This programme was first broadcast in 1999.
This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.

You’re listening to “First Sight, Second Thoughts” from the BBC World Service, the series which views life in Britain through the eyes of her immigrant population.

Mushtaq: Everything of course was very new - going to England was such a dream, you know.

Renate: Very popular here are these orange street lights and they are actually pretty dim and dark. (Laughs). So, the impression what I remember of Cardiff is grey, grey, grey... I'm sorry! (Laughs)

Ana: Sometimes I couldn't even breathe because the wind was so strong. And I do still miss the sunshine of Mexico.

Presenter: Voices of immigrants as they remember their first impressions of Britain.

Today we discover if their ‘first sights’ of Britain matched their expectations.

Immigrants from India, Guyana, Mexico, Germany, Pakistan, Botswana and Iran tell us about their first impressions.
My name is Rajinder Dulai. I came from Punjab in India. I came into Britain on 16th December 1977 and landed at Heathrow Airport terminal 3. Immigration officers weren't that friendly but the whole excitement (sort of) overcame that unfriendliness from the immigration officer and then we got out of the airport, and it was very chilly…very cold.

Presenter: Although Rajinder clearly remembers the unfriendliness of the immigration officers, and the chilly winter weather, arriving in Britain was still an exciting experience for him. Our next speaker arrived during the Spring, when the weather wasn’t quite as cold.

Coming into London, I was a wee bit disappointed when I saw the buildings. Because I was not accustomed to such big buildings - looking so brown - everything looked alike. I was impressed with street traders as I passed. Beautiful flowers, because it was Spring. The Spring everywhere. But the houses...I didn't like the looks of them at all.

Presenter: So Muriel’s first sight of London in the Spring was a pleasant experience, particularly because of the flowers. But the buildings weren’t quite what she expected! She said they were “a wee bit” disappointing – a little bit disappointing, because she wasn’t “accustomed” to them… She wasn’t used to seeing so many big, brown buildings. And Muriel certainly wasn’t impressed by the look of the houses.
Our next speaker settled in the north of England. She shares Muriel’s first impressions of the houses and also talks about the weather.

Insert 3

My name is Ana Silvia Rodriguez. I’m Mexican. I have lived in England for the past 20 years. It was difficult at first in terms of the climate. I used to find Leeds very windy. Sometimes I couldn't even breathe because the wind was so strong. And I do still miss the sunshine of Mexico.

It was the houses that I found also very different - with rows after rows of terraced houses. In the North of England we have lots of brick houses, particularly in a city like Leeds. I was used to greens and pinks and blues, and a big house with a small house. But in England, you find that houses are very similar to each other.

Presenter: As we’ve heard, immigrants who’ve come from warm countries, like Mexico, sometimes find the climate – the weather - in Britain quite difficult to get used to. And like Muriel, Ana was surprised by the houses; she wasn’t accustomed to seeing rows and rows of brick ‘terraced houses’. A terraced house is one of a row of similar houses joined together by their side walls. Our next speaker arrived in Britain in 1964. She recalls her first impressions of Cardiff, the capital city of Wales.

Insert 4

My name is Renate Thornton. Originally I’m (coming) from East Prussia… now Kalinigrad. And being a refugee, we moved right across Germany and then we moved to Cardiff in Wales. Compared with Munich of course, this was a great shock to me. Everything seemed to be very grey, dull - nothing happened. When you went, for example, to the cinema, you had to run to the bus, to get home, to catch the last bus. There were no restaurants or cafes open where you could sit afterwards and have a chat about the play or the film and lots of rain. In Cardiff there was lots of rain…..(laughs).
Presenter: So, coming to Wales from Germany was a great shock - an unsettling experience for Renate. There was too much rain, and as she said, ‘nothing happened’ in Cardiff during the 1960’s - she felt there was very little for her to do in her leisure time.

Mushtaq Mohammed came to Britain from Pakistan at the age of 14 to play cricket. His English teammates nicknamed him ‘Mushy’ - because it was easier for them to pronounce! Although Mushy arrived in Britain many years ago, his first impressions were lasting. He particularly remembers Lords and The Oval – two of Britain’s most famous cricket grounds.

Insert 5
I first came to England in 1958 with the Pakistan Eaglettes. Everything of course was very new - going to England was such a dream, you know, for any youngsters, and to come and play cricket here - to see Lords, see Oval cricket ground and I heard about it from my elder brothers. They'd been here before me and they, all the time, talk about England and England was THE place in those days where the cricketers win - so well established and recognised. For me to come here in 1958 was a dream.
(SFX Cricket actuality!!)

Presenter: Fond memories there from Mushy. His older brothers had played cricket in Britain before him and through their eyes, he saw England as ‘THE place’ - the
best place - to play and win cricket... and he wasn’t disappointed.

Our next speaker, Bootsie, also felt she knew what to expect. She’d heard about Britain through friends and relatives, and had read books about it because she’d been planning to study here.

Insert 6

When I lived in Botswana, really, I had an idea of what to expect here because I have friends who have studied here. I have relatives who’ve lived here. So, I knew and heard a lot about the country and in any case, that’s why probably it wasn't difficult for me to blend in. So, it wasn't a shock, because I had read about the country and I had so much knowledge about Britain.

Presenter: Bootsie found it easy to ‘blend in, to fit into English society, because she was well prepared. But was she really prepared for life at a university in London?

Insert 7

When I arrived here, the first thing that I thought of doing when I came out of Heathrow - actually it was the very same day I arrived. I was so anxious - very curious to see my university. And I went there that afternoon and I couldn't believe what I saw. I was so depressed and I actually thought no, I don't think this is the right place for me to come and study. I didn't like the place at all. The administration centre that I saw the first time. It looked like a really dilapidated building. I was really worried and I remember, I even said to my aunt that day... “I think I don't want to study here. I'm not happy about this place”. And anyway, she gave me a bit of courage... that, “no, no, no. It's how it is. It's not that kind of campus life where you have the grounds and everything. Most universities in London are like that.” It looked more like offices to me. It didn't look like a university but this is England and London is very different from home and other countries.

Presenter: Bootsie soon got used to her University buildings and is now a third year student.

Next, we hear from Mojtaba, who’s also a student. He’s been learning English for
about seven months. His first impressions of England were of the weather and the buildings because they reminded him of the northern part of his own country, Iran.

Insert 8

My name is Mojtaba Amini. I'm from Iran. I came in England in 1998. Actually, when I arrived in London from Heathrow, weather and some buildings remind me the north of Iran. Because something similar. North of Iran by the sea always raining.... And always, you can't find many time sunshine and you know, sometimes sun shining and you can't trust weather. Every five minutes or every (one) hour weather change. And that really remind me… my north country.