Challenges to the Internationalization of United Kingdom Universities

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the anticipated repercussions of the Brexit Referendum to the internationalization of UK universities. The referendum approved the UK leaving the European Union. This process of leaving has become known as "Brexit." The UK has been part of the European Union for over 40 years and this membership fostered the international exchange of students and academics. University campuses across the UK have experienced significant internationalization. The study explored emergent concerns on the challenges that higher education institutions would confront as the process of Brexit continues to develop. The research draws on testimony given to the Education Committee of the House of Commons, government documents, media reports, fieldwork and interviews of UK academics. Findings are presented thematically as a narrative and include concerns about potential reduction of international students and faculty, decrease in international research collaboration and research funding, and the possible negative impact on campus and community climate.

Keywords*: universities, internationalization, multiculturalism, Europe, United Kingdom, Brexit*

The United Kingdom has a large and vibrant higher education system, with deep historical roots and traditions. The quality of UK universities is recognized worldwide and has attracted leading researchers from the European Union and every corner of the world. Higher education institutions in the UK have increased their global connections throughout the years, especially since the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by the ministers of education of 29 European countries. The United Kingdom was one of the original signers of the Bologna Declaration and has been an active member in the European Higher Education Area from the beginning of the Bologna Process. The ministers of education of the countries involved in the Bologna Process and other stakeholders acknowledged that cultural richness was a valuable asset to the European Higher Education Area. The benefits of transnational experiences were widely discussed and considered important factors to achieve quality in higher education (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Bologna Declaration, 1999; Bologna Working Group, 2005; ENQA, 2005; ESG, 2015; Ríos, 2011).

Among the key agenda objectives of the Bologna Declaration was to attain international mobility of students and academics, which resulted in a significant internationalization of UK university campuses (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Ríos, 2011). The importance of the European Union for UK universities cannot be overstated. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) that

accredits UK universities has held membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for many years and is included on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). Universities in the UK maintain partnerships and collaborative research endeavors with numerous institutions in the European Union (ENQA, 2005; Gaskell, 2015; QAA, 2016; UUK, 2013).

Public universities in the UK are autonomous entities and as such, they can decide their own missions and strategic priorities (Gaskell, 2015; UUK, 2013, p.3). In the year 2017 there were about 160 higher education institutions receiving public funding and 2.32 million students studying at UK higher education institutions. According to figures provided by the *Universities UK* organization, in the academic year 2016-2017 there were 134,835 students from European Union countries and 307,540 students from other countries not in the European Union enrolled in UK higher education institutions at the time (UUK, 2017, para. 1- 2). The flow of students and academics from continental Europe to higher education institutions in the United Kingdom has brought a wealth of international talent and multiculturalism to its universities.

Background on Brexit

The United Kingdom became part of the European Economic Community in 1973, and over the years it has signed a number of treaties intended to produce or encourage economic support and integration among the participating member countries (Suthersanen, 2017). Economic and social circumstances, such as the financial worldwide crisis and the surge of immigrants and refugees across Europe, combined to prompt the so-called "Brexit Referendum." The term "Brexit" was coined from the words "Britain" and "exit," to mean Britain leaving the European Union. In 2016, then UK Prime Minister Cameron called for a non-binding referendum on the EU membership. According to Welfens (2016), the electorate did not receive essential information on the expected economic effects of leaving the EU. The Brexit referendum took place on June 23, 2016, and the result of the referendum favored leaving the European Union. The outcome was close, 51.9 to 48.1 percent, and the results were unexpected. The decision to leave the EU "represents a rather surprising decision by the UK electorate and it is a historical result with implications for the UK, Europe and the world economy" (Welfens, 2016, Para 1). As Suthersanen (2017) has commented "the effects of this monumental event still remain ambiguous and murky. This is all the more so as there is no precedent of a Member State withdrawing from the Union" (p. 98, para 5). The vote to leave came after a political pro-Brexit campaign that fostered fear of immigration and disparaged immigrants. Subsequent to the referendum a wave of hate crime was unleashed across the United Kingdom (NPCC, 2016). The immediate repercussions of this negative climate for international students and academics are addressed in this article. This research explores the potential impact of Brexit on the internationalization of United Kingdom higher education institutions. At the time of the writing of this paper, the United Kingdom continues to struggle with decisions about the Brexit referendum and the relationship of the UK with continental Europe.

Method and Procedure

The research presented in this paper is part of a larger study by the author on quality assurance in UK higher education. While in the UK conducting interviews on quality assurance issues in UK universities, I discovered there were widespread concerns about the effect that the split from continental Europe, could have on international research collaboration and mobility of students and scholars. This research is of qualitative nature and draws on testimony given to the Education Committee of the House of Commons, government documents, and media reports, as well as fieldwork and interviews of UK academics. The research explores the possible repercussions of Brexit to the internationalization of United Kingdom higher education institutions, as seen through the eyes of academics. The field research was carried out after the initial Brexit referendum had taken place, and included research visits to universities and accrediting agencies in the United Kingdom.

This study uses a qualitative approach exploring the participants' understanding of the foreseen effects of Brexit as a central phenomenon. Faculty members and university administrators in universities across the UK were interviewed at their own institutions. Creswell (2008) explains that a researcher using qualitative methods "purposefully or intentionally selects individuals and sites" that might provide answers to understand the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative research also "provides voice to individuals who may not be heard otherwise" (Creswell, 2008 p. 213, para. 2). This research follows Creswell's definitions of qualitative inquiry, and the qualitative interviewing approaches recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Seidman (2013). Qualitative theories stress the subjectivity of the participants' experience and assert that individuals construct their own meaning from the experiences lived. Qualitative methodologies were particularly suitable for this research where the participants' experiences and perspectives were sought. The research was conducted by the author of this paper as sole investigator.

Sources of Data

Accrediting agencies and higher education institutions across the UK were contacted and interviews were arranged with individuals in the organizations who had expertise in the area of my research inquiry. Participants include administrators and faculty members in eleven universities in the UK and experts representing the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which is the accreditor of UK higher education institutions. With the purpose of getting the perspectives of academics from different segments of the UK's higher education system, interviews were held in regional institutions of different sizes, as well as in renowned universities such as Oxford and Cambridge (Ríos, 2017).

For the research reported here, 12 academics were interviewed. All of the interviewees had been involved in processes of quality assurance at their institutions. Demographics and cultural background of the participants was not considered. The names and affiliations of the academics interviewed are not included in the narrative in order to protect their anonymity; they are referred as "participants" throughout this article.

According to Creswell, qualitative research can be seen as an "emerging process" in which "participants set the direction" of the narrative (Creswell, 2008 pp. 140-141). As the unique investigator, I facilitated the interviews and ensured that the qualitative inquiry methodology was followed. During individual interviews, most participants brought up the issue of Brexit; in some cases, a general open-ended question was given to the participants: "What is happening with Brexit?" This open-ended question became the research question for the qualitative study presented here. Participants were allowed to set the direction of the narrative and elaborate on the description of their own experiences and views. The open-ended question invited participants to share their views. Recurrent themes in the narratives were then identified and categorized.

Consistent with qualitative research procedures, the emerging themes from the participants' narratives were triangulated with other data sources and analyzed for consistency. The sources used for triangulation are included in the discussion below. Creswell (2008) has stated that "Qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study" (p. 266 para. 4). Springer (2010) concurs, indicating that triangulation is "a way of corroborating information by comparing the information obtained from multiple sources" (p. 394 para. 2). The use of triangulation was valuable for this research because it allowed the incorporation of multiple perspectives and sources. The process of triangulation permitted correlation of the participants' experiences with apprehensions across the country.

For purposes of triangulation, documentary information was gathered from minutes of the House of Commons and other government documents. On January 11, 2017, several university professors appeared as expert witnesses at a hearing of the Education Committee of the House of Commons, which took place in Oxford. The professors answered questions from the Members of Parliament and provided oral evidence regarding the impact that exiting the European Union could have on UK higher education. Some of the answers given to the House of Commons by the following academics are quoted in this paper: Professor Catherine Barnard, Professor of EU Law, University of Cambridge; Professor Alastair Buchan, Dean of Medicine at the University of Oxford; Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University; Professor Stephanie Haywood, Head of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Hull, representing the Engineering Professors' Council; Professor Lyndal Roper, Regius Professor of History, University of Oxford; and Professor Margret Wintermantel, Professor of Psychology and President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The names of these professors are included in this article, as their answers are a public record.

Media reports and documents posted in the websites of some universities were used as a source of information to triangulate data bearing on the Brexit effects. Given that newspapers and other media outlets in the UK gave extensive coverage to the concerns that the universities had after the Brexit referendum, and reported the resulting surge of hate crime, some of the quoted material comes from these sources.

Findings

Following the qualitative methodology, the participants' views are presented through a "narrative" merging the identified themes from the interviews with answers from expert witnesses to the House of Commons and reports from media outlets. In qualitative research the interviewer elicits the participants' personal experiences in their environments and the resulting account is articulated in a "narrative" focused on the subjective experiences of the participants, as opposed to a quantitative report of findings (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013; Springer, 2010).

The broad umbrella theme that emerged in the interviews was "Challenges to Internationalization" and has been used in the title of this article. Participants described their concerns about the possible negative effects of Brexit on the internationalization of their institutions. The analysis of the umbrella theme produced several sub-themes which are incorporated across this paper. Sub-thematic categories include apprehensions about the Brexit impact on their internationally collaborative research and partnerships with EU institutions, potential loss of European research funding, decline in the number of European Union students and other international students attending UK universities, reduction of foreign faculty members and researchers, and deterioration of campus and community climate.

While a narrative discussion is "the primary form for representing findings in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2008, p. 262 para. 2); representing the qualitative findings visually is also recommended (Creswell, 2008, p. 261). Miles & Huberman (1994) indicate that in qualitative research a visual display such as a figure, chart, table or diagram can be useful. In order to have a visual representation of the findings, a diagram illustrating the umbrella theme and sub-themes is included (see Figure 1 below).

The narrative that follows incorporates the participants' views about the different challenges to internationalization that Brexit might bring to their institutions. The findings discussed reveal merely a snapshot of the concerns of the participants and in the country as reflected in the media, government documents, and testimonies presented to the Education Committee of the House of Commons at a particular time.

Significance of International Students and Academics for UK Higher Education

Participants described the importance of international students for their particular institutions and for the UK university system. Several of the study's participants referred to the academic benefits of the presence of international students in their classrooms and university campuses. According to the participants, the number of students from European countries enrolling at their institutions had substantially increased in the last two decades. In their narratives, participants pointed out the many ways in which international students enhance the academic life of their institutions bringing multiple viewpoints to university classrooms. As I have discussed elsewhere, it is widely recognized that international students help to increase the cultural diversity of higher education institutions. They bring countless ethnicities, languages,

traditions, values, cultures, religions and different ways to understand the world (Ríos, 2017). Two participants mentioned the international recruiting efforts of their institutions or programs. Review of the literature indicates that in the last two decades, universities in the United Kingdom have intensified their efforts for recruiting international students from around the world and from continental Europe (Royal Society, 2016; UUK, 2017).

Figure 1

Diagram of umbrella theme and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narratives
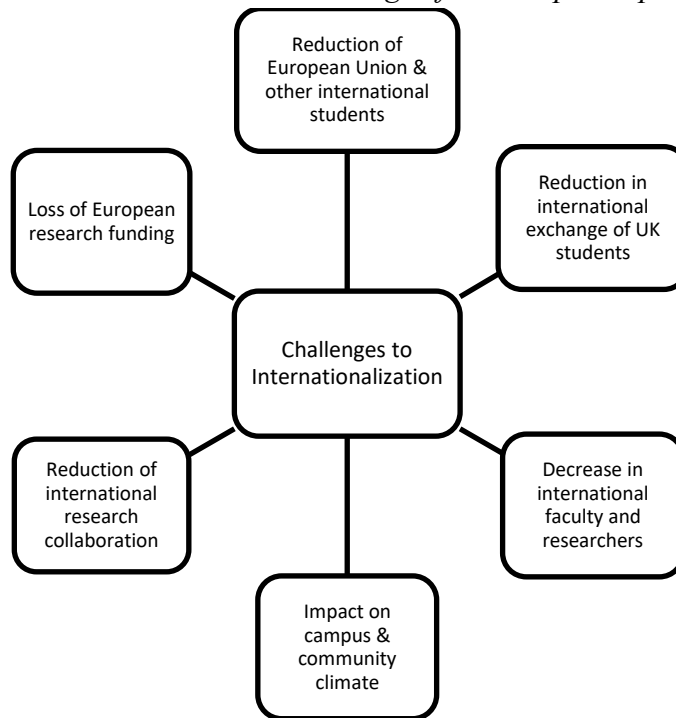
In the view of participants, international faculty members and students have enriched the academic life of higher education institutions in the UK. In the interviews, participants expressed concerns about a potential decrease in international faculty and researchers. Participants from regional and smaller universities were particularly concerned, as it is more difficult for lesser known institutions to recruit renowned international academics. The views of the participants coincide with data gathered by the *Royal Society* and *Universities UK* (Royal Society, 2016; UUK, 2017). Research universities in the United Kingdom attract prominent scholars and researchers from every corner of the world (Ríos, 2017). A report by the Royal Society (2016), estimated that at least 28% of the academic staff in UK universities were non-UK nationals and that half of the students enrolled in PhD programs were international students (Royal Society, 2016, p. 4).

In some elite research institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, a substantial number of academics and researchers have come from outside the United Kingdom. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Professor Leszek Borysiewicz has explained: "The University [of

Cambridge] depends on the talent of students and staff from across the world. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the university's academic staff (including 27 per cent of our postdoctoral researchers) are non-UK EU nationals" (Borysiewicz, 2016, para. 6). Professor Buchan, Dean of Medicine at the University of Oxford, specified the importance of postgraduate EU students for research: "The quality of the postgraduate research students is absolutely paramount for driving the research activity in the country and that is where the largest proportion is coming from Europe…" (Buchan, 2017, p. 17, para. 4).

When asked by members of the Parliament if the diversity of the academics was important for the quality of teaching in higher education. Professor Stephanie Haywood, President of the Engineering Professors' Council answered: "It is very important. In engineering we tend to have a lot of overseas lecturers anyway and not just from the rest of the EU but from China and Russia. That diversity is absolutely great. I would not like to lose the people from the EU because they bring a different perspective…" (Haywood, 2017, p. 39, para. 9).

Margret Wintermantel, professor of psychology and President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) expressed her concern about the possible reduction of research collaboration and exchanges of students and academics, stating: "I do not know at which point I should begin, but the networks of researchers that were developed in the last 30 years are very important… we have a lot of publications in co-operation between German and British researchers and other researchers. We fear that the quality of research conducted with institutions such as the Max Planck Institute and DAAD will— *schaden nehmen* [will be damaged] … we fear the number of German students who would love to go the United Kingdom will have problems" (Wintermantel, 2017, p. 24, para. 7 & p. 25, para. 1 & 6).

In their narratives, most participants stressed the significance of international partnerships for their institutions and highlighted their international exchanges. An analysis of the websites of the participants' institutions corroborates the importance that their universities give to international collaboration. Partnerships across the globe are evident in the websites and recruitment materials of most UK universities, which show multiple international endeavors. The website of the University of Cambridge includes the following statement: "The University of Cambridge is a highly international community. One-third of all full-time students at the University and nearly two-thirds of all post-graduate students are from countries outside the UK, as are most of Cambridge's 4,000 post-doctoral researchers" (Global Cambridge, 2016, para. 1).

Potential Decline in the Number of European Union Students

Participants recognize that students from different backgrounds provide important contributions to the learning experience and to the campus environment. One of the common concerns shared by the participants was the anticipated decline in the number of students coming from continental Europe as a result of Brexit. During the House of Commons meeting, Barnard (2017) pointed out that there was already a decline in applications from European Union students at the University of Cambridge, stating: "This year at Cambridge we have seen a 14% reduction in the number of applications from the European Union at undergraduate level" (Barnard, 2017,

p. 14, para. 6). It is important to acknowledge that studying at Cambridge is the dream of many students and that turning down the opportunity is a significant event. According to Professor Barnard, the university surveyed potential students who had declined to come to Cambridge at postgraduate level, and there were, among other factors, concerns about an "anti-immigrant sentiment" in the UK and "uncertainty over future research collaboration" (Barnard, 2017, p. 15, para. 1).

As previously discussed, the number of European Union student applications to universities in the United Kingdom declined after the Brexit referendum (Ríos, 2017). This was extensively reported in the media and was one of the sub-themes that emerged in the interviews. According to one media article, a Welsh university experienced the withdrawal of the applications of "more than 100 prospective European students" (One Hundred Cancel, 2016, para. 1).

Expressing his apprehension about the effect of the Brexit referendum on prospective international students, Fitt (2017) indicated in his testimony to the House of Commons that a polling after the Brexit referendum showed that: "43% of prospective international students from all over the world felt that Brexit had affected their decision to study in the UK and, of those students, 83% said it made them less likely to study in the UK" (Fitt, 2017, p. 15, para. 2).

On February 1, 2017 the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service in the UK (UCAS) released a study of undergraduate applications that were filed by the 15 January deadline, which is considered a reliable indicator of the number of students coming to UK higher education for the year 2017. In its study, UCAS indicates that there was a decline in European Union applicants to United Kingdom higher education institutions, specifying that the number of applications from European Union candidates had "decreased by 7% to 42,070" (UCAS, 2017, para. 4).

The potential decline in the number of international students, applying from countries outside the European Union, became another sub-theme in the participants' narratives. International students from around the world, in particular ethnic minorities, have communicated their apprehensions about the climate towards foreigners across the United Kingdom. According to media reports, this climate has deteriorated since the Brexit referendum. In their narratives, some of the participants voiced their concerns about the environment for international students, particularly on the safety of these students when they go outside campus. Participants indicated that international students and their families needed assurance of being accepted and welcomed. If international students are worried about their own safety, they could decide to select a different country for their studies.

A Climate of Tension for International Scholars & Students

The outcome of the referendum became a pretext for racist and extremist individuals to attack immigrants and foreigners, given that the rhetoric of some politicians provoked resentment against people in these groups. International students, international academics, and their families were affected by the upsurge of hate crime. They were perceived as foreigners, particularly if

they were from an ethnic minority group or if they had an accent different from the local population (Ríos, 2017).

Participants conveyed distress about how these nationwide incidents could impact their communities and campus climate. University officials made statements supporting international students and minorities and condemning racist incidents. Lord Bilimoria, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, stated: "The referendum itself has unleashed a wave of hate crime and vitriol directed towards foreign migrants, EU and non-EU alike" (Bilimoria, 2017, para. 7).

Police reports revealed that racist and xenophobic incidents escalated immediately after the referendum. The BBC published an article about the flood of hate crime, which included a chart summarizing the statistics of hate crimes reported to the police. There was a 57% increase of hate crimes in the 4 days after the Brexit referendum (Kelly, August 10, 2016). The media across the UK reported the escalation in hate crime incidents. There were multiple reports about how some minority groups had become the target of hate crime across the UK (Burnett, 2016; Kelly, 2016; "Mosque in Cumbernauld," 2016; "Olympic Athlete," 2016; Sherwood, 2016; Townsend, 2016; Weaver, 2016). The National Police Chiefs' Council recounted 6,193 hate related crimes across the United Kingdom from June 16, the week before the Brexit referendum, through July 14, three weeks after the referendum (NPCC, 2016, para.1). There were media reports indicating that the week after the Brexit referendum "more than 300 hate crime incidents were reported to a national online portal" (York, 2016, para. 2).

The media reports about the wave of hate crime in the UK became international news and crossed the Atlantic. An article in The Washington Post described the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in the UK, indicating that "the xenophobic passions unleashed by the Brexit vote have created a new normal of fear and intimidation for the country's approximately 8.5 million foreign-born residents" (Witte, 2016, para. 3). According to the *Office for National Statistics,* in the year 2016, the overall UK population was estimated to be about 65 million (ONS, 2016).

Even renowned individuals such as Olympic athlete Jazmin Sawyers, BBC presenter Trish Adudu, and Lord Bilimoria, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham and Member of Parliament, experienced incidents of hate (Bilimoria, 2016; Hate Crime, 2016; Olympic Athlete, 2016). Addressing the Parliament, Lord Bilimoria stated: "I have lived in this country since I came here from India as a 19-year-old student in the early 80s. In 35 years I have never experienced any hate crime except for this year—and this year I have received it in abundance" (Bilimoria, 2016, para 9).

In some university towns and campuses, foreign-born residents and ethnic minorities experienced antagonism and aggressions. UK universities have had, for some time, "Equality and Diversity Units;" these offices have made clear the rules against hate crime. In some universities, anti-hate events were organized in the aftermath of the referendum. For example, the University of Oxford held an anti-bullying week organized by the Chemistry department and the "Equality & Diversity Unit" emphasizing the value of diversity: "Our staff and students come from over 140 countries and we are proud that modern Oxford is increasingly diverse … we

work with colleagues (both staff and students) across the University to make sure that our community is inclusive and welcoming for everyone" (Oxford, 2016, para. 1).

In another example of a campus responding to diversity and inclusion concerns, the Cambridge Polish Studies department organized a panel discussion on the challenges faced by the Polish community as a result of Brexit. The explanation of the purpose of the panel discussion included the following statement: "Millions of EU nationals - including almost a million Poles - living and working in the UK face a period of great uncertainty, with 'Brexit' negotiations perhaps set to commence in 2017. At the same time, anti-migrant sentiment has been on the rise in Britain, with a significant spike in hate crimes after the referendum, especially against Poles" (Cambridge Polish Studies, 2016, para. 1).

The Oxford City Council expressed its concern about the rise of hate incidents after a Muslim woman reported an incident of hate in the city of Oxford. Council members were distressed that minority individuals had become a target of racial intolerance as a result of the rhetoric against immigrants used during the Brexit campaign. In its Minutes for the July 2016 meeting, the Oxford City Council made a cross party motion condemning the rise in hate crimes. The cross party motion states that Brexit: "has stimulated a wave of hostility towards migrants and ethnic minorities … We are particularly concerned by the reported rise in racism, xenophobia and hate crimes since the referendum, and wish to place on record our condemnation of such crimes …" (Oxford City Council, 2016, pp. 6-7).

The reported reduction of European Union student applications to British universities after the referendum prompted university leaders to issue declarations regarding the worth of international students to the academic life of British institutions, stating that "European students continue to be welcome at UK universities and that their contribution to academic life is invaluable. More than 125,000 EU students are currently studying at universities across the UK and they make an important cultural and academic contribution to campus life" (Goodfellow, 2017, para. 6).

Apprehensions about the Loss of Talented Students and Researchers

British universities have raised their prestige and ranking by pursuing excellent students and faculty from every corner of the world, and this has brought multicultural perspectives to the institutions; the highest ranked universities in the UK have an extraordinary concentration of international talent in many of their programs. British universities have been increasing their international recruitment efforts in recent years with "aggressive international student recruitment" strategies (Nicol, 2012, p. 412). The recruiting efforts have brought international students to British universities even in remote areas of the country. There are some programs in which international students and researchers are the majority (McIvor, 2016). Participants in the study voiced apprehension about the potential decline in the quality of programs that rely on international researchers and that attract extremely talented international students. A number of the authors and the literature reviewed have pointed out similar issues (Adams, 2016; Barnard, 2017; Burns, 2016; Ríos, 2017; Royal Society, 2016).

Professor Catherine Barnard, an expert in EU Law, from the University of Cambridge referred to the enormous talent that European Union students bring to the UK, especially to certain science and exact science fields: "They bring excellent quality. Trinity is the largest of the Cambridge colleges and it is also number one in the league tables of the colleges for performance. The reason for that is largely attributable to Trinity's brilliance in maths [sic] and that brilliance is much to do with the input of our Hungarian, Polish and Romanian students" (Barnard, 2017, p. 3, para. 3).

International students contribute to the learning experience of British students, who also benefit from opportunities to study in other countries on exchange visits. An example mentioned by three of the participant is the Erasmus program, which over the years, has helped British students to study abroad and to learn other languages. One of the participants anticipated that with Brexit, UK students will have reduced opportunities to interact with international students or to study in continental Europe. There is a wide consensus among academics regarding the importance of British students being exposed to other languages and cultures. Kohl (2016) articulated her distress about how Brexit will impact the opportunities of British students to learn foreign languages and value other cultures: "[O]ur young people have been sold short on language skills and the breadth of cultural understanding that comes from learning about other cultures. In the years ahead, it will be more important than ever to nurture an appreciation of diversity and cultural agility" (Kohl, 2016, para. 5).

Outstanding international students and scholars have worldwide options; research institutions in continental Europe or Asia would be delighted to hire the best researchers currently working in the UK. Professor Paul O'Prey, Vice-Chancellor, University of Roehampton has written: "Our success as a sector has been built on our ability to attract the most talented students and academics from around Europe. The risk of losing our access to this talent pool is, I believe, the biggest threat that Brexit presents to our universities" (O'Prey, 2016, para. 5). Some of the concerns shared by the participants mirrored Vice-Chancellor O'Prey's insights as they had apprehensions that their universities could lose some of the brightest students and faculty.

British academics have established collaborative research linkages with colleagues in their fields, and a substantial number of international academics work in UK universities. British universities are "dependent on their ties to Europe: 1 in 3 academics in UK universities are foreign, and EU residents make up a significant proportion of that" (Bilimoria, 2017, para. 4). British academics value their international research associates and their contributions. As stated by Vice-Chancellor O'Prey: "We need to ensure that academics and their families can continue to come here to work – and that British academics continue to have access to and influence within European research networks and collaborations" (O'Prey, 2016, para. 5). International research collaboration and student exchanges were definitely important for every participant in the study.

Dr. Julia Goodfellow, President of *Universities UK* and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kent stated: "We want to play a role in working with international counterparts to

address the great global challenges of our age, to seek out and work with the best minds wherever they are" (Goodfellow, 2016, p. 7, para. 3). Vice-Chancellor O'Prey continued: "But we need to go further and remove unhelpful barriers to students coming to the UK from outside the EU too. These students enrich the learning experience of all students, and provide an influential network for British students" (O'Prey, 2016, para. 7). Not only in the literature, but from the participants' narratives there was an overall consensus that the participation of international students is helpful in many ways for British students.

While the aftermath of the Brexit referendum has presented challenges to universities in the UK, institutions are committed to build on their internationally recognized prestige and to continue collaborating globally. Multiple initiatives focused on international issues have emerged at institutional and system-wide levels. The leading organization of higher education institutions, *Universities UK,* has included in its strategic priorities doubling UK students' international mobility, increasing global education partnerships, and achieving a global research impact grounded on international research collaboration (UUK, 2018). A branch of *Universities UK, Universities UK International (UUKi),* was created to support the internationalization and international activities of 136 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As the *Universities UK* president explains: "We are best when we are outward looking, globally networked and welcoming to the world" (Goodfellow, 2016, p. 7, para. 3).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has explored the anticipated impact of Brexit on the internationalization of United Kingdom universities. The qualitative findings presented are just a snapshot of the insights of academics into how Brexit could impact higher education institutions. Numerous concerns about a possible decline in international students and scholars were found. Most serious concerns expressed were about the deterioration of civility and growth of hostility for foreigners across the country, which affects international students and academics. It was found that UK universities value the presence of international students and scholars in their institutions, a presence which is the result of years of recruitment effort. Participants acknowledged that UK students and faculty receive enormous benefits from their interaction with their international peers. There is a recognition among the participants that the quality of British universities is linked to the talent that institutions have been able to gather from throughout the world. International faculty and students bring a treasure of cultural paradigms that enrich teaching and learning in United Kingdom universities. The myriad of languages spoken by international students and scholars promote interest in learning foreign languages. The presence of international scholars in British universities also enhances campus life, bringing a global perspective to research endeavors and an international dimension to classroom discussions.

The concerns expressed throughout this paper seem aggravated by participants' sense of not knowing what will happen and the uncertainty of the impact of what may come on higher education. One of the limitations of this study is that the full effect that Brexit will have on the UK university system simply cannot yet be known. The British government is still in the process

of deciding how to proceed, and is not possible to predict the outcomes. The findings presented here should be tested in time, both qualitatively and quantitatively, after the United Kingdom separation from the European Union has actually occurred. Suggestions for further research include the study of the financial impact of Brexit in UK higher education and the economic impact on universities of losing European funding for research; further quantitative and qualitative research is also needed about the participation of international students and scholars in UK higher education. These areas were beyond the boundaries of this study.

The responses of participants in this study demonstrate that academics recognize that there are important challenges ahead in order to sustain research collaboration and other academic exchanges with EU institutions. Triangulated information collected from a variety of sources corroborate the participants concerns. The challenges forecasted by participants can be summarized by what professor Bhopal has written: "In the current post-Brexit climate, marred by insecurity, fragility and risk, universities need to communicate their wider values and commitment to engaging with heterogeneous communities of students" (Bhopal, 2017, para. 8). In light of these challenges, British universities have imperative responsibilities. As a Cambridge professor has stated: "More than ever, it will be the job of universities to champion the values of openness, tolerance and mutual cooperation, and ensure that young people can feel part of the changing world rather than being isolated from it" (Kohl, 2016, para. 4).

The United Kingdom has a remarkable higher education system facing numerous challenges in the next few years as the process of Brexit is resolved. As I conclude the writing of this paper, the United Kingdom continues to struggle with decisions about Brexit and the relationship of the UK with continental Europe.

University leaders and the professoriate will play a central role in protecting the internationalization and values of multiculturalism in their institutions. Future research will be needed after political decisions are made, to reexamine their impact in universities across the United Kingdom.

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