

Address: APPG on Social Integration, c/o Chuka Umunna MP
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APPG on Social Integration Minutes for Meeting on Monday, 27 February, 3:30–4:50pm, in Committee Room 8, Westminster Palace

Minutes taken by: Anna Kere, The Challenge

Present (Parliamentarians):

- Chuka Umunna MP, Chair (Labour)
- The Rt. Rev the Lord Bishop of Oxford
- Nus Ghani MP (Conservative)—left at 4:00pm
- Matt Warman MP (Conservative)—left at 4:30pm
- Holly Lynch MP (Labour)—left at 4:20pm
- James Berry MP (Conservative)—joined at 4:40pm

Present (Others):

- Richard Bell, The Challenge (Secretariat)
- Anna Kere, The Challenge (Secretariat/minutes)
- Nicholas Plumb, The Challenge (Secretariat/Twitter)
- Dr Rachel Marangozov, Institute for Employment Studies (Advisor to the APPG inquiry into immigration and integration)

Apologies of absence:

- Jim McMahon MP (Labour)
- Gavin Robinson MP (DUP)
- Mark Durkan MP (SDLP)
- Lord Lennie (Labour)
- Suella Fernandes MP (Conservative)
- Jon Cruddas MP (Labour)
- Anne McLaughlin MP (SNP)

Meeting in private, 3:30—3:45pm

1. Approval of minutes

- 1.1. The minutes of the previous meeting, which took place on 5 December 2016, were provided to the members prior to the meeting. Hearing no changes, let the record reflect that the prior minutes stand as approved.

2. Division of questions

- 2.1. The Chair divided the questions for the proceedings among the APPG members present.

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Public meeting, 3:45—4:50pm

External speakers:

- *Dr Anne Smith*, creator and the Lead Trainer of the Creative English Alliance.
- *Alexander Braddell*, Director of Oxfordshire Skills Escalator Centre CIC Ltd.
- *James Cupper*, Head of Learning at Blackfriars Settlement and Co-Chair of NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults).
- *Saira Grant*, Chief Executive of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI).

1. Q&A session with the panel

- 1.1. Mr Umunna commenced the session by saying that Stage Two of the APPG's inquiry into immigration and integration is focussing on regionalised immigration systems and English language provision. He then invited the panellists to offer their thoughts on whether the lack of proficiency in English was acting as a barrier to the integration of newcomers.
- 1.2. Mr Cupper introduced himself and stated that he was from NATECLA, an organisation representing ESOL providers and tutors. He said that a lack of proficiency had a number of obvious barriers to participation in society, including access to health, education, and other services. It also creates additional barriers with regard to actually improving one's situation because people who don't speak the language may not be able to access providers' websites.
- 1.3. The Chair noted that part of the commentary coming off the back of the APPG's Interim Report was the question as to what extent the lack of English proficiency among migrants was a real problem.
- 1.4. Mr Cupper responded that while the problem is not by any means large scale it does very much exist.
- 1.5. The Chair asked Dr Smith for her input.
- 1.6. Dr Smith agreed that the lack of English skills was a key issue. Within the current political climate, it is also now increasingly common for people with virtually no English skills to claim English was their first language to avoid discrimination.
- 1.7. Mr Braddell agreed that the problem does indeed exist; it would be reasonable to suggest that there are about one million people currently in the UK who speak little or no English. On top of that, there are a lot of migrants who do not feel that their language skills allow them to adequately make use of the opportunities offered by the UK. Mr Braddell stressed that it was a very significant problem with many ramifications and wondered whether employers whose workforces do not have sufficient language skills could be deemed to be meeting their Health & Safety obligations. He noted that until people feel comfortable with their English skills, they will always stay slightly apart and other people will always perceive them as being slightly apart.

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- 1.8. Saira Grant emphasised that while she agreed with her colleagues for the most part, the full picture is a lot more nuanced. There are some communities that are settled in the UK but who do not speak English and who struggle to access provision. The recent trends in ESOL provision meant that people who come in as family/spouses of somebody on the points based system cannot apply for free language classes. Yet if they then choose to settle in the UK five years later, they do have to pass the Life in the UK test which is sat in English. Then there is the entire new cohort of migrants who come here via the points based system. They are now required to pass English at B1 one level, which is quite basic and does not prepare you for meaningful engagement.
- 1.9. Nus Ghani MP asked what could be done to break down the barriers to enable low-skilled and settled ethnic minority migrants to access provision.
- 1.10. Mr Braddell said that what had emerged from his experience was that while there were a lot of people in low skilled work who said they were willing to take up language classes it was unclear how it could be done. Mr Braddell characterised that as “low paid, limited English trap”: people who have enough language skills to access the labour market but not enough to get anything that would improve their language skills. Formal provision doesn’t work for these people. Researchers have identified workplace provision as the ideal option for them but of course this is not available.
- 1.11. Ms Grant added that community settings were also key to successful provision. Community based organisations may be better placed to reach out to migrants who are struggling the most. The situation is even more complicated for undocumented migrants, whose numbers are growing. There are probably around one million undocumented migrants in the UK, most of them in London. These are people with precarious immigration status who are afraid to come forward and access JCWI services to regularise their status. A good level of English would really help these migrants. But the negative climate (‘hostile environment’) created by government policy prevents them from doing so. JCWI also found that male migrants who are in work do not have the time to access ESOL provision during the day. Evening classes would work better for them.
- 1.12. Mr Cupper agreed with Ms Grant’s points and added further that people who work shifts face similar problems. Some migrants face a double barrier because they are illiterate in their own languages.
- 1.13. Nus Ghani MP asked if the situation has improved or worsened over the last decade.
- 1.14. Mr Cupper spoke of the drastic cuts to ESOL and local authority budgets over the past few years and concluded that the situation had definitely got worse in the last decade. Furthermore, ESOL provision is also not joined up between government departments, but that has always been the case.
- 1.15. Ms Ghani asked whether local authorities had the opportunity to share best practice with each other.

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- 1.16. Mr Cupper responded in the negative. He said that at the moment provision was inconsistent across the country and joining an ESOL course ended up being a bit of a potluck. This is why NATECLA recommended a national ESOL strategy in their most recent report.
- 1.17. Holly Lynch MP noted that the last few years had seen a mix of traditional college-based ESOL provision as well as less formal community based English provision. She wondered if the panel had any thoughts on how the two worked together.
- 1.18. Mr Cupper said that informal language provision is most effective where the communities are involved and in that regard it has been successful. You can't expect someone to study a formal ESOL qualification before they've learned the basic soft skills. Unfortunately, it is often the case that people who benefit from this provision are concentrated in a narrow area. There's also a further issue of progression routes, as people who finish a community based course struggle to move on to more formal qualifications.
- 1.19. Holly Lynch MP addressed Dr Smith asking her if that corresponded with her experience of working in communities.
- 1.20. Dr Smith responded that a lot of learners participating in community based language classes were not actually interested in formal provision and might not want to take up classroom based ESOL. It is about having a full range of provision rather than assuming that everybody wants to progress.
- 1.21. Ms Lynch asked what responsibility employers should have in delivering ESOL provision.
- 1.22. Mr Braddell emphasises that teaching and provision were separate from learning. Formal English teaching is only one of the ways in which people learn English. Mr Braddell argued that we need to focus more on learning and less on teaching. It is entirely reasonable to expect employers to take responsibility for the skills of their employees, and language should be part of that responsibility. Employers could scaffold learning through helping their workforce pick up language skills in the workplace. This is where providers could actually help. With ESOL funding unlikely to increase any time soon, we need to make better use of technology and sectoral approaches. Employers need to get the message not only from learning providers and people concerned about integration, but from their trade associations and quality assurance mechanisms.
- 1.23. Holly Lynch MP asked if there were some specific international or British examples of existing initiatives.
- 1.24. Mr Braddell mentioned the work done in the social care sector in Sweden. They went through a phase where they tried to take employees out of work to teach them Swedish but found that it didn't work very well. To make an impact you need to work directly with the employers within the workplaces. So they switched to a provision

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model where employers took more responsibility and assumed a role within the provision. This is well documented and available in English.

- 1.25. Mr Umunna asked how we could prevent employers from freeloading. The more proficient your employees become the more marketable to other employers they become. So somebody else risks getting the benefit of the training you, as the employer, have paid for.
- 1.26. Mr Braddell responded by quoting one of his friends: “Nobody leaves an employer because the employer trains them; they leave the employer because they’re a crap employer”. Mr Braddell stipulated that the question was a bit of a red herring and that we should, instead, be focussing on promoting best practice among employers.
- 1.27. Matt Warman MP spoke about the challenges in his own constituency, which has a high proportion of migrant labour in low skilled employment. Speaking English is often not necessary in those circumstances and employers tend to provide Health & Safety information in other languages. He asked how we could demonstrate to those migrants and the “native” English people that they are missing out on the opportunities by not speaking English.
- 1.28. Mr Braddell retorted that he, personally, had never met a migrant, whether low skilled or high skilled, who was not willing to improve their English. As long as people feel welcome in the country, they will make the effort. Where they are isolated and feel that the local community would rather they went home, they will hunker down. In this county, we are not very good at providing social initiatives that make sure migrants feel welcome.
- 1.29. Mr Warman noted that there was a difference between people feeling that it would be beneficial to speak English and between them feeling it was a necessity.
- 1.30. Dr Smith emphasised that it is friendships that motivates people to learn and use a new language. This is what really creates a sense of belonging. Dr Smith said we should be seeking to engage people in their local community more widely.
- 1.31. The Chair noted that one of the more controversial recommendations of the APPG’s Interim Report was to ensure that new arrivals either spoke English already or were obliged to enrol in a class upon their arrival. He asked Ms Grant if having that requirement, in particular for spousal visas, would prevent the problem we are currently facing where people who have been here for decades are not able to speak English.
- 1.32. Ms Grant agreed that it was an interesting question. JCWI have a real problem with the current qualification test, as it forces people to speak English at a certain level and they fail tests repeatedly, normally due to poor provision in their own countries. There is a real danger in creating an artificial test that prevents family reunification. People are more likely to learn English better once they are in the country and are immersed in the language. Creating an entry requirement does not address the reasons

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for which some communities are reluctant to engage in language learning. We have to tackle this from inside out.

- 1.33. Matt Warman MP agreed with Ms Grant but gave an example of successful but limited integration in the local school in his constituency. While integration within the school and among the children was absolutely seamless, the parents were still very segregated. He asked what else could be done, save the radical measures mentioned by the Chair, to encourage integration between the host communities and the migrants.
- 1.34. Mr Cupper suggested that we could encourage migrant parents to get involved as school governors or councillors, which would motivate them to learn English by getting more engaged in their children's education. It is about having positive role models in those communities and providing them with information.
- 1.35. The Chair offered some context by saying that the APPG recognised that integration is a two way street and that additional funding is needed for all these measures. However, both in the Chair's own constituency experience, and in that of other MPs on the APPG, the barriers to learning English for some people often come from within their families. A requirement could address this issue.
- 1.36. Dr Smith responded that operating in trusted spaces helps practitioners to reach out to the more challenging parts of communities. Working in mosques and gurdwaras and places where families feel safe is a good way of engaging these people. In Mr Warman's example of a school, it would be helpful to bring the parents together through some school based initiatives or activities.
- 1.37. Mr Braddell noted that it was worth asking what responsibility the British people at the school gate were taking to encourage the Polish neighbours to learn and integrate. If we just view migrants as 'them' and the responsibility to learn English as 'theirs' we will not get very far. People are not just coming here out of their own volition—we want them here, and we need to make that a lot more obvious.
- 1.38. Ms Grant agreed with Mr Braddell and noted that English language is only a small part of the bigger picture. There is a very toxic situation in the country and migrants don't feel welcome and don't feel wanted. Currently, migrants are only required to take an English test when they apply for settlement after five years of living in the UK—we should not be leaving it so long to ensure these people can participate in everyday life. It is the sense of not belonging that is the biggest problem we're facing. When there are opportunities for people to integrate, to take part in the community life, they will do it. When you break the fear and the language barrier down, integration starts happening. What the country really needs now is people like the APPG members, a political message, stating clear that migrants are welcome and needed.
- 1.39. The Bishop of Oxford strongly agreed with Ms Grant and spoke of his recent visit to a small programme in High Wickham, working to resettle Syrian refugees. The good that the programme was doing in integrating the existing Muslim communities as well the newcomers was really impressive. The Bishop returned to Mr Braddell's earlier

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point about the distinction between teaching and learning and enquired as to how a focus on learning might work in practice.

- 1.40. Dr Smith noted that most of the teaching in Creative English is delivered primarily by volunteers. For this to work there needs to be sufficient funding for both organisations like FaithAction and local community spaces where the learning takes place.
- 1.41. Mr Braddell added that funding programmes that bring people together was one straightforward way to achieve this outcome. We have the expertise and we have the right sort of people—we just need to put it all together and focus our efforts on programmes aimed at integration. Mr Braddell also stressed that we need to de-emphasise testing. IELTS, for example, is a test for educated speakers, and so many native speakers wouldn't do as well at it as migrants do. This is not productive.
- 1.42. The Bishop asked Mr Braddell for some more international examples.
- 1.43. Mr Braddell highlighted language learning “in the wild” [i.e. in the day-to-day context/settings], explored by the Nordic countries. This is something that has been recently done in Iceland and in Sweden. There was also some work done in Milton Keynes by some people from the Open University, which used technology to engage migrants with the local area.
- 1.44. Mr Cupper agreed that there was a lot of good work already happening at a local level across the country. Yet people who provide the funding tend to base it on outcomes, which is not conducive to small grassroots projects.
- 1.45. The Chair asked which level of government or public body should hold primary responsibility for language provision.
- 1.46. Mr Cupper said that it would have to depend on the area. There is currently no pan-national network on integration and English programmes.
- 1.47. The Chair pressed further by asking who we should be looking to assume this responsibility.
- 1.48. Mr Braddell responded that it would sit well with local authorities but they would need to be provided with sufficient funding. We also desperately need national leadership—somebody to develop high quality research and a methodology to disseminate learning across the country.
- 1.49. The Bishop asked the panellists what are some of the things that give them hope and what effect, if any, Brexit is likely to have on English provision.
- 1.50. Mr Cupper started by tackling the Brexit question, stating that the impact of leaving the EU can be summed up by saying “nobody really knows”. The negative rhetoric around immigration has been really harmful to integration and if that continues it is likely to dissuade people from coming here, which would have some

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serious negative consequences. There is also a considerable amount of EU funding in the sector, which will need to be replaced. In terms of what NATECLA was hopeful about—our country will always need migrants, and it is a positive thing. It makes us a diverse and interesting society. Forums like this APPG and like the Casey Review are also very positive.

- 1.51. Dr Smith said that what gave her hope was seeing people progress in their learning and getting involved as volunteers. In response to the anti-immigration rhetoric, Creative English has seen more people come forward to get involved in their communities and protect their values.
- 1.52. James Berry MP noted that he spent the morning with his local Learn English At Home charity. He asked the panellists how we could reach the people who had been in the UK for a while.
- 1.53. Mr Cupper responded that for that particular group of migrants it was word of mouth that worked best. Running projects, like the one in Kingston, regularly also helps a lot.
- 1.54. Mr Braddell added that it was another issue of leadership. If we, as a society, took this issue seriously, we could easily run concerted campaigns to promote English learning opportunities. While personal recommendation is going to work for some people, making these initiatives far more visible would work better.
- 1.55. Before asking the final question, the Chair came back to the issue of accountability. He conceded that testing at an individual level may not be as useful as it appears. However, the success of our policies still needs to be measured somehow. The Chair asked the experts how this could be done.
- 1.56. Ms Grant argued that measurement of participation would be a good initial step. She encouraged the APPG to really think about integration. Over the past years there has been a trend towards discouraging people from settling in the UK. This really does not help the long term goal of integration. A one size fits all model, where settlement isn't allowed, isn't conducive to integration.
- 1.57. Dr Smith agreed with Ms Grant that measures of participation would be the best way.
- 1.58. Mr Cupper noted that before we start measuring participation we need to measure the need. If we get better at mapping the need, we could start setting targets based on people's ability to access services—e.g. going to the post office/GPs.
- 1.59. Mr Braddell reiterated the importance of looking at participation and of examining the accountability of local communities and not just the migrants.

2. Any other business

- 2.1. No other business.

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3. Date of next meeting

3.1. The date of the next APPG meeting is Wednesday 17 May 2017.

MEETING ENDED AT 4:50pm