person moving to the UK to work
• An economic migration system should invite positive economic contributions to the UK, through filling key jobs including those with shortages. • An economic migration system should invite positive social contributions to the UK, by ensuring that immigrants genuinely want to build a life in the UK, and support public services. Underpinned by value placed on contribution and stability.	• An economic migration system should support immigrants and treat them fairly. • An economic migration system should consider what immigrants bring in a more holistic way. • An economic migration system should always offer routes to permanent residency. Underpinned by value placed on personalisation and fairness.

Overall, jurors envisaged an economic migration system that supports the needs of the UK, reflected predominantly in immigrants filling jobs and contributing to public services that support the UK's economy. Jurors wanted to ensure that people entering the country on the Skilled Worker visa were contributing positively to the UK and committed to building a life here. For immigrants that fulfilled this criteria, they wanted a more fair, transparent and supportive system that treated migrants in a personalised and holistic way, with routes to permanent residency. They also believed that such a process should be underpinned by a long-term migration strategy, to provide greater social, political and economic stability for all.

The following three activities were facilitated in small groups to help jurors to reimagine the UK's economic migration system:

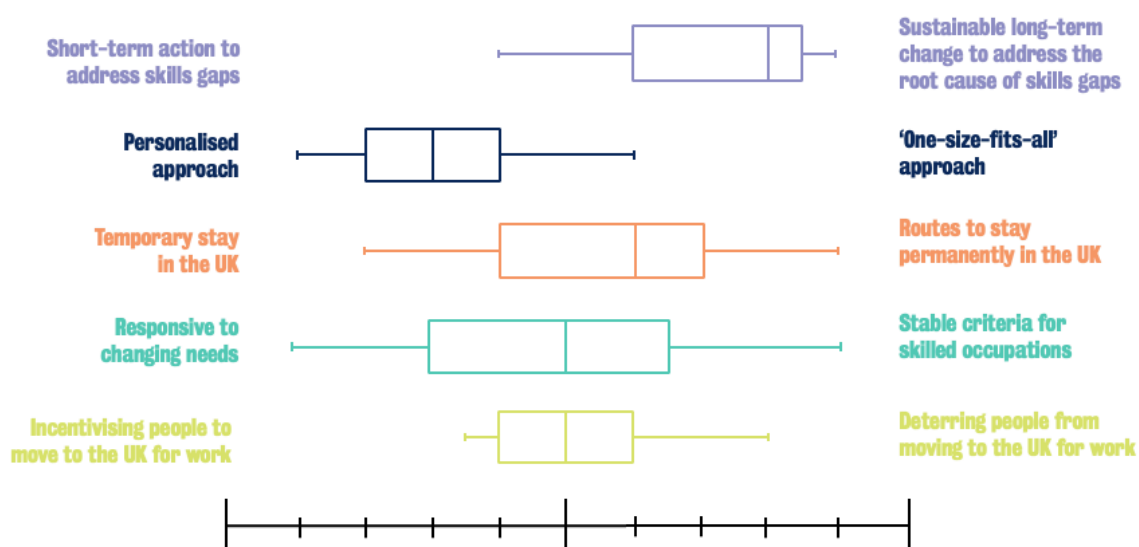
1. Trading-off underlying principles

Jurors discussed trade-offs around five underlying principles – developed inductively from discussions in workshop one – that inform the design of migration systems:

- Short- vs long-term action
- Personalised vs 'one-size-fits-all' approaches
- Temporary vs permanent routes to living in the UK
- Being responsive to changing needs vs having stable criteria
- Incentivising people vs deterring people from moving to the UK

Jurors then voted on each trade-off and prioritised them by placing them in order from what they considered to be most to least important in designing an economic migration system. As shown in Figure 8 (for individual votes, see Annex A), the most important consideration was that policymakers should focus their attention on long-term, sustainable change that addresses the root causes of issues such as labour market shortages, although some short-term

Figure 8: Summary of sticker votes on where should policymakers focus their attention when developing a points-based migration system?



Notes on figure: Box and whisker diagrams showing the distribution of jurors' votes on policy trade-offs, reflecting where they think policymakers should focus their attention when developing a points-based migration system. The midline of the box indicates the median average vote, the limits of the box show the upper and lower quartiles of the votes, and the whiskers show the full range of the votes. The mid-point of the axis indicates that both sides of a trade-off are considered as equally important. Additionally, trade-offs are listed from top to bottom in order of priority as determined by jurors, with long-term change perceived as the most important for policymakers' attention, and incentivizing or deterring potential immigrants seen as the least important.

action was seen as necessary alongside this. Jurors also favoured an immigration system that takes a personalised approach and provides routes to permanent residency. Other trade-offs were more nuanced. For example, jurors felt it was important for immigration policy to be responsive to changing needs, but equally felt that stable criteria are important for political and economic stability, and transparency. Deterring/incentivising people to immigrate to the UK was generally not an important principle for the jurors.

2. Comparing economic migration systems

Before reimagining the UK's economic migration system, jurors reviewed and discussed alternative points-based economic migration systems in other high-income countries – the United States, Australia, and Singapore (see Technical Report). These comparisons were chosen due to being comparable high-income countries, but jurors highlighted that the contexts still differed in important ways. For example, the UK has significantly less land mass and is more densely populated than Australia, Canada and the United States.

Of these alternative systems, jurors predominantly focused on the Australian migration system, which several jurors had heard of before. This mirrors political discourse in the UK, particularly around the time of the Brexit vote, which held up the Australian system as an example to aspire to ([Sumption, 2019](#)). Jurors particularly liked that there was a more personalised approach in the Australian system, centred on the immigrant and what they have to offer, as well as the range and detail of points that were available (eg points available for study, a range of points corresponding to length of relevant employment experience). Still, Jurors highlighted an important difference in that Australia has significantly greater land mass and lower population density, making the system less transferable to the UK context.

3. Developing and pitching proposals for reform

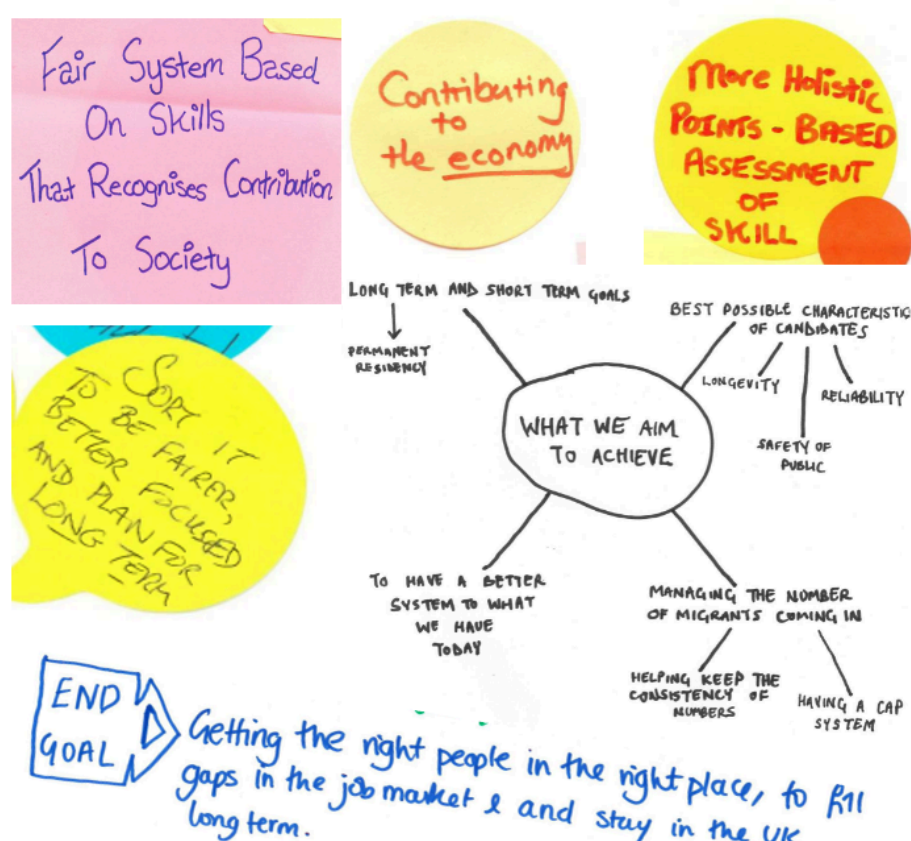
In the final session, jurors worked in small groups to develop a proposal for a new economic migration system, thinking through an overarching aim and key priorities that reflected what they value. The three proposals were then pitched to the other jurors and voted on to choose a preferred model.

A common aim across all three proposals was to welcome immigrants who fill skills gaps in the UK, especially those who filled public service roles that were considered as making a positive social contribution (eg a doctor or nurse). All three proposals endorsed health and criminal checks for immigrants, and routes to permanent residency, while two proposals endorsed a flexible cap on net migration and a more holistic assessment of people who apply for a Skilled Worker visa, using a points-based tool to evaluate skills, qualifications, English language ability and additional considerations (eg whether someone has pre-existing links to the UK).

All groups considered the needs of the UK and how immigrants can contribute to the UK when designing their proposed migration systems. Only one group explicitly considered their final proposal through the lens of the immigrant too, prioritising fairness and support for immigrants, although the other groups agreed with such sentiments in wider discussions throughout the workshops. A summary of the winning proposal is set out in Table 3, which won with 6 out of 15 votes. For all proposals, see [Annex B: Policy Pitches](#)

Table 3: Summary of winning pitch for a new economic migration system developed by jurors

Aim: Getting the right people in the right place, to fill gaps in the job market and stay in the UK long-term.		
Skill by occupation type	Person-centred approach	Flexible, industry specific cap
To assess people based on the shortage occupational job list, and education professional qualifications.	Different points allocated based on age, English language proficiency, dependents and their skills, and criminal and health records.	This would include limits to specific industries, regular reviews of the occupational list and changes where needed.



4.1 From principles to policies

Four core principles underpinned the discussions that led to the ideas developed by jurors for reforms to the economic migration system:

- **Contribution:** making a positive net contribution to the UK economy and society
- **Personalisation:** adopting a person-centred approach to visa eligibility
- **Fairness:** treating people in a way that is just and reasonable
- **Stability:** promoting stability and consistency across social, economic or political conditions in the UK, and avoiding unexpected and sudden changes

These principles are important because they anchored how jurors worked through policy trade-offs, and help to understand what motivated their decision-making. In the following sections, we explore how these principles map onto specific policy recommendations that were developed during the workshops.

The system should welcome people who enrich the UK's economy and society by filling roles with labour market shortages or that provide social value

Contribution



- Allocate points for filling a labour market shortage (shifting from a focus on skills to filling shortages)
- Allocate points for filling roles with important social value

When considering the purpose and function of an economic migration system, jurors tended to deliberate through the lens of the economy or the system itself, and how it meets the needs of the UK. It was widely agreed that the primary function of the economic migration system should be to support the UK's economy by building a skilled workforce, paying into the tax system, and filling labour market shortages. There was, however, debate over the type of skills that economic migrants should bring. What counts as a 'skill' was generally seen as subjective, with jurors noting that different skills are not necessarily comparable, though many are important. Some believed that people who move to the UK through work-based routes should be filling a range of roles.

'I think we probably do want those professionals and executives, but I think we also have a need for the sort of people that might fill in those other gaps' – **Juror, born in UK**

'I think we should take into consideration what value the job provides economically. For example, with doctors we know that provides to the economy, but also brick laying and construction, and even hospitality.' – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Filling labour shortages was discussed over and above the level of skill, in how economic migration should contribute to the UK economy. Shortages were identified across a range of essential roles, including teachers, lorry drivers, construction workers and seasonal agricultural workers, but the most pressing need was identified in health and social care, which dominated discussion on labour market shortages.

‘I work for a GP surgery, and we cannot get GPs. There’s nobody to recruit. So, consequently they recruit overseas.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘We started talking about there being a bit too much of a focus on higher education or higher skilled people, but actually that’s not matching a shortage. Is it adding to the UK economy? Is it helping us long-term?’ – **Juror, born in UK**

A common theme highlighted by jurors was that labour market shortages could change periodically, and that a visa could be issued one year based on filling a labour market shortage, but may not be granted the next if there is no longer a shortage. Jurors were divided on how to deal with this fluctuation within the system, with half endorsing a need for a changing list of labour market shortages, and half concerned that flexibility could give rise to arbitrariness, damaging the integrity of the system. However, most jurors agreed with the compromise that it does not have to be a mandatory criteria to fill a labour market shortage, but doing so should be highly incentivised through greater allocation of points.

Jurors also valued the broader social contributions that immigrants make to the UK, which they mostly spoke about in reference to public services. People who moved to the UK to fill jobs in health and social care were perceived as making an important social as well as economic contribution to the UK, reflecting broader public attitudes of valuing the NHS. One of the three groups explicitly endorsed a policy that allocated a greater number of points to prospective immigrants who would be filling a labour market shortage that offers both economic and social value (eg healthcare workers).

Yet negative sentiment towards immigrants was also present in discussion around public services, which fed into how some jurors developed recommendations around contribution. For example, around half of the group voiced concerns that immigrants could place further burden on already overstretched services, or that people could abuse the system, migrating to the UK under false pretences to use public services. Such attitudes motivated jurors to favour a strict system that welcomes only those who make a positive contribution to the UK.

‘They’re not going to come here and, in a year, drop off, and god forbid, end up in a hospital and then they’re a burden... or be a criminal.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘I think we need to shut the doors to people who have no skills, who are going to be a drain on society, and not going to advance the UK in any shape or form. It’s a very difficult thing to do, but I think we have to be more stringent.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

The system should support a more personalised assessment of eligibility, placing value on who is coming in and not just the job they're hired to do

Personalisation



- Introduce a more holistic assessment of immigrants and their skills
- Separate mandatory and desirable criteria, with mandatory criteria for eligibility and points allocated for desirable criteria
- Introduce greater variation within the points table to recognise broader attributes
- Mandate more comprehensive health and criminal checks at the responsibility of the Home Office

Jurors valued who is immigrating to the UK, not just the roles they come to fill. The group overwhelmingly wanted to see a more person-centred approach that placed the immigrant at the heart of the system, in addition to their job role. As one juror phrased it, ‘it needs to be based on the individual ... focused on the whole package’ (juror, first generation immigrant). Some jurors suggested that a person-centred approach could be adopted once those applying for the Skilled Worker visa had met an initial assessment comprised of mandatory eligibility criteria and a base threshold for points allocation, recognising that considering immigration applications in such detail would be resource intensive.

In their pitches for system reform, all three groups endorsed a policy to make mandatory eligibility criteria an initial barrier to entry, as an initial screening step. Two out of three groups proposed that mandatory criteria should not be allocated points (as in the current system), as failing to meet such criteria would determine someone as ineligible.

‘Maybe [the current mandatory points] don’t need to be a part of the points system. Maybe it’s just, you qualify first of all, you tick all these boxes, and then add points to that. Because if you don’t actually qualify at any of those particular stages, then your qualification is at an end. It’s almost like a screener. You screen them out from the beginning, so it doesn’t give people false hope.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Practically all jurors agreed that mandatory eligibility criteria should also include greater health and criminal background checks, alongside existing criteria such as having a basic level of English language and a suitable job offer. Jurors were asked whether they would include a minimum salary requirement in the mandatory eligibility criteria (as with the existing Skilled Worker Visa), but spent little time discussing it. One group explained that they gave it little importance as they believed most job offers should provide a sufficient salary.

Instead, debate centred on how extensive a health check should be, with some jurors emphasising the importance of both physical and mental health. It was recognised that immigrants from some countries were already required to undergo some health checks (eg

Tuberculosis screening). However, some jurors felt that a whole medical history should be taken into consideration to determine whether a person is healthy, to ensure that those who move to the UK to work contribute more to the economy and society than they take out in the form of using public services. However, others explained that the subjective nature of ‘healthy’ made it difficult to measure someone’s health. For example, certain health needs or conditions may not be debilitating or may not affect a person’s ability to fulfil their work. As a result, all three juror groups settled on health checks that determine whether an immigrant is ‘fit to do a specific job’ that they intend to take on.

‘If you want a care worker... let’s say she looks after your mum in a care home... you’d want to make sure he or she was healthy.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘Your medical history should be included... if you applied to be, let’s say, a bricklayer, but you broke your back two years ago... what are you bringing? You’re just here to use the health system.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘We want healthy people who are capable of doing the jobs they’re set to do... as opposed to coming over here knowing that you could potentially get better healthcare and using that as an excuse to come.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

Similarly, while criminal record checks are already conducted if a person has a job in sectors such as education, defence, and health and social care, most jurors wanted to see such checks rolled out more widely, as a centralised responsibility of the Home Office.

‘Why should it depend on the employer? I think it should be in the visa system. The criminal record should be checked.’ – **Juror, born in the UK**

More broadly, once mandatory eligibility criteria were met, jurors generally agreed that a points-based tool could be applied in a more nuanced way to give more power to desirable criteria. This approach provides a means of ranking immigration applications to identify those with the most to offer.

‘I don’t think we should have like ‘70 [points] and you’re good to go’... make it more about, the more points the more likelihood.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘You can pick the people most suited, most qualified, and most specialised who can then bring their skills to the UK.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

In general, all jurors favoured a points-based tool as a mechanism to facilitate greater personalisation in the system and provide ‘more of a holistic assessment’ (juror, second generation immigrant) of people who apply to move to the UK by offering points for a wider range of attributes. Across the three pitches, there were various suggestions for what points could be allocated to, including:

- Education (including qualifications)
- Work experience
- Filling shortage occupation roles

-
- Filling roles with social value (ie public service roles)
 - If they are bringing dependents with skills
 - If they have preexisting connections to the UK (eg family in the UK, previous study in the UK)
 - Age

Jurors also wanted to see more granularity in how points are allocated. Drawing inspiration from Australia's points-based immigration system, they wanted to see a more graded range of points available for each desirable criteria, recognising nuance in individual circumstances and abilities.

'There's a broader pool of points available for Australia... I think [the UK] should be like that because there's more opportunity to get more points, but then it's quite specific and easy to centre on the person. ... It could help to filter people out who aren't as strong, or those who are more of a priority.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'We should look at the partner, if they're bringing a partner. What are their skills, what are they going to do when they get to the country?' – **Juror, born in UK**

Education was a focal point of this discussion, with some jurors wanting to see different amounts of points available according to whether someone has, for example, a vocational qualification, a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree or a PhD. Australia allocates 15 points for a Bachelor's degree and 20 points for a doctorate, with additional points available if a qualification has been acquired from an Australian institution. This approach was generally perceived to bring more detailed criteria than the current UK system, which only awards points for the highest level of education, a PhD.

'I think there needs to be some more complexity around skill level and shortage occupation... there seems to be no points awarded to education unless it's a PhD.' – **Juror, born in UK**

'There should be points awarded if someone's got a master's degree. I think it needs to be broken down into what university you've been to as to how many points you actually qualify for.' – **Juror, born in UK**

Another aspect of the Australian system which sparked debate was limits around age. In Australia, a greater number of points are allocated to younger applicants, and those over 50 are ineligible to move to Australia for work in most circumstances. When considering the UK's economic migration system, just over half of jurors explicitly found an age condition appealing because younger people are perceived to have more years to contribute to the economy and society. However, when thinking from the perspective of individuals and society, around a third of jurors explicitly objected to an age requirement, citing it as unfair, discriminatory and in violation of the Equality Act. They emphasised that older and middle-aged people have significant skills and knowledge to contribute, and that 'it's unfair to have points on age' (juror, born in UK). On balance, most jurors agreed that an age condition

should not be implemented in the UK system as mandatory, though one of the pitches favoured allocating points to younger people.

‘We’re not going to discriminate against anyone based on age, sexuality, gender, religion. ... I think that’s really important because it stands for British values. ... In everyday life employers are not allowed to discriminate, so why should this process?’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Although most jurors favoured a person-centred approach, around half of jurors supported personalisation on the grounds of creating more safeguards within the system. They wanted a thorough assessment of those moving to the UK for work, as a mechanism to ‘make sure [immigrants] are who they say they are’ (juror, first generation immigrant), and to guard against people abusing the system. Suggestions on how this could be achieved included seeking employment references, considering the institution that a qualification is awarded by, and implementing job-specific tests.

‘You want to avoid any loopholes where someone could lie and be like, yeah, 10 years’ experience in this, when they’ve only had one’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘I think you can show if you have a certified qualification... a degree, or maybe if it’s based on experience, if you had like 10 years in a profession... then there must be some sort of test you can do. I know that cab drivers, they have to take a test... there must be something they can do to prove.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

The system should be fair towards immigrants, supporting them to integrate and build a life in the UK in the long-term



Fairness

- Always offer immigrants a route to permanent residency
- Introduce greater support and flexibility for immigrants entering lower-paid roles

Most jurors agreed that once someone is deemed eligible for a Skilled Worker visa, they should be treated fairly by the system and supported to integrate and build a life in the UK. Offering routes to permanent residency, introducing flexibility around visa fees, and increasing transparency within the system were all proposed as important mechanisms for fairer treatment.

Around a third of jurors explicitly acknowledged that allowing people who move to the UK under a Skilled Worker visa to stay permanently, or at least offering a route to permanent residency, signalled a mutual investment in one another. They felt that a transparent route

to long-term residence would allow people to build a life in the UK, and signalled that they are welcome, valued and have opportunities in the UK, which in turn promotes integration. One juror explained that it would be unfair to remove immigrants who had built a life and paid taxes in the UK, ‘that you could be living here, paying national insurance and tax, and then they’re like “bye”’ (juror, born in UK). Another juror suggested that offering permanent residency provided a rationale for investing more time and resources into assessing economic visa applications and taking a closer, more personalised look at who is moving to the UK under a work-based visa.

‘Allowing them to think long-term and plan ahead. It’s annoying to come here and then you’ve spent all that money in two years, but we don’t want you. I feel a bit like what’s the point? Was it really worth all the stress and hassle and money?’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘They make it hard anyway. ... You have to show you’ve got money to sustain yourself, that you have a plan. ... They are contributing... so I think I would lean towards long-term stay.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘I think at the moment it feels like the temporary routes are causing the issue, whereas if we looked at everyone as a permanent application, we’d think a bit more about what they’re bringing but also what we can offer them.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Another mechanism for fairer treatment suggested by the jurors was to introduce greater flexibility around visa fees and how they are paid. The requirement to pay application fees and a health surcharge up front, set at between £625–£1,423 and £624, respectively, at the time of the jury, was perceived as costly and unfair. Jurors felt that this could make the visa inaccessible for many. Around a third of jurors suggested that costs should not make moving to the UK for work inaccessible for those with the right skills who meet a high barrier to entry to the UK. One suggestion to introduce more flexibility was to adopt more dynamic pricing, corresponding to the type of job and salary of the person immigrating. For example, fees could be lowered for social care workers, whose roles were viewed as important, but as receiving low wages. Other suggestions included placing more responsibility on employers to pay fees, introducing a payment plan to pay fees in monthly instalments, or introducing a payment system similar to student finance, in which fees are paid through instalments taken directly through wages.

‘I think the price needs to be based on the type of job. So, if you’re having a business analyst maybe charge them £4,000, if they’re a bricklayer charge them £500.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘I think they should have a system where it’s matched up against what you’re earning. ... If you earn a certain amount of money a year through employment, then if you can afford it, you can pay the full surcharge for the NHS. ... I think it’s unfair to suggest that everyone who comes over should pay that.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘Wouldn’t it be fairer to split it [the health surcharge] every month out of wages?’ – **Juror, born in UK**

These ideas were again underpinned by a boarder desire for greater transparency and clarity around how the economic migration system functions, how decisions are made and how the system is managed. Some jurors described this as meaning transparency for all stakeholders involved – both those immigrating to the UK and the British public. Further, they wanted to see more honesty in politics and the media, free of political agenda or rhetoric that contributes to confusion, misperception and polarisation around who is moving to the UK, and what they are doing when they are living here.

‘A sense of transparency to the UK and to people applying to come to the UK.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘Clear facts rather than spin. ... I just want someone to be honest.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

The system should be underpinned by a long-term migration strategy that provides greater economic and political stability

Stability



- Develop a long-term economic migration strategy
- Introduce an industry-specific annual cap on the number of visas allocated
- Transparently re-invest revenue from visas into the local economy, including training the workforce

The majority of jurors wanted to see a system that was underpinned by long-term strategy. This meant more consistent policies which were influenced by changing needs of the UK, rather than political ideology. Several jurors considered current policies to be too short-term and too reactive, which failed to address the root causes of deeper structural problems, such as labour market shortages. They felt that migration policies have been highly politicised, dominating party manifestos and media. This was felt to contribute substantially to political and economic instability.

‘If [the main political opposition party] come in tomorrow, they could just rip it all up and do something completely different. ... Maybe there could be more consistency and it wouldn’t be just based on political opinion of that time.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘There’d be more consistency because you wouldn’t have other parties coming in later on and tweaking this and changing that, so maybe there would be more continuity, I’d hope. It would hopefully be a long-term vision and would have a long-term plan that is independent of other political views or agendas.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘You need to fill immediate [labour] need, but at the same time you’ve got to look to the future and make sure this doesn’t happen again.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

The jurors wanted a long-term approach that involves a strategy with foresight, considering at least the next 5-10 years. Specifically, they wanted such a strategy to consider additional measures to strengthen the labour market that reduce shortages, and promote more stable net migration figures. Such long-term thinking was perceived as necessary for policies that are sustainable for society and the economy.

‘They need to plan ahead... I feel like they’re just really reactive, taking each day as it comes, rather than planning ahead.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘Companies look at doing a 3, 5, 10-year plan. That’s what we should be doing... looking at the long-term.’ – **Juror, second generation immigrant**

‘I can just see a headline in 20 years’ time saying that this is all because of the health and social care visas back in 2023. ... I think there’s not a lot of foresight when there are these quick policies.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

Jurors emphasised that the economic migration system still, however, needed take account of changing social and economic contexts to be sustainable and responsive. Recent decades have seen significant change across all areas of life in the UK, which jurors felt needed to be taken into consideration to design a system that is fit for purpose. Partly, this involved building in some flexibility within a long-term strategy, so that the system is responsive to changing needs. Several jurors mentioned this in relation to major, and sometimes unexpected socio-economic events and pressures, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing cost of living, Brexit and changing labour market demands. As one juror described it, ‘the society and economy are changing all the time... I think it has to be responsive to changes’ (juror, first generation immigrant).

When discussing the trade-off between long and short-term action, jurors came to the conclusion that there is an important balance to strike between stability and responsiveness within the system. While a long-term strategy was favoured, jurors also acknowledged the need for some short-term action where necessary, such as employing more healthcare workers following the Covid-19 pandemic. The group ultimately reached a point where they wanted to see a long-term economic migration strategy with a degree of flexibility built in, to respond to changing needs of the UK.

‘Sometimes we have to do the short-term actions because otherwise the industry might just crumble, like the health and social sector ... but I do think that long-term sustainable change is a better approach.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘You almost need a mix of two [systems], don’t you? You need a short-term one and a long-term one for different purposes.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘I would hope that we can develop a system that reacts to changing needs, but at its heart have a long-term change.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

This desire for a sustainable and flexible long-term approach led jurors to imagine a system that worked in synergy with wider socio-economic structures. For example, a proportion of visa fees could be re-invested into public services or the labour market within areas that receive the highest volume of immigrants. In parallel, jurors wanted to see greater investment into training and employment of people already within the country, to alleviate pressures to hire immigrants as a quick fix to labour market shortages: ‘bringing the change within the country first and making sure that the necessary skillsets are given to the people, and making sure that develops first’ (juror, first generation immigrant).

Substantial discussion also focused on the possibility of introducing an annual cap on the number of people immigrating to the UK as a mechanism to provide greater stability. While only two jurors explicitly said that they thought net migration figures were too high, several others observed that inconsistent and rapidly changing patterns of net migration were a challenge for the country. Importantly, between the first and second workshops the news broke that the net migration figure for 2022 had been revised up from 606,000 to 745,000 people ([ONS, 2023](#)), foregrounding the discussions. Those in favour of introducing a cap on net migration cited the UK’s relatively small land mass, dense population and overstretched public services as justifications for controlling migration figures. They argued that lower, more stable net migration figures would be easier to manage.

‘I think a cap is important because otherwise you could get loads of applications from the right people, but you still can’t accommodate them all.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

‘The UK population is already quite high and dense.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

More than half of the jurors were also in favour of introducing an industry-specific cap that placed quotas on different shortage occupations, such as doctors, nurses and teachers. This was proposed as a mechanism to be able to be selective, and to ensure that different types of roles were filled to support the economy. Only one juror was explicitly against a cap, noting that ‘there used to be a 100,000 cap, [but] we couldn’t keep it because it’s not realistic’ (juror, first generation immigrant).

‘Maybe you could have a cap on certain professions? Like if we’ve got enough teachers, then we don’t need any more coming over to teach.’ – **Juror, first generation immigrant**

‘Maybe you would allow 10,000 nurses in one year, but only 5,000 teachers if that’s what you needed to fill those shortages in the job market. ... This was important to us because we felt it creates stability and helps us to move towards a long-term approach to migration.’ – **Juror, born in UK**

While jurors tended to value lower net migration figures, on balance, more importance was placed on welcoming the right people who bring value to the UK. Careful selection of the best candidates was favoured over incentivising, deterring, or outright blocking anyone from immigrating. Above all else, jurors expressed a desire for greater political and economic stability delivered by a long-term economic migration strategy.

4.2 Summary of policy pitches

The discussions across the two workshops culminated in the jurors' final pitches. Each of the three groups were asked to choose 3-4 policies that they considered as most important to underpin their vision for a reimagined economic migration system. The policies they chose are summarised in Table 4.

Once each group had pitched their proposal, the jury voted. The winning proposal (see Table 3, start of Section 4) endorsed a fair economic migration system, that welcomed skilled individuals who contribute to the UK. Such a system would involve mandatory eligibility criteria (eg health and criminal checks), use a points tool to holistically measure skill and contribution to the UK, offer more flexibility to support people throughout the process (eg fee loans for low-paid shortage roles), and a fair and transparent process (eg clear routes to permanent residency).

Table 4: Summary of policies included in final pitches

1.	Introduce more comprehensive health and criminal checks as mandatory eligibility criteria
	<i>(included in 3/3 pitches)</i> Health and criminal checks should be mandatory for all immigrants and should be the responsibility of the Home Office rather than employers. Checks should go beyond what is currently in place by including a fit-to-work check, for physical and mental health, that is relevant to the individual's job offer.
2.	Introduce greater granularity in points allocation, in line with the Australian economic migration system
	<i>(included in 3/3 pitches)</i> Introduce greater complexity and variation in how points are allocated, in line with the Australian points-table. This includes introducing: a greater variety of points corresponding to different levels of education (eg vocational qualifications, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctorate); additional desirable criteria that points can be allocated for, such as having several years of industry experience or considering whether someone has pre-existing links to the UK.

3. Always offer immigrants a route to permanent residency

   (included in 3/3 pitches)

Always offer a route to permanent residency for immigrants who are granted a Skilled Worker visa and who want to build a life in the UK, signalling a mutual investment in the country and the immigrant.

4. Only allocate points for desirable criteria, not for mandatory eligibility criteria

   (included in 2/3 pitches)

Allocation of points should be reformed such that points are only allocated for desirable criteria, as a mechanism to sort and identify candidates. Points should not be allocated for mandatory eligibility criteria because the points then become redundant.

5. Introduce a more holistic assessment of immigrants

   (included in 2/3 pitches)

Assessment of who is granted a Skilled Worker visa should be more holistic and person-centred, putting the person at the heart of the system rather than the job role. For example, educational institutions and prior work experience should be considered to assess the credibility and value of the experience and qualifications that migrants bring. Individuals' wider circumstances should also be considered, such as whether they already have connections to the UK or whether dependents will also contribute to the economy.

6. Introduce an industry-specific cap on the number of skilled worker visas allocated each year

   (included in 2/3 pitches)

The number of skilled worker visas allocated each year should be capped to facilitate more consistent numbers of immigrants entering the UK. Industry-specific caps will help to fill a greater diversity of roles.

7. Allocate more points for filling shortage occupation roles

   (included in 1/3 pitches)

More points should be allocated for those who hold a valid job offer that fills an occupation on the shortage occupation list. This acts as a mechanism to promote migrants filling roles that could not be filled by candidates within the UK first. The shortage occupation list may be revised periodically.

Example occupations include, but are not limited to, doctors, nurses, health and social care workers, seasonal agricultural workers, lorry drivers, teachers, and construction workers.

8. Introduce greater support and flexibility for immigrants entering low-paid roles

   (included in 1/3 pitches)

Introduce greater support and flexibility, particularly around fees, to remove barriers for desirable immigrants entering low-paid roles, such as health and social care workers. For example, charge dynamic fees that correspond to the individual's salary offer, incentivising employers to pay fees, or introducing a payment system that allows immigrants to pay in instalments.

9. Allocate points for age to incentivise younger immigrants

   (included in 1/3 pitches)

Allocate points corresponding to people's age, with more points available for younger candidates in order to favour and incentivise younger immigrants.

Age is not considered within mandatory criteria, meaning people of any age can still apply for a visa.

5 Conclusion

As the UK continues to make adjustments to control net migration, this citizens' jury offers a window into how members of the public engaged with the complex and often polarising question of how economic migration is managed. Jurors' perspectives, while initially shaped by general migration debates, evolved as they were given space, time and balanced evidence to deliberate on one key question: does the current economic migration system reflect what people value about those who come to the UK for work?

Overall, all fifteen jurors were in favour of reforming the economic migration system. They wanted to keep a points-based system, but wanted to see a more nuanced allocation of points that centred on the person, not just on the job they came to fill. Jurors widely recognised the importance of immigration to the UK's economy and public services, especially the NHS and care sector. They wanted to see a system that was fair to immigrants and capable of meeting the country's economic needs, and valued a system that would recognise the social and economic contribution of workers beyond high salaries and formal qualifications. This led to discussions around how 'skills' were defined in the current system: there was strong support for recognising shortage occupations and essential roles more clearly within the points structure as opposed to only 'high skills'. Jurors were primarily concerned with attracting the right people to the UK, recognising the value of all skills the country needs, and not putting unnecessary burdens on applicants.

On the other hand, jurors expressed concerns about the capacity of public services and infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population. This was particularly true when discussing housing, schools and the NHS – areas that many jurors felt were stretched even before recent increases in immigration. While most jurors recognised that immigration was not the sole or even primary cause of these pressures, they still felt that it was a relevant consideration when planning for the future. There was also support for checks and controls to ensure that migrants contribute fairly and follow the rules.

Overall, the jury offers a compelling case for designing systems in dialogue with the public, even on contentious topics such as immigration. The jurors reached agreement on their vision for a reformed points-based immigration system in the UK. Reaching consensus was not straightforward, but a journey that involved integrating differing motivations, perspectives and experiences, reconciling conflicts, and stepping into the heart of challenging decisions and trade-offs. Common solutions were found, even when people came to the topic with diverging views. For example, some jurors were motivated by suspicion towards migrants and others by support, but all agreed on a person-centred approach as a pragmatic policy that benefits the UK and is fair to migrants. Such solutions show how systems can work for the people they affect, while also ameliorating the concerns of others. Such deliberative moments can teach us lessons about how to engage the public to develop policy relating to contentious topics.

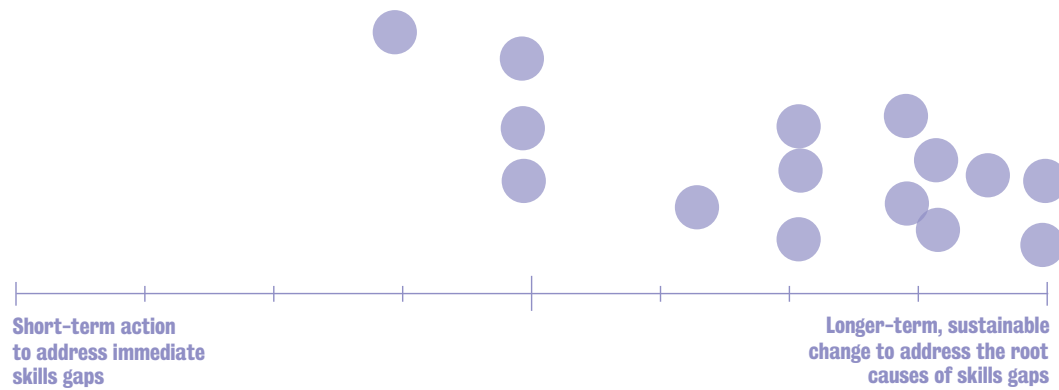
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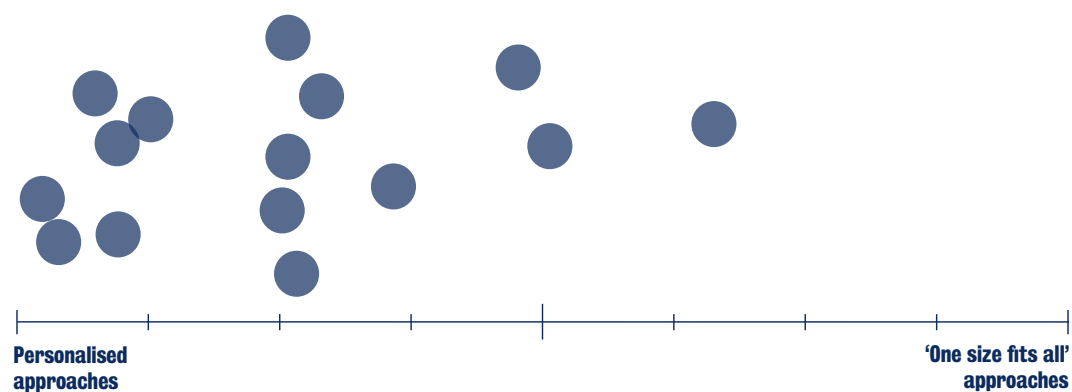
7 Appendices

Annex A: Trade-off sticker votes

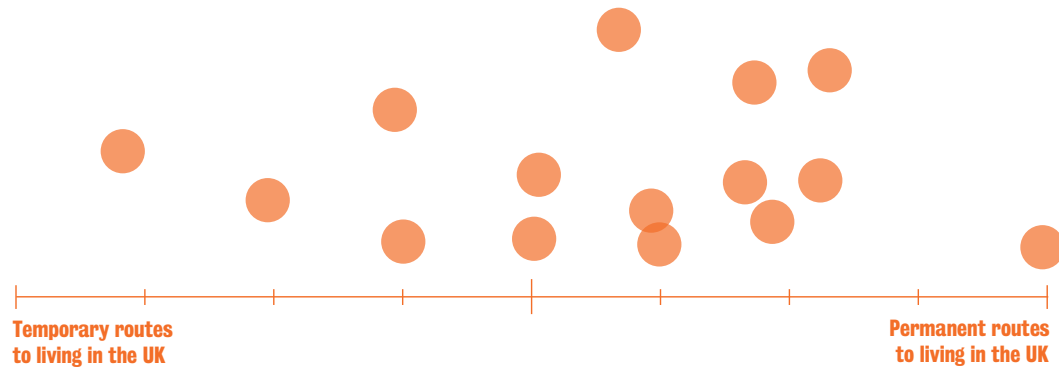
Where should policymakers focus their attention when developing a points-based migration system?



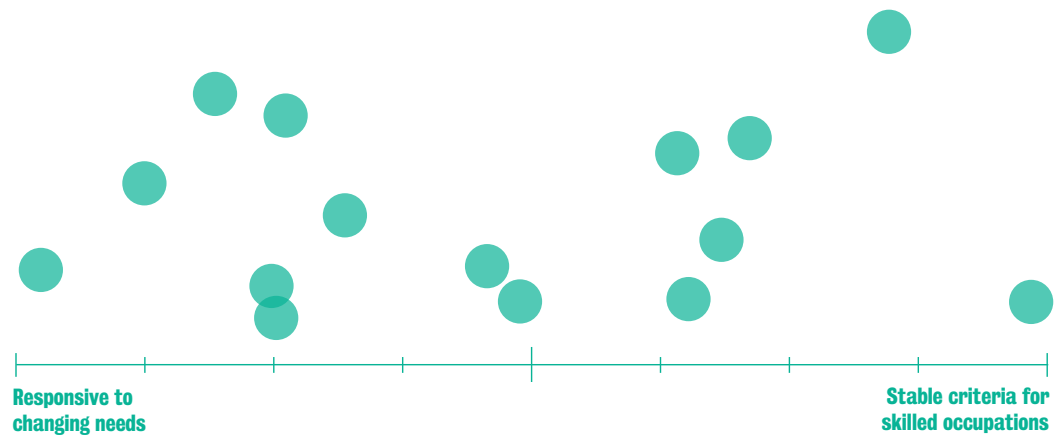
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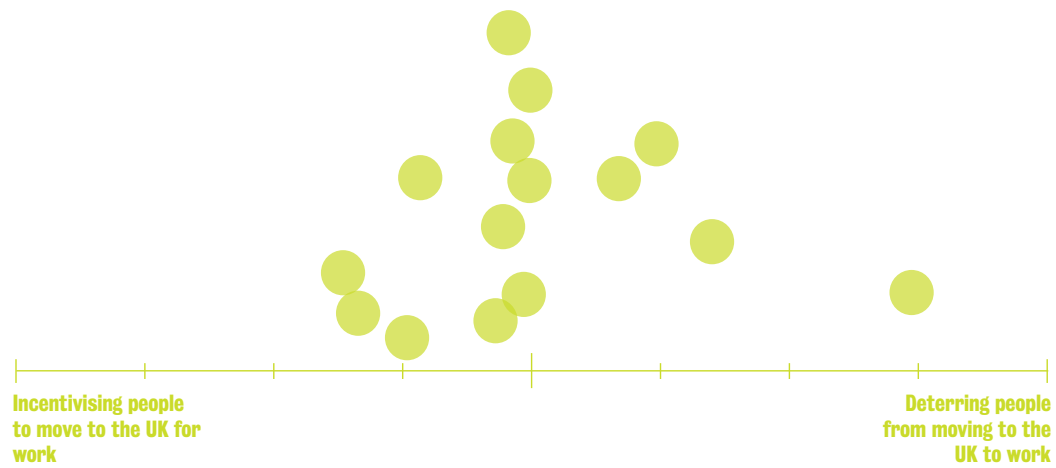
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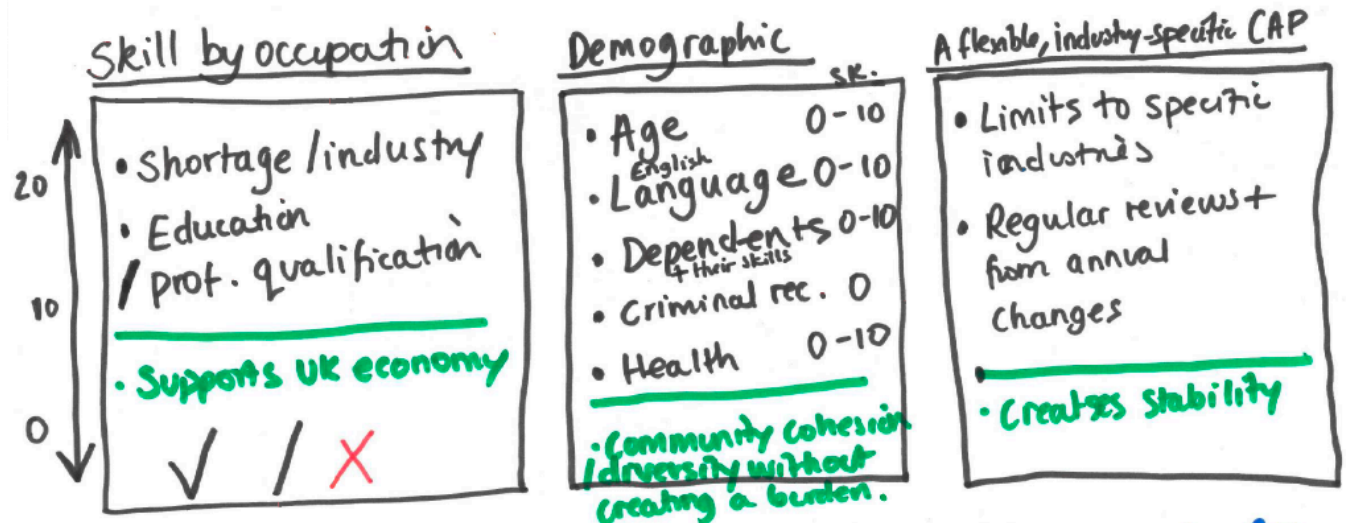
Where should policymakers focus their attention when developing a points-based migration system?



7.1 Annex B: Policy Pitches

Group 1 Pitch

Long-term, skills-based migration



END
GOAL

Getting the right people in the right place, to fill gaps in the job market & and stay in the UK long term.

Group 2 Pitch



Points based system for transparency.

- more graduated points depending on qualifications.
- checking points are genuine.

Cap on Visa numbers

✓
Have an overall cap and then have an additional number for spaces / job shortages e.t.c.
↓
Flexibility.

Skills Set

Qualifications
Experience
Experience
↓
Health + Social care
↓
Level of English Spoken + written.

Assessments
↓
Points table

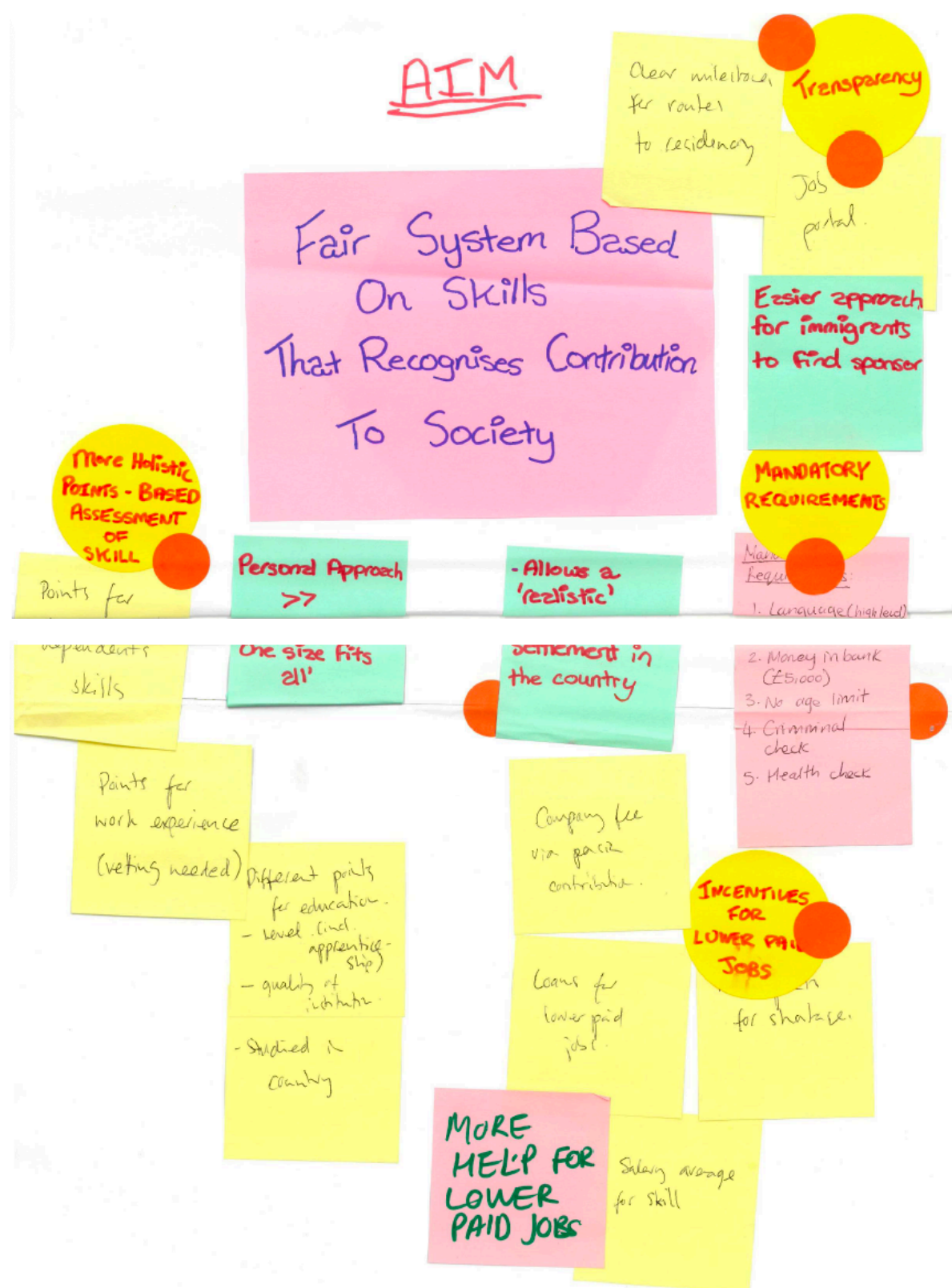
Eligibility

Character + Health Checks

↓
Full health check
Enhanced police check.
mental health
on-going medical treatment

Fit for the role.

Group 3 Pitch



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