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University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on EU staff and students

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University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on EU staff and students

By Diane Stanley

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Author's declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Education has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

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Abstract Diane Stanley

University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on EU staff and students

The Brexit referendum in June 2016, which led to the UK's decision to leave the European Union (EU), generated significant concern and anxiety within the United Kingdom's (UK) Higher Education (HE) sector. The potential impact on EU student and staff recruitment, EU research funding, and collaborations with Europe was uncertain, as many Brexit policies and procedures had not been considered by the government when the Leave outcome was announced. EU staff and students working and studying in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were left contemplating their future in the UK.

This thesis examines the impact of Brexit through Charles Wright Mills' theoretical perspective of The Sociological Imagination. Employing a Mixed Method Research (MMR) approach, it analyses macro-level quantitative data on EU staff, students, and research funding, alongside qualitative micro-level research on the pull factors that attracted EU staff and students to England. It also explores the push factors relating to Brexit that may impact their future decisions on where to study and work. The research was conducted from 2020 to 2021.

The findings indicate that Brexit has led to a decline in the number of EU students choosing to study in England. This trend is likely to continue as other EU countries increase the number of degree programmes delivered in English. EU academic staff have been affected more than EU professional services staff, as many academic staff contracts are linked to research funding. Research funding has declined; International collaborations have also declined as many EU countries are now hesitant to partner with the UK. The diversity and inclusivity of the university environment are diminishing, as the number of Europeans working and studying in the sector declines.

This research provides a unique perspective on the effects of Brexit on a university in the Southwest of England, focusing on the lived experiences of EU staff and students in the region. It offers valuable insights into the factors arising from Brexit that influence EU staff and students' choice of where they work and study. These findings can guide university policymakers in implementing measures to encourage EU citizens to work and study in England.

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1. Introduction

This thesis aims to understand how Brexit has affected university sustainability in times of change. It focuses on EU staff and student recruitment and retention, EU research funding, and the impact of Brexit on EU staff and students who work and study at a university in the Southwest of England.

Brexit posed several threats to UK universities, impacting various aspects of their operations and standing. Key concerns included the loss of EU funding, a decline in EU student recruitment, and adverse effects on staff recruitment, international collaboration, and research. Brexit complicated joint research projects, academic exchanges, and shared initiatives due to increased bureaucratic hurdles and reduced funding opportunities. Ultimately, these challenges could affect the reputation and global standing of UK universities. At the time of the Brexit referendum, Universities UK (2018b) expressed their concern and called for research into the following key themes: 1) The reputation of the UK as a 'collaborator of choice' in vital research, 2) Access to research funding, 3) Losing academic talent from the EU, 4) A decline in EU student enrolments and its impact on the UK economy in terms of growth and job generation.

This thesis addresses the research gap identified by Universities UK by examining how Brexit has reshaped EU staff and student experiences at a university in the Southwest of England. By providing an in-depth analysis of the challenges this study aims to offer insights into the broader implications for university sustainability in a post-Brexit environment. Understanding these impacts is crucial as universities navigate a changing educational landscape, and this research provides valuable insights into how institutions can adapt to maintain their global standing, attract, and retain talent, and secure research funding amidst ongoing uncertainties.

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with EU staff and students, and quantitative analysis of recruitment and funding data. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of Brexit on university operations and individual experiences.

Since the end of the Brexit transition period, significant developments have occurred, including the implementation of new immigration and funding policies. This thesis considers

these contexts and their implications for EU staff and students, providing an analysis of the ongoing challenges and opportunities facing UK higher education institutions.

The UK Government initiated the Brexit referendum without fully anticipating the consequences of a majority Leave vote. This left EU citizens working, studying, and living in the UK with many unanswered questions. At the time of writing, which began in earnest in October 2020, the UK had left the EU single market as of January 31, 2021. Although an outline Brexit trade deal had been agreed, considerable uncertainty remained regarding its impact on EU staff, students, and research funding, as detailed policies had not yet been finalised (Courtois, 2018; Mayhew, 2017; Universities UK, 2019c).

This chapter includes 1.1 Context, 1.2 Rationale for this research, 1.3 Research Question and 1.4 Structure of the thesis.

1.1. Context

The UK Higher Education (HE) sector has seen major change in recent years with the increase of higher student tuition fees to £9000 in 2013 (BIS, 2010); the lifting of the student number cap (Hillman 2014); the Brexit referendum in 2016, and the introduction of the new regulatory body for Higher Education, the Office for Students (OfS) in 2018. These government initiatives have all had an impact on how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate. HEIs are striving to provide an excellent student experience, a quality education, and a research environment where new learning and knowledge are embraced. Universities must balance their priorities to ensure they remain viable. The White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, (BIS, 2011) reiterated the need for financial sustainability for UK HEIs; however, continued sustainability in the HE sector relates not only to financial viability but to social, economic, and environmental factors (Jones, Selby & Sterling, 2010). It was perceived that financial sustainability would be achieved through marketisation and competition as HEIs would be vying against each other for business (BIS, 2011). This would create a market driven HE environment whereby students could choose where to spend their money based on the information available to them (BIS, 2011).

The change in funding model began in 1998, from government funding through taxation, to the introduction of student tuition fees. Before 1998 the government funded higher education; however, this was unsustainable as the demand for higher education was growing

(Dearing, 1997). In 1998 tuition fees in England were £1,000 per annum which had to be paid upfront by students. This was increased in 2006 to £3,000 per year, however at this time students were able to access tuition fee loans. In 2012, the Coalition Government raised tuition fees to £9,000 per year and in the same year the maintenance grant was abolished (Hubble & Bolton, 2018). In 2013, the government decided to relax the cap on student numbers entering into higher education in 2014/15 and removed the student cap entirely in 2015/16. Previously there had been strict controls on the number of students accepted into HE; HEIs were fined for over-recruitment (Hillman, 2014).

Tuition fees have been frozen at £9250 since 2017; they have not risen in line with inflation meaning that universities must deliver more with less income (Weale, 2023); this is set to continue until 2025 (Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2022). The competition to attract more students, changes to immigration rules post Brexit, and the fact that the number of 18- to 24-year-olds in the UK has dropped year-on-year from 2015 until 2022, has caused increasing financial pressures for many universities (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Institutions that received a large percentage of the funding from the state rather than research grants suddenly found their income had dropped substantially. This loss of income has meant universities have had to reassess what they offer to ensure they attract as many students as possible (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2017).

The constant pressure of government policy changes and the marketisation of the sector have proved to be challenging for English HEIs. Many providers have had to act quickly and ensure they have a diversified operating model. The Greenwich School of Management (GSM) London went into Administration on 30th July 2019[3], this resulted in 3500 students and 147 staff members being affected. The University and College Union (UCU) union blamed the failure of GSM on the marketisation of education.

> 'The college has not been able to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of students to generate enough revenue to be sustainable' (BBC News, 2019a, p.1).

In 2018, three universities were on the brink of bankruptcy and had to secure short-term loans to help bridge the gap in funds until they received the tuition fees from students (Vaughan, 2018). Nick Hillman the Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute stated that

[3] GSM London was a private college that was not regulated by the Office for Students (OfS).

no UK university has gone bankrupt, and many were in strong financial positions. However, many vice-chancellors believe that the current funding model is unsustainable if universities wish to maintain the current level of quality (Hillman, 2022).

The Brexit referendum was initiated by the Conservative Party in 2016. David Cameron, pledged to hold a referendum on the UK's EU membership if his party was re-elected in the next general election (Bale, 2022; Schnapper, 2017). Following their victory in the election, the date for the Brexit referendum was confirmed for June 23, 2016. The word Brexit is the combination of two words 'Britain and 'Exit,' this phrase signifies the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. The UK voted to leave the EU by a narrow majority 51.9% of the 72.2% of people that voted opted to Leave the EU (The Electoral Commision, 2023).

On 29th March 2017, nine months after the referendum, the UK triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, confirming its desire to leave the EU (Wright, 2018). This action initiated the Brexit Transition period, a two-year negotiation period for a UK Brexit withdrawal agreement to be agreed upon and passed by parliament. Although the initial planned date to leave the EU was 29th March 2019, this date was extended several times. The UK officially left the EU on 31st January 2020 (Blitz, Mance & Barker, 2019). Nearly three and a half years after the referendum in June 2016, Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed the EU Withdrawal Agreement, and it took effect at 11 pm on 31st January 2020 (Walker, 2021).

The Universities UK (2019c) recognised the importance of having EU staff working in UK universities. They acknowledged that EU staff often fill vital skill gaps that cannot be filled by UK nationals. They felt that Brexit could leave the UK in a situation where the country is financially, culturally, and academically worse off. The Universities UK urged leaders to produce answers to the impact of Brexit on EU student and staff recruitment to help inform university policies in the future. During the Brexit transition period, the consensus of many scholars was that Brexit may be harmful and disruptive to the HE sector in the UK, however at the time the impact of was unknown (Marginson, 2017; Marini, 2018a). It was hoped that the Government would quickly address these concerns by making special arrangements for UK HEIs (Bekhradnia & Beech, 2018; Universities UK, 2019b). Marini (2018) identified the need for further research into the lived experiences of EU staff and students currently working in the HE sector; this research aims to fill this gap in knowledge. Brexit could have an impact on the sustainability of HE Institutions in England, therefore it is important to understand

what is meant by sustainability. The focus of research into the HEI sustainability agenda often relates to environmental sustainability in terms of energy use, and the amount of green space available on university campuses. Campus management is often seen as the first part of sustainability however it is important to recognise other factors in higher education sustainability including staff and student well-being, communication, and sustainable development in teaching and the curriculum (Jones, Selby & Sterling, 2010; Muller-Christ *et al.*, 2014). Early definitions of sustainability such as 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' are considered sufficiently vague to enable people to interpret this how they want to (Bruntland, 1987, p.8). For years sustainability in the HE sector was perceived as relating to the financial aspects of business alone, however, this view is changing and although financial sustainability is important this will not guarantee a sustainable solution (Purvis, Mao & Robinson, 2019).

My research is not purely concerned with sustainability in terms of the environment in which we live or the financial implications. The society, environment, and economy pillars of sustainability must all be addressed to provide a sustainable solution (Purvis, Mao & Robinson, 2019). My research focuses on two of the three pillars required: the societal and economic pillars. The 'Society' pillar relates to the stakeholders and how the community operates. The economic pillar relates to financial viability; however, this is not linked to profit alone, it also relates to the purpose of an organisation. The people, society, and the educational environment in which staff and students are exposed are as important as the financial pillar (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

The three-pillar sustainability lens provides a way for HEIs to review what is important to them and help them achieve their strategic aims and objectives (Wals & Jickling, 2002). Social justice issues are equally as important as finance and environmental issues. To be truly sustainable all factors need to be considered including communities/social, financial/economic, and environmental issues (Browne, 2010; Clugston & Calder, 1999). If one aspect is out of balance with the other, then it will be harder to maintain a truly sustainable solution. For the UK HE sector to survive and flourish a solution that is far more reaching than purely financial is required. Research funding, and the ability to attract expert international staff and students are vital to the growth and sustainability of UK universities. Universities need to understand the issues that are affecting people here and now (Žalėnienė & Pereira,

2021). This information can be used to inform universities on how to manage change and restrict the impact of change on their business.

> 'For universities to become sustainability leaders and change drivers, they must ensure that the needs of present and future generations be better understood and built upon' (Lozano *et al.*, 2013, p.1).

Many HEIs in the UK have a strategic goal relating to sustainability or have committed to the sustainable goals set by the United Nations (2020). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four, Quality Education[4] aims to ensure everyone has access to a high-quality education system. Goal four is aimed at all levels of education as a quality education is seen as the route to socioeconomic mobility which helps play an important part in escaping poverty (United Nations, 2020). Universities play a key role in the dissemination of knowledge, providing opportunities for innovation and creation, encouraging a more environmentally friendly approach, and promoting social and national unity. Stakeholder relationship management is vital to social sustainability, to embrace the term sustainability HEIs need to ensure stakeholder expectations are satisfied i.e., staff, students, government, and regulatory bodies such as the Office for Students (OfS). The quality of the relationship between a university and its stakeholders helps to define the level of social sustainability within an institution.

> 'A socially responsible university assumes behaviours that seek to involve stakeholders to better understand their expectations and priorities and transfer these into defining the strategy and goals, into monitoring the objectives in view of promoting the activities and accountability, to enhance a community-university engagement' (Salvioni, Franzoni & Cassano, 2017, p.3).

Universities must understand the factors arising from Brexit that affect their stakeholders. Gaining this insight will enable them to develop strategic plans and policies focused on attracting and retaining EU staff and students. This research aims to address this gap in knowledge.

This research is underpinned by Charles Wright Mills' (1959) theoretical framework taken from *The Sociological Imagination;* Mills theory suggests public issues and personal matters

[4] There are 17 UN sustainable development goals to transform the world.

are closely linked. To fully understand a situation, one needs to connect personal experience to societal issues, a person may feel alone, anxious, and uncertain on an individual level and not realise that their feelings are connected to wider societal issues (Mills, 1959). Mills feels it is important to understand the social world in conjunction with the systems that surround a person to fully understand society. Having a sociological imagination enables the person to step outside of themselves and view their feelings in context with what is happening around them (Mills, 1959).

Mills' (1959) theoretical perspective remains relevant today, over sixty years later. It helps individuals understand how their personal challenges are influenced by larger societal structures. It encourages people to critically evaluate the world around them and comprehend the intricate relationship between themselves and society. One of Mills' primary concerns was that media spread misinformation that manipulated public opinion; this concern is even more pertinent today in the digital age.

Brexit is a government initiative that has, and is, continuing to cause concern at a societal level particularly with regards to the impact on EU staff and student recruitment, and the impact on EU research funding and collaboration. Through the use of Mills' theoretical framework an analysis has been carried out looking at the macro societal level impact and the micro individual level impact of Brexit. This research provides valuable insights into the experiences of EU citizens living, working, and studying in England which in turn provides a greater understanding of how Brexit may affect the HE sector in the future.

The HEI chosen for this research was based on the following selection criteria; size of institution, location, funding streams, and whether it had a significant proportion of EU staff and students. Although this research is based on one HEI in the Southwest of England the research findings are relevant to all universities in England as they are subject to the same government funding and policies, including those relating to Brexit. The wider implications of Brexit in terms of travel, immigration, employment and research collaboration are all relevant, irrespective of the location of the HEI.

1.2. Rationale for this research

I returned to higher education as a mature student after working in industry for many years. In my late thirties, the decision to stop working and studying was a huge decision for me, but

it was one of the best decisions I have made. I enjoyed acquiring new knowledge and working with other students and staff members in a university setting. When I returned to education I embraced the learning experience, I particularly enjoyed mixing with different people from diverse backgrounds and cultures to my own. Learning in an environment where different viewpoints and experiences were welcomed was important to me. When the Brexit referendum was mooted by the Government, I was concerned that Brexit would affect the social equilibrium in the UK if the Leave campaign were to succeed. I felt that Brexit could have an impact on future international collaboration and the diversity of both the staff and student population in the higher education sector in England.

In my role as a project manager at a university, I engaged in delivering strategic projects and initiatives that support the key strategic aims of the university. One of the projects I worked on in 2018/19 was to plan for a No-Deal Brexit. This project highlighted the risks posed, and planned mitigating actions to ensure the university was able to operate if a No-Deal Brexit materialised. This project allowed me to see the implications of Brexit on all areas of the university in the event of a no-deal. However, even with a Brexit deal, I could see that universities could be affected in terms of research collaborations, funding, student and staff recruitment and retention. The No-Deal Brexit project highlighted the issues at a strategic risk level. I wanted to understand the implications of Brexit from an EU citizen's point of view. Having had experience of working and studying in a diverse multicultural environment I wanted to understand how Brexit had affected the lives of EU staff and students working and studying in a university setting.

When I started this research in 2017 there had been some preliminary research into the impact of Brexit on the HE sector, see Chapter 2, however, scholars were calling for more research into the impact of Brexit on the HE Sector (Jarvis, 2018; Mayhew, 2017; Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018; Universities UK, 2018b). My research aims to address this gap in knowledge by addressing the aims and objectives outlined below; this will offer a comprehensive understanding of Brexit's impact on a university in the Southwest of England.

1.3. Research question

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the question:

> *What impact has Brexit had on the sustainability of a Higher Education Institute in the Southwest of England in times of change, with a particular emphasis on the impact of Brexit on EU staff and students?*

The following sub-questions highlight the key objectives of the research[5].

SBQ1. What are the current EU staff and student experiences of working, studying, and living In the Southwest of England, highlighting the pull and push factors?

SBQ2. How has Brexit had an impact on the numbers of EU staff and students wanting to work and study in the Southwest of England?

SBQ3. How has Brexit affected research collaborations and the opportunity to attract research funding from the EU?

SBQ4. How is Brexit affecting the sustainability of a university in the Southwest of England?

SBQ5. How does this study contribute to existing scholarship on the impact of Brexit on the Higher Education sector using Charles Wright Mills' theoretical framework?

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes valuable insights into the ongoing discourse on Brexit's repercussions and helps inform strategies to support the HE sector in navigating the post-Brexit landscape.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

The remaining chapters in this thesis include:

Chapter 2 – Situating the Research - The Literature Review

This chapter situates the research in current scholarship in terms of Brexit, the HE Sector in England and the ongoing issues associated with university sustainability in times of change. This chapter explores marketisation and neoliberalism, research funding and collaboration, EU staff and student mobility, Mills' Grand Theory, *The Sociological Imagination* and highlights the research approach.

[5] The data gathering phase of the thesis was between 31st January 2020 and 30th June 2021

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the research with Charles Wright Mills (1959) functional theory that wider political issues cause anxiety and uncertainty when values are threatened. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and methods used to address the research aims and objectives. Additionally, this chapter highlights my positionality in terms of the research.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings: Pull Factors

This chapter highlights the findings from the Mixed Methods Research (MMR) looking at the pull factors that originally attracted EU staff and students to want to work, live and study in England. This chapter highlights the macro level context through the quantitative analysis looking at the data available from HESA on EU staff and student recruitment and research funding. This is followed by the micro-level qualitative analysis of the factors that have influenced EU staff and students' choice of where to work and study.

Chapter 5 – Research Findings: Push Factors

This chapter includes the micro-level qualitative analysis. It highlights the key factors resulting from Brexit that have affected how EU staff and student participants live, work, and study in England post Brexit . It includes the push factors arising from Brexit that may influence the participants' decision whether to remain in England in the future.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings and conclusions in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. This chapter concludes by detailing the future, implications for practice, limitations, challenges and final thoughts, and an epilogue.

2. Situating the research - The Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

I have broken down the literature review into distinct components relevant to my research, focusing on the marketisation and neoliberal discourse, and research funding and collaboration. I explore the reasons behind international students' choice to study and work in the UK. This examination involves an analysis of the pull factors that attract international staff and students to the UK, and the factors that might push them away from the country. The following sections include 2.2 Marketisation and Neoliberalism, 2.3 Research Funding and Collaboration, 2.4 EU Staff and Student Mobility, 2.5 Mills' Grand Theory - The Sociological Imagination, and 2.6 Conclusion.

2.2. Marketisation and Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that prioritises the efficiency of free markets, minimal government intervention, deregulation, privatisation, and reduced public spending. Rooted in classical liberal economic theories, neoliberalism has evolved and been implemented in various forms since the late 20th century. In the 1980s, under the governments of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US, neoliberalism was characterised by a combination of 'cultural conservatism and economic liberalism' (Kandiko, 2010, p. 156). Neoliberal governments advocate for open markets, free trade, reduced state intervention and market deregulation (Morrow & Torres, 2003). This transformation has resulted in the HE sector in England becoming less regulated by the state, thereby granting more autonomy to HEIs in the country. Policies such as higher tuition fees and the removal of the student number cap have led HEIs to compete against each other to attract students and staff. The notion of students as customers emerged with the introduction of higher fees, increased competition, and heightened student expectations (Browne, 2010). This has shifted the system towards being driven by market demand, where success is measured through quantifiable outputs such as university league tables and appraisal systems (Furedi, 2010). Consequently, HEIs are increasingly focused on their reputation and standing in the market. HEIs measure student satisfaction regularly through the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The neoliberal discourse has given rise to an increasingly competitive academic landscape, marked by elevated student expectations and a greater range of choices for

prospective students. In the UK, HEIs engage in fierce competition, vying for prominence in various league tables and university tariff systems. Notable league tables such as the Times Higher (Times Higher Education, 2022), the Guardian (The Guardian, 2023), and the QS World University Rankings (QS, 2023) have become pivotal in the quest to attract both students and staff to universities, (Findlay *et al.*, 2011; Hazelkorn, 2007). League tables provide students with information on student satisfaction, research quality, graduate prospects, and entry standards; this enables students to compare and contrast universities which can help students to 'shortlist' the universities when making their choice of where to study (Matzdor & Greenwood, 2015 p.9).

Marketisation and neoliberal policies can be beneficial to the HE sector in that universities have more autonomy and control over how they operate (Kandiko, 2010). However, this opens the door to an aggressive competitive environment where institutions need to attract as many students as possible, including international students to remain viable (Bolsmann & Miller, 2009). The growth in international students coming to the UK has increased year on year since 2011-12. In 2019-2020 the total international student population was 538,615 which represented 27.5% of the student population (Universities UK, 2021). In 2020-21 the international student number population increased to 605,130 which represented 22% of the total population (Universities UK, 2022a). International students contribute on average £40m to the UK economy; this equates to £390 for each member of the resident population, factoring in all costs (London Economics, 2021). The increase in the popularity of the UK as a place for international students to study has helped the conservative government achieve its aim of reducing the funding to the UK HE sector (Coate, 2009). This is because the funding received from international students has boosted the income of UK HEIs, so they are less reliant on government funding. In 2019, the UK dropped from second place to third place in the most popular place to study for international students; Australia took second place for the first time, with the United States of America being the most popular (Universities UK, 2022a).

Another approach UK HEIs have used to diversify is through Transnational Education (TNE), where educational programmes are delivered by an institution in one country to students in another. This is seen as a way to increase the international profile for UK universities (Healey, 2023). There has been considerable growth in TNE partnerships in the UK over the last 10 years; In 2017/18 approximately 700,000 students were studying in their home country for a

UK HE qualification (Healey, 2020). TNE has partially addressed criticisms of internationalism related to the sustainable development goals by reducing the carbon footprint associated with international students traveling to the UK to study. It retains knowledge within the country, limits the outflow of students to other nations, and deflects criticism that youth in other countries are being exploited (Healey, 2023).

Neo-liberals argue that there has been a drive against the public provision of higher education in support of the idea that students should pay more for their education through higher tuition fees (Kandiko, 2010; Tilak, 2008). The debate on whether students see themselves as consumers continues; the fact that students are now paying for a large percentage of their education means that students' expectations are high, they expect a high-quality experience, value for money, and a choice of where they can study (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2017). The student experience has become an important factor for UK HEIs; the ability to attract and retain students is vital to the sustainability of UK institutions.

The discourse of education has deep historical roots, evolving over centuries as societies developed and formalised systems of teaching and learning. It benefits society by creating informed citizens, driving economic growth, fostering social cohesion, supporting personal development, enabling adaptation to change, promoting global understanding, and advocating for social justice. Through education, societies become more resilient, equitable, and capable of addressing the challenges of the present and future (Dewey, 1916; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

The discourse of education as a benefit to society and a right for everyone has come into question. The Neoliberal view that education is a commodity to be bought and sold does not consider the social value of higher education and this is dangerous for future prosperity (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2017). Higher education protects culture, is a place where learning and creativity are encouraged, and allows space for people to develop new social values and experiences. The value of the social experience, cultural and academic values cannot be underestimated in society, they cannot be traded off for the commodification of HE (Tilak, 2008).

> ‘It is necessary to protect the integrity of research, to preserve the much cherished educational and social values and, in brief, to resurrect the public good nature of education’ (Tilak, 2008, p.462).

The neoliberal view of education represents not just a commodification but also a shift towards individualism. In modern societies characterised by increasing individualisation, individuals are expected to take personal responsibility for their own success and well-being. Within this framework, education is increasingly viewed as a personal investment. People are encouraged to manage their own educational journeys, often perceiving education as a commodity that can be purchased to enhance personal and professional prospects. This perspective reflects a broader shift towards treating education as a tool for achieving individual goals in a competitive and uncertain market (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Following the introduction of higher tuition fees in the UK in 2012/2013 some students do consider themselves to be consumers of higher education and expect value for money. Other students think that it is difficult to see education as a product which can be bought and sold. Education is the experience of sharing knowledge and as an individual, you have the choice of whether to engage in that process. Although students felt that they should see an equitable return for the price they pay, this view varies from those students who believe that they are consumers to those who disassociate themselves from this notion (Tomlinson, 2016). This research analyses the factors affecting EU staff and students’ choice of where to work and study with particular emphasis on the impact of Brexit on their decision-making process.

2.3. Research Funding and Collaboration

Research funding is a major source of income for HEIs in the UK, in 2015-16, UK institutions received £7.8 billion in research income, 11% of this was from EU sources (Universities UK., 2017). In 2017-18, the UK received 17.7% research income from overseas with 11.3% from the EU (Universities UK, 2019d). In 2019-20, 23.4% of research funding was from overseas, however, during this period, EU funding, which made up half of the UK’s international funding has decreased by 11% since 2018-19 (Universities UK, 2021). In 2020/2021 EU research funding contributed £1.86 billion to the UK economy, and £1 billion to GDP (Gross Domestic Product), creating 19,000 jobs across the UK.

Following the Brexit referendum, concerns emerged among academic institutions and scholars, primarily regarding the potential loss of EU research funding and its implications for international research partnerships (Courtois *et al.*, 2018; Marini, 2018a; Mayhew, 2017). The UK holds a crucial role in research collaborations, its HEIs and researchers have earned a prestigious reputation for contributing to the quality and global standing of European research. In 2017, 54% of UK research publications involved international co-authors, highlighting the UK's commitment to global research (Universities UK, 2018a). Collaborations with UK counterparts are recognised as advantageous for European research, underscored by the fact that, in 2018, the UK had the highest number of European Research Council (ERC) Principal Investigators (PIs) (Courtois, 2018).

The UK was the top research collaborator for Germany and the second collaborator for Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Poland, and Switzerland in 2017 (Courtois, 2018). Following the Brexit referendum, the UK may not have the opportunity to collaborate with other EU countries, so the future is difficult to predict. Other EU countries have been hesitant to involve UK partners because of the uncertainty surrounding the impact of Brexit; there was also fear that the EU would lose the UK's leadership in research projects, collaborations, and joint projects (Courtois, 2018). Although Germany was ranked first in terms of the amount of EU funding received from 2014-2016 the UK had more ERC PIs suggesting that the UK has more lead applicants for research grants than other European countries (European Research Council, 2022). Post Brexit, Courtois (2018) suggested that Germany may benefit from the UK's withdrawal from the EU in terms of the amount of research funding it receives and the number of lead applicants they have. This was considered to be an opportunity for Germany to take the lead in all aspects of EU research (Courtois, 2018).

EU funding is a major contributor to the UK's economy, it helps to promote collaboration with international partners, social mobility and provides economies of scale. The UK's research base has benefitted from Horizon 2020; 13,903 grants have been agreed with a value of €24.8 billion (European Commission, 2018). The UK has secured €5.1 billion of funding to date over the 7 years from 2014-2020 (UK Government, 2018a).

The Horizon 2020 programme, referred to as H2020 from this point on, was the biggest EU-funded research and innovation programme that provided circa €80 billion of funding

between the years 2014-2020. The primary goal of Horizon 2020 was to drive economic growth and create jobs by fostering innovation and advancing scientific excellence across various sectors (Horizon, 2022). England received €11,9bn in EU funding and the Southwest of England received €1.66bn in funding as of 6th September 2022 (Horizon, 2022). H2020 has many sub programmes one of which is the ERC. The UK has benefited from the programme with the second-highest share of programmes funded through the programme and the highest proportion of participants taking part in projects funded by H2020 (Horizon, 2022). H2020 removed the bureaucracy from international collaboration however was seen by some to favour influential HEIs that have established networks (Galsworthy & McKee, 2013). Newcomers are less likely to get funding than others which constitutes a situation where 'the club is closed to those less fortunate' (Enger, 2018, p.884). However, the UK's membership has helped to facilitate collaboration through international research opportunities and has increased the standard of research which has helped to attract the best staff (House of Lords, 2019).

Horizon Europe has now replaced H2020 with a budget of €95.5 billion from 2021 – 2027 (European Commission, 2022b). At the time of writing this thesis the UK's membership of Horizon Europe was that of a third country; the European Commission blocked the UK from being a full member of Horizon Europe due to the ongoing issues with the Northern Ireland Protocol and disagreements over a hard border (Horizon, 2023; UK Research and Innovation, 2023). This has caused concern and there have been calls from leading scientists to the European Commission and the UK Government to keep Brexit politics out of science as the UK faces being cut off from the biggest research funding programme available. Even though the UK has offered to fill the funding gap if an agreement cannot be reached, international collaboration and involvement in large-scale research discovery projects could not be replicated with a UK programme (Samarasekara, 2022).

The ERC forms part of the Horizon Europe programme with a budget of €16 billion. After Germany, the UK was the second largest recipient of the ERC receiving €6.9 billion of the total funding under the H2020 programme. British universities have become dependent on EU funding to progress their research activity (Fernandez, 2021). At the time of the Brexit referendum, the UK Government promised to guarantee funding for existing EU projects. However, this did not provide the guarantee sought by many British Institutions for EU research funding in the future (Cressey, 2016). Post Brexit, if an ERC grant is awarded to a UK-

based researcher, they have the choice to either relocate to another EU country or decline the funding (Amsen, 2022). The impact of this decision has been felt throughout the UK HE sector as the funding from the ERC and Horizon Europe has dropped substantially (Amsen, 2022; Mayhew, 2022). The UK, which prior to Brexit had been a highly sought-after research partner is now pitied and ridiculed by other nations; this raises major concerns for the future of international research collaborations, research funding and social mobility (Courtois *et al.*, 2018).

2.4. EU Student and Staff Mobility

Internationalisation is a core component of UK higher education; from 2012/13 to 2016/17 the number of EU students studying in UK HEIs rose by 8% (HESA, 2018). The contribution per EU student to the UK economy was £87,000 per year in 2015/2016 (HEPI, 2018). International students contribute to a diverse environment, bring unique skills and talent, and contribute to the UK economy (Falkingham *et al.*, 2021). A high level of student mobility is seen as a marker of good quality and prestige for a university (Mechtenberg & Strausz, 2008). In 2018-19 there were 0.34 million international students and 0.14 million EU students contributing to the UK economy; 18% of academic staff and 7% of professional services staff had an EU nationality (Universities UK, 2019a). In 2018, 16 billion was generated through UK revenue from education exports and transnational activity, an increase of 46.7% since 2010 (Department for Education, 2020).

The Sorbonne Declaration in 1999 set out to increase social mobility and improve employability (Allegre *et al.*, 1998). The Bologna Agreement was introduced as part of this initiative which in turn led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) common framework (European Higher Education Area, 2022). The Bologna process aimed to make higher education accessible and inclusive and to raise the profile of Europe to the rest of the world. It ensured that there was mutual recognition of qualifications and introduced the 3-tier educational system of bachelor, master's, and doctoral level studies. It also ensured that there was a system of quality assurance to ensure that the teaching and learning was relevant (European Commission, 2023b). The EHEA aimed to provide greater opportunities for improved social mobility for staff and students, recognition of qualifications and employability through the provision of a common approach to higher education. Originally it was perceived as a platform for 'Europeanisation' following the growth in the number of EU

countries joining (Kushnir & Brooks, 2022, p.2). However, it was not intended solely for EU membership, other non-EU countries were allowed to join as associated members; the framework aimed to link member countries together. The impact of Brexit on the UK's membership[6] of the EHEA is concerning. Brexit may affect the UK's relationship with the rest of Europe, Kushnir and Brooks (2022) recommend that the UK should continue to develop the Europeanism story to ensure unity with the EU nations post-Brexit.

Other social mobility initiatives include the Erasmus programme which was established in 1987. It aimed to increase student mobility through a student exchange programme where students can study abroad at one of the partner institutions (European Commission, 2021). This programme was expanded in 2014 and called Erasmus+, this programme combined all EU schemes relating to education, training, youth, and sport. Erasmus+ is seen as a success story for international student mobility as it enables students to experience another country and it provides a 'warming up' for further study (Jacobone & Moro, 2014, p.325). Students who take the opportunity to travel with the Erasmus+ programme are more likely to return to study in a different country to experience a different culture and way of life (Jacobone & Moro, 2014). Students participating in the Erasmus+ programme felt a feeling of belonging to Europe, they valued the chance to improve their linguistic skills and experience a different culture, this was more important to them than the academic aspects of their exchange (Cairns, 2017; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Soares & Mosquera, 2019). The pull factors in terms of what attracted students to a particular EU country were concentrated around the culture, the general experience, and experiencing a European identity (Lesjak *et al.*, 2015). Basically 'having fun motives' were much more important considerations than finance, place of study, people, travel, or programme of study (Lesjak *et al.*, 2015, p.861). Erasmus+ has helped many students from different backgrounds study abroad and broaden their skills. In 2017, 31,727 EU citizens came to the UK and 16,561 UK students took advantage of the Erasmus+ exchange programme (European Commission, 2022a).

The decision by the UK Government to withdraw from the Erasmus+ programme post-Brexit was met with surprise and was perceived to be another casualty of Brexit (Cairns, 2017). Following the Brexit referendum, the UK decided not to participate in Erasmus+; prior to this

[6] each nation of the UK has adopted a different engagement level with the programme.

the UK held full membership. However, after Brexit the UK was classed as an associated third country[7]. The UK withdrawal from the Erasmus+ programme affects the potential for UK students to experience different cultures and internationalisation (Highman, Marginson & Papatsiba, 2023). At the time of the UK's withdrawal from the programme, the European Commission stated that it regretted the UK's decision to leave as the decision further reduced opportunities for collaboration with the EU in the future (European Commission, 2022a). The Erasmus+ programme has contributed to the UK economy bringing in £420 million a year by incoming students across the country providing the UK with a net profit of £243 million from the Erasmus+ programme (Universities UK, 2020).

Following the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus+ Programme the UK has created a scheme named after the mathematician Alan Turing (UK Government, 2023). The scheme provides UK students with the opportunity to go to any university in the world rather than to EU universities alone. The new scheme has many challenges including social justice in terms of equal opportunities, and the ability of the UK to secure partner institutions to promote mobility. One of the objectives of the Turing Scheme is to encourage participation from disadvantaged groups. However, recent research has shown that HEIs are not explicitly highlighting this on their webpages, which is seen as a missed opportunity (Brooks & Waters, 2023). Additionally, the Turing Scheme does not cover incoming students, creating a risk that overseas institutions may be less willing to partner with the UK (Guibert & Rayón, 2021). Consequently, HEIs must now be proactive in organizing themselves and forging their own strategic partnerships post-Brexit (Highman, Marginson & Papatsiba, 2023).

The potential impact of Brexit on EU recruitment and mobility following Brexit is a concern for HEIs in the UK. According to UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), the student application figures from the EU fell by 4.4% (-2,375 applications) in 2017, reversing the growth seen in 2016 (UCAS, 2017). This indicated a drop in applications in the first year after the Brexit referendum. There had been a slight recovery in the 2018 UCAS cycle of EU applicants with an increase of 2.8% on 2017 figures (UCAS, 2018), however, the overall figure is still lower than prior to the Brexit referendum. Existing scholarship on the impact of Brexit suggests that EU student numbers have remained at similar levels as before (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). However, there have been calls for research to highlight the emerging trends

[7] Countries outside of the EU can be eligible to be associated members of the Erasmus+ programme.

in EU students' inbound mobility through 'word of mouth,' focussing on how personal recommendations and informal networks are shaping their choice of where to study (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018, p.4). My research aims to fill this gap in knowledge by capturing the firsthand narratives of current EU staff and students at a HEI in the Southwest of England. This study will provide valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives, offering a deeper understanding of the real-time impacts of Brexit on the HE sector.

Brexit was also seen as an opportunity for other EU countries to 'poach' EU staff and students who would have otherwise come to the UK to work and study (Courtois, 2018, p.19). Many EU countries were also increasing their provision in the delivery of English-speaking degree programmes in an attempt to attract more international students (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). European nationals working in UK universities make a significant contribution, they are highly skilled, highly educated, and bring an international perspective to their work. The possible impact of Brexit on research funding, UK stability, security, Horizon 2020, and European research collaborations may lead to fewer EU nationals choosing to work in UK HEIs (Universities UK, 2019c). There were 49,530 EU staff working in the UK in 2016/2017, 13,610 Non-academic and 35,920 academic and the number of EU academics has doubled in the last 10 years (Universities UK, 2018a). The UK's research reputation draws more EU staff and students to study and work in the country (Courtois et al., 2018). In 2018, the number of applications for employment from UK citizens to EU Institutions had increased (Courtois *et al.*, 2018; Universities UK, 2018c). A Russell Group university in the top 100 recognised the risk of losing EU staff and suggested that recruiting new EU staff post-Brexit may be difficult; their major concern was for the 'position and welfare of our EU staff and students, they recognised the importance of retaining their existing EU staff and students (Courtois & Horvath, 2018, p.170).

Some staff members have been headhunted, and some senior EU academics with portable funding have already decided to leave their positions to work in other EU Institutions. Early Career Researchers (ECRs) were left in the lurch after senior academics left the UK, others were left unemployed with no income and given little notice (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). EU staff members on temporary contracts were concerned that a lack of research funding would mean that they would not be able to secure permanent positions. Brexit has caused ECRs anxiety over their long-term career prospects and their ability to stay in the UK because their contracts of employment are reliant on the availability of research funding (Courtois &

Horvath, 2018; HEFCE, 2018; Courtois & Sautier, 2022). Following the Brexit referendum EU ECRs and senior academic staff in the UK have experienced many reactions from their European colleagues including incredulity, empathy, jokes, and negative comments (Courtois *et al.*, 2018).

There has been a decrease in the number of EU staff working in UK HEIs aged 34 and under, suggesting that Brexit may be influencing ECRs decision to work in the UK (Marini, 2018a). The growth in EU staff numbers evidenced prior to Brexit has slowed in the first year after the referendum. Brexit has provided an opportunity for EU countries to attract academic expertise currently working in the UK creating a 'Brexodus,' a situation where EU staff members are leaving the UK to work in other European universities (Courtois, 2018, p.19).

Before Brexit, students from the EU/European Economic Area (EAA)[8] were classed as 'home' students in terms of the fees they paid[9] (Universities UK, 2022c). However, in 2020 the UK Government confirmed that EU students would no longer be eligible for home fees in 2021/22 academic year. EU students who had started their course before 31st July 2021 would continue with home fee status (Department for Education, 2021). Shortly after the Referendum, Mayhew (2017) suggested that any concerns regarding tuition fees may be unwarranted as the Government had assured EU students already studying in the UK that they would continue to be charged 'home' fees[10]. Mayhew felt that universities had the choice whether to continue to charge 'home' fees for EU citizens. In November 2020, one month after the end of the Brexit transition period the University of Leicester was the first Institution to announce a fee freeze for current EU students and students enrolling in the next academic year 2021/2022 (Owen, 2020). The University of Leicester wanted to send the message that EU students are important to the university and that it recognised their social and cultural contribution to the university (The University of Leicester, 2020).

In terms of staff recruitment Mayhew (2017) noted that the UK government had underwritten research contracts granted under EU funding until the end of the Brexit transition period, however, it was unknown at the time of writing whether EU colleagues would want to

[8] Students from Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein, and Switzerland are considered EEA students. They are offered similar benefits as European Union students. Swiss citizens are accorded equal rights as EEA students even though they are not members of the EEA.

[9] Currently £9250 per academic year

[10] EU/EEA students were charged the same fees as students living in the UK i.e., home fees until the end of the Transition period in December 2020. From the 1st of January 2021 EU/EEA are classed as international students and are no longer eligible for home fee status

collaborate with the UK in joint bids in the future (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). The future of the academic workforce was also still in question as were the immigration changes that could potentially deter EU citizens from applying for jobs in the UK. The right to free movement between the UK and the European Union ended on 31st December 2020, a new points-based immigration system was introduced on 1st January 2021 where EU citizens and non-EU citizens needed to meet specific requirements to work or study in the UK (Government Digital Service, 2020).

Following the Brexit referendum 2.4 million EU citizens worked in the UK in 2017 and made up 8% of the UK's workforce. 50% of EU nationals felt less welcome and were no longer attracted to living in the UK and 25% of EU nationals still living in their home countries felt the UK economy would worsen after Brexit and they questioned whether they would be welcome in the UK. The people who will consider leaving the UK are those that are highly qualified or high earners thus leaving a serious situation for employers that are reliant on EU staff members (KPMG, 2017). Employers need to act to establish policies, talk, and listen to the EU nationals and assess the exposure of Brexit on their organisation to ensure mitigation is in place to reduce the loss of the EU staff members (KPMG, 2017).

2.4.1. Pull and push factors attracting EU students and staff to the UK.

The following section highlights the pull factors in terms of what attracted EU citizens to want to work and live in the UK and the push factors that may affect an EU citizen's choice of where to work, study and live in the future.

The concepts of push and pull factors originate from early migration theories such as Lee's (1966) theory of migration and Zelinsky's (1971) mobility transition theory (de Haas, 2021). Over time, these concepts have been refined and expanded by various disciplines, including economics, sociology, and political science, to explain the multifaceted nature of migration. They remain fundamental in understanding why people move from one place to another, influenced by a combination of economic, social, political, and environmental factors.

The traditional migration push-pull theory has several limitations and oversimplifies the nature of migration (de Haas (2021). Factors such as neglect of agency, inadequate consideration of social factors and psychological and emotional dimensions of migration have not previously been considered (de Haas, 2021). It portrays people as being passive and

uniform in the decision-making process, effectively 'being "pulled" and "pushed" like atoms by somewhat abstract economic, political, demographic, or environmental causal forces' (de Haas, 2021, p. 30). More recent research indicates that the choice of moving or staying is dependent on a person's capability to choose where to live or stay, rather than, as previously thought, being solely based on economic or political forces (de Haas, 2021).

Although there are limitations to the push and pull theory of migration, this approach has provided me with a framework to understand the primary motivations behind EU staff and students' choice of where they want to live, work and study.

The UK has some of the most prestigious universities in the world; the University of Oxford has been first in the world rankings for five years up to 2022 (Times Higher Education, 2022). The UK HE's system is renowned for its academic excellence for providing a high-quality education that is internationally recognised and respected throughout the world, UK HEIs are often sought as international research partners (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). The UK provides world-ranked organisations, with a high-quality teaching experience, world-class research, and an internationally recognised qualification (British Council, 2019). The quality of an institution is a key pull factor that attracts students to study in a different country, students feel that the prestige of an institution will be reflected in the qualifications achieved. The quality factor is more important to students when undertaking a full-time degree rather than a shorter Erasmus exchange (Bouwel & Reinhilde, 2013). Bouwel and Reinhilde (2013) highlight that the lack of opportunity in a student's home country, particularly at PhD level is a key driver for outward student mobility.

Other studies have been carried out to determine the pull factors that attract international students to study in a different country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) studied the pull factors for students in Indonesia, Taiwan, China, and India and concluded that culture, society, nature, cost, and infrastructure are important. It is important that HEIs can distinguish themselves from others in terms of the range of courses they offer. The quality of education, the quality of the institution, the expertise of staff, and where institutions have a large population of international students are all important factors when students are choosing where to study. In addition, a common language, the location in terms of proximity to their home country, the wealth of the country and the availability of science programmes were important factors influencing student choice. One of their key findings was that family and

friends play an important part in the decision-making process along with word-of-mouth recommendations from alumni (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Students who have limited access to further education were more likely to search for opportunities in other countries which in effect was a push factor from their own country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Intra-European mobility has increased over the past decade; however, previous literature has concentrated on the outcomes of social mobility rather than the factors that attract students to study in another European country (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). Previous studies have found that language, climate, cost of living and distance are important factors for shorter-term Erasmus exchanges (Gonzalez, Mesanza & Petr, 2010). Although the cost of living is a key factor in terms of exchange rates when choosing where to study, tuition fees were not so important. When higher tuition fees were introduced in the UK it had little effect on the number of home students opting to study in higher education; a similar study with EU students coming to the UK led to similar results (Wakeling and Jefferies, 2013).

When choosing where to study for longer periods Van Mol and Timmerman (2014) found that improving language skills, personal growth, culture, people, and independence were students' reasons for wanting to study elsewhere. Love was also a factor that came into play in both attracting students to study in another country and also for students deciding to stay in their home country and not study abroad (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). Learning new cultures, safety and security, and the standard of living are also highlighted as important factors for shorter exchanges, students also wanted to experience living in another European country to be able to identify themselves as European (Lesjak *et al.*, 2015). The pull factors are complex, there is not one factor in isolation that attracts staff and students to want to work and study in the UK, instead, it is a mix of factors which are influenced by their own personal and situational circumstances (Lesjak *et al.*, 2015).

Shortly after the Brexit referendum, there was concern that Brexit would affect the ease of movement between the UK and Europe (Mayhew, 2022; Zambelli, Benson, Sigona, 2022). This was considered an important pull factor for EU students wanting to work or study in another EU country (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). Before Brexit there were no restriction in terms of travel in the EU by members of the EU, travel visas were not required, and the length of stay was not limited. Post-Brexit the UK implemented a new immigration policy on 21st January 2021 which resulted in the right of free movement for EU citizens being removed, at

the same time it introduced points-based eligibility criteria for work visas (Gower, Fella & Jozepa, 2022; Sturge, 2022; UK Government, 2022d). Student visas have been introduced and are dependent on certain eligibility criteria[11]. Global talent visas are available for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens which permits scientists and researchers to come to the UK even if they do not hold a job offer (UK Government, 2022d).

Sigona et al. (2022) shed light on the post-Brexit experiences of EU citizens residing in the United Kingdom, particularly in terms of migration and settlement. Their research revealed that a significant proportion of their participants harboured feelings of insecurity concerning their continued presence in Britain. An interesting finding was that approximately two-thirds of the participants held negative sentiments toward the UK, whilst maintaining a strong sense of attachment to the EU. This is reiterated by Benson, Craven & Sigona's (2022) research which found that three quarters of the respondents in their research were extremely or very attached to the EU, whereas they felt a moderate attachment to their country of origin. Brexit has stirred feelings of loyalty and connection to the EU and its principles among EU citizens living in the UK. Brexit has created a level of engagement and solidarity. This shared cause has fostered a stronger sense of community and collective identity among those affected by Brexit.

At the time of writing this thesis in 2022-23, there is no existing scholarship which highlights the EU student and staff pull and push factors affecting an EU citizen's choice whether to work and study in a university in England, or in the Southwest of England. One of the primary objectives of this research is to examine the experiences of EU staff and students working, studying, and living in the Southwest of England, identifying key pull and push factors influencing their decisions, in order to address this gap in knowledge.

2.4.2. Internationalisation

Other EU countries notably the Netherlands, France, and Germany had already strengthened their TNE offering before Brexit through reduced fee incentives, teaching their degrees in English and packages to attract EU staff and students (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). The argument that Brexit will affect the level of EU student mobility and EU staff recruitment has failed to

[11] 1) You have been offered a place on a course, 2) can speak, read, and write English and you have enough money to support yourself and pay for your course.

recognise the fact that other EU countries had already started to increase their popularity with international students and staff members before the referendum. Rather than see Brexit as a threat it should be seen as a 'wake-up call' as it is very likely that UK HEIs will not sustain their attractiveness to EU students and staff members post-Brexit (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018, p.3). UK HEIs should look holistically at their landscape, assess their institutional strategy, and develop differentiation to ensure they keep their place in the market and secure a sustainable future. Brexit should be seen as an opportunity to review, develop and implement changes to ensure their future is secure (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). Tsiligiris & Ruyter (2018) recognise that there are gaps in their research about Brexit and suggest more research is carried out on the perceptions and expectations of EU students.

UK universities are heavily dependent on the EU for recruiting staff, securing funding, and attracting students, therefore they face both economic and symbolic concerns. These challenges are exacerbated by an unfriendly migration policy and economic uncertainty stemming from the Referendum vote. However, employment in a university setting has offered a protective shield for EU staff members, thanks to the diverse and multicultural nature of the workforce. Universities have a history of navigating immigration control issues, further contributing to the support and resilience for EU personnel (Luthra, 2021). In the future, recruiting academic staff from the EU may pose greater challenges for universities compared to hiring EU professional services staff. This difficulty arises from the fact that academic positions are frequently tied to research funding (Luthra, 2021).

2.4.3. Xenophobia and Racism

Xenophobia and racism have been evident in the UK long before the Brexit referendum was called (Rzepnikowska, 2019), however, the number of incidences increased post the Brexit referendum (BBC News, 2019b; Virdee & McGeever, 2018). 'Englishness' was seen as an underlying driver in the Leave campaign, going back to an English empire promoted nostalgic feelings of nationalism which fuelled racism (Virdee & McGeever, 2018, p.1804). The number of xenophobic incidences increased after the Brexit referendum, 6000 hate crimes were reported in the 4 weeks after the Brexit referendum by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) (Komaromi & Singh, 2016).

Traditional racism is seen as prejudice against people based on the colour of their skin, however racism is more than that it now incorporates new forms of racism that are based on 'values, norms and language' (Lee, 2017, p.871) The argument that racism is not racism because a person is white is unfounded as racism has extended to others which may have the same colour skin but have different beliefs or attitudes (Rzepnikowska, 2019). It can be argued that racism is another form of Xenophobia which is classified as a fear of strangers. Xenophobia 'the fear of strangers' has been reframed by some researchers to be called 'xenoracism,' this resembles racism, but it is inflicted by people who are members of the same group and who appear to have no phenotypical differences (Abranches *et al.*, 2021; Patel & Connelly, 2019, p. 972; Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Xenoracism features anti-immigration views and is based on nostalgic visions of a country's national identity. Differences arise in defence of, and preservation of our culture and our race (Sime *et al.*, 2021; Sivanandan, 2006). Although Brexit did not create xenoracism the Government in effect encouraged xenoracism through the messages it portrayed in the Leave campaign (Abranches *et al.*, 2021). The Brexit Leave campaign fuelled xenoracism attitudes by supporting the limitation of immigration and free movement (Golec de Zavala, Guerra & Simao, 2017). They found that the psychological predictors of xenophobia and the threat to national uniqueness motivated people to vote Leave in the Brexit referendum. Scholars have suggested that some UK citizens, primarily those from the working class[12], believed that immigrants were to blame for the lack of jobs, poor social housing, poor wages, and lack of affordable houses (Benedi, Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2021; Gough, 2017; Mintchev, 2020). However, in respect to Brexit, acts of racism expanded to the middle-class who had little experience of living in a multicultural environment. The government's Leave campaign Let's Take Back Control fuelled the beliefs that the UK would regain its power from the EU by enabling new policies (Mintchev, 2020), this led people to believe that Brexit would reduce immigration (Cassidy, 2020).

Xenoracism was a significant issue in Europe before Brexit. The increase in migration, particularly due to the Syrian Civil War and other conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, led to a large influx of refugees and asylum seekers, which fuelled anti-immigrant sentiment

[12] People from standard classes C2 – Skilled working class, D – Working class (semi-skilled) and E – non-working (state pensioners, casual staff and unemployed on state benefits)

across many European countries. In nations like the UK, Germany, France, and Italy, segments of the population increasingly perceived migrants as threats to jobs, public services, and national identity (Backes & Moreau, 2011). This growing hostility towards migrants and refugees exacerbated social tensions, leading to a rise in hate crimes against immigrants and ethnic minorities. Anti-immigrant protests and the emergence of vigilante groups became more common, reflecting the deepening polarisation and resentment toward foreign-born populations (van der Zwan, Bles & Lubbers, 2017). Before Brexit, xenoracism was already on the rise in Europe, driven by economic uncertainty, cultural fears, and the politicisation of immigration. Brexit both reflected and intensified these trends (Golec de Zavala, Guerra & Simao, 2017).

Eastern Europeans make up the largest EU group of EU nationals in the UK. They have experienced racism and xenophobic crime prior to Brexit (Benedi Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2021), some have lived in 'fear' of their neighbours and experienced damage to property (Rzepnikowska, 2019, p.68). The Anti-EU discourse was endorsed by some political parties in the lead-up to the referendum which led to feelings of a 'threat in the air', the EU nationals living in the UK at this time had feelings of anxiety, distress, insecurity, and fear (Benedi Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2021, p.291). Years of hostility towards EU migrants were further acerbated by the Brexit referendum which was perceived to be a 'trigger event' which unleashed an increase in xenophobic and racist incidence (Devine, 2018a; Sime *et al.*, 2021, p.14).

Much of the scholarship on Brexit and racism focuses on Eastern European's, however Mulholland and Ryan (2023) offer a different perspective in that they focus on French citizens. Their research found that before Brexit French citizens' living In London automatically enjoyed certain privileges that were associated with belonging to the EU. As white Western European professional's working in a country that belonged to the EU they were not labelled as immigrants but had the privilege of 'invisibility' in this respect. However, after Brexit they were considered to be 'immigrants of an unwelcome kind', (Mulholland & Ryan, 2023 p.603). Their research found that the participants felt unwelcome and experienced a sense of loss, as they no longer felt at home living in England in a post-Brexit era.

2.4.4. EU Settled Status

All EU citizens living in England at the time of Brexit were encouraged to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme. EU Settled Status enables EU citizens to continue to live in the UK for as long as they want and continue to receive equal rights in terms of health care, and pensions (UK Government, N.d.). To be eligible an EU citizen had to be living in the UK by 11 pm on 31st December 2020 and have been resident in the UK for at least five years before this date. If, at the time of application, the EU citizen did have five years of residency in the UK then a pre-settled status was awarded[13] if the application met all the conditions of registration. The UK government assured EU citizens living in the UK that the process would be 'smooth, transparent and simple' however this was not always the case (Elfing & Marcinkowska, 2021, p.55). There were delays, it was difficult in some instances to prove residency if people had moved around or had a gap in employment (Barnard, Butlin & Costello, 2022; Elfing & Marcinkowska, 2021). Initially, there was a £65 charge however this was scraped when the scheme rolled out on 30th March 2019 (UK Government, 2022c). The EU settlement scheme is quicker, easier, and cheaper than applying for permanent British Citizenship. The British Citizenship scheme has more conditions attached, one of which is that if you are an EU national you must have held EU-settled status for 12 months before applying[14]. British citizenship currently costs £1330 to apply (UK Government, 2022b). In March 2022 there have been approximately 6.5 million applications for settled status (UK Government, 2022a). Although obtaining settled status provides a certain level of security for EU nationals living in the UK, many EU citizens were planning to apply for British Citizenship 'to cement their security of status in the UK' (Barnard, Butlin & Costello, 2022, p.382).

2.5. Mills' Grand Theory- The Sociological Imagination

My research on the impact of Brexit on EU staff and students at English universities is underpinned by Charles Wright Mills' theory that personal problems and 'milieux' are linked to broader public issues (Mills, 1959, p.10). The Brexit referendum was initiated by the UK Government; the Government had not thought through the consequences of a majority Leave

[13] IF you are awarded pre-settled status you are entitled to stay in the UK for five years from the date you get pre-settled status.
[14] There are many more conditions attached to citizenship which can be found here https://www.gov.uk/apply-citizenship-indefinite-leave-to-remain

vote which left EU citizen's working, studying, and living in the UK with many unanswered questions.

Charles Wright Mills' (1959), concept of the sociological imagination, outlined in his work *The Sociological Imagination* encourages individuals to connect their personal experiences to broader social, historical, and cultural contexts. The sociological imagination is the ability to see and understand the relationship between personal troubles and public issues. Mills felt that people's lives were shaped by social forces that were not of their choosing; he emphasised that the focus of a sociologist should be on the intersection of biography and history (Gitlin, 2000). Mills (1959) suggests that the focus of sociological research is problematic in that research has moved from trying to understand society in terms of people's situation and experience to something more akin to positivist quantitative research. Facts and scientific research do not represent reality.

> 'Much that is held to be 'real science' is often felt to provide confused fragments of the realities among which men live' (Mills, 1959, p.16).

To fully understand a situation Mills asserts that you must connect history and biography to make meaning i.e., the interconnection of individuals' behaviours and the social forces surrounding that individual. Mills implies that an individual maybe powerless in their 'restricted milieu' to solve any problems imposed by the national system and that personal troubles are linked to public issues (Mills, 1959, p.10). Having a sociological imagination means that you have the quality of mind to be able to step outside of your individual experiences and feelings and see what is happening at a societal level. This allows the individual to understand how macro issues at a societal level affect people on a personal level (Mills, 1959).

Mills' ideology was inspired by German sociologists such as Weber, Mannheim and Gerth; their views helped Mills to develop his ideology on social stratification, social structure, and political power. Mills believed that there was a connection between the 'elite' in terms of the people who held the power, the decisions they made and the impact these decisions had on the rest of the population. Mills argued that sociological work should seek to be historical, comparative, consider power and stratification and include all social structures to understand problems (Mills, 1959). Mills was influenced by Dewey's ideas particularly in respect to his

views on pragmatism and social philosophy, mainly because it emphasised the practical nature of knowledge and the consequences of ideas and actions (Geary, 2009). Mills was also influenced by Marx; Mills considered Marxism to be an adequate system that could be further developed to measure social systems (Tilman, 1979). Mills thought Marx offered a valuable theoretical model that must be looked at; however, he considered that a model was not enough to understand a situation. Mills' use of a theory as opposed to a model provides the opportunity to prove or disprove a situation so is more advanced in its thinking. Mills considered other people's viewpoints, as discussed earlier, however, it was Mills' ability to assimilate everything together and then create something new that was recognised (Tilman, 1979). Through *The Sociological Imagination* Mills calls for social scientists to 'practice the politics of truth;' by doing this, social scientists can help build a democratic society 'in which substantive reason would play a fundamental role, for the values of freedom and reason could only be realized' (Geary, 2009, p.177).

In *The Sociological Imagination* Mills critiques Parsons 'Grand Theory' from *The Social System* as he feels that there is more to social science than purely viewing the world through a structural functionalist theory perspective where individuals are expected to conform to society and are guided by the systems in place (Parsons, 1937). Mills interpretation of Parson's theory is that people who share the same values will behave accordingly, and they will conform even when their views are different, in effect making the values part of their personality.

> 'As such they bind a society together for what is socially expected becomes individually needed' (Mills, 1959, p.31).

Mills challenged this view and considered Parsons to be 'out of touch with the real world and its real problems' (Staubmann, 2020, p.178). Mills considers Parsons' grand theory to be unable to deal with social change, social conflict or understanding power relationships. Mills feels that societal decisions were made by the people in senior positions, based on incomplete research that did not focus on the individual's experience in society. Mills considered this approach to be a failure of sociology and thinks that sociological research should consider peoples' attitudes, beliefs and experiences which may differ from our own, only then will we be able to understand the real problems people face (Mills, 1959).

Mills' interpretation of Parsons's work in *The Sociological Imagination* has led social scientists to believe that Parsons did not believe in societal change and that he demanded individuals to conform to societal rules. However, Garfinkel and Geertz, two of Parsons students found that this was not the case and made it clear that they learnt about interactions with social systems and culture from Parsons, their teacher (Staubmann, 2020). Mills' work is different to Parsons in that Mills concentrated on power, conflict and critical analysis between society and the individual, whereas Parsons concentrated on social order and equilibrium (Mills, 1959; Parsons, 1951).

The 'Promise' as described in the first chapter of *The Sociological Imagination* suggests that there is an intricate relationship between the individual and society, therefore personal issues are felt as part of broader social issues. Mills (1959) suggested that when a person's values are threatened, they feel that threat, but when a person's values are not threatened, they feel well-being. Individuals may feel uncertain about a given situation but not understand why until they start to unpack what is happening around them and locate their experiences in the wider context. A person's experience may be affected by structural changes that are happening at a societal level (Mills, 1959). Individuals can experience feelings of anxiety in times of change, the feelings may be felt on a personal level where a person feels they have control over the impact of change on their life or the changes may be at a societal level, and they feel they have little or no control over their personal experiences. By distancing oneself from personal issues and problems and looking at the broader societal view may help individuals understand their feelings and experiences (Mills, 1959).

People can either choose to adapt to their new situation by not seeking a way out or choose a different path. People can be coerced into action when they are unable to control a situation.

> 'Turned into a robot…by steady coercion and by controlled environment;
> but also, by random pressures and unplanned sequences of circumstances'
> (Mills, 1959, p.171).

The Sociological Imagination split opinion among scholars some, notably Herbert Blumer, Andrew Hacker, Lewis Coser, Richard Hofstadter, Stuart Hughes, Floyd Hunter, Charles Lindblom, and Ralph Miliband, agreed with Mills' critique of disciplinary trends and the

positive way in which he portrayed *The Sociological Imagination* (Geary, 2009). However, during the late 1950's Barrington Moore, despite agreeing with Mills on many aspects, perceived Mills to be out of touch with contemporary social science stating:

> 'Mills does not convey much of a notion of the richness and diversity in present-day work in sociology' (Geary, 2009, p.173).

This viewpoint has been echoed by feminist scholars arguing that *The Sociological Imagination* does not consider the gendered experiences, particularly women, or the struggles of marginalised groups (Geary, 2009; Gitlin, 2000). Two of Mills strongest critics were Merton and Lazarsfeld (Summers, 2006); Lazarsfeld believed Mills' grand theory was too critical because he had used a broader style of empiricism rather than sticking to a scientific approach, he referred to Mills book as a violent attack on sociology (Lazarsfeld, 1973). Lazarsfeld who had initially hired Mills to collaborate with him on the Decatur House Manuscript in 1945 fired Mills in 1947. Mills struggled to make sense of the figures, tables and equations gathered for the Decatur project so had decided to write the manuscript without using the data as a basis of the report; this was unacceptable to Lazarsfeld (Summers, 2006). The dispute between Mills and Lazarsfeld continued for many years, when *The Sociological Imagination* was published using social inquiry and ethical convictions rather than techniques or scientific concepts Lazarsfeld expressed his confusion with the book he stated:

> "I find what Mills writes, you see, just ridiculous. There is nothing in the world he can, as a research man, contribute to anything, by what he's writing about, power or whatever it is and how bad the world is and so on. Why does he mix it up? I mean why doesn't he leave us alone" (Lazarsfeld, 1973, p.149).

These views were in contrast to the students and early career academics who were not directly involved in the profession, they thought the book was a 'source of wonder and liberation' (Summers, 2006, p.37).

In summary, Mills' sociological imagination is about fostering a critical perspective that enables individuals to connect their personal lives with broader societal structures and historical contexts. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how personal experiences are shaped by and connected to larger social forces.

Current literature shows that Brexit made EU citizens feel uncertain, uneasy, and threatened (Courtois *et al.*, 2018; Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). At the time of writing this research there was no existing scholarship linking Mills theoretical framework to government initiatives such as Brexit. In times of change people may feel they have little control over what is happening to them which causes anxiety, anger, and uncertainty. Before the increase in tuition fees in 2012, students felt angry, protests were held across the country as students wanted to vent their anger and frustration at the changes being imposed by the Government (Ibrahim, 2016). Similarly, after the Brexit referendum in June 2016, people felt angry and bitter, EU citizens felt discriminated against. Some EU citizens have decided to leave the UK following Brexit, citing 'emotional, political and practical' considerations as the reasons for leaving (Sigona *et al.*, 2022, p.3).

Although Mills' (1959) theoretical perspective originated in the 1950's, it remains relevant today. Mills' (1959) theoretical perspective offers valuable insights for my research into the factors affecting EU staff and students, examining societal issues at both micro and macro levels to offer a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. By applying the sociological imagination, this approach explores how personal troubles of individuals are connected to public issues of social structure. At the micro level, the focus is on individual experiences and interactions, capturing the day-to-day realities and challenges faced by EU staff and students. At the macro level, broader societal factors such as policy changes, economic conditions, and cultural dynamics are considered, highlighting how these larger forces shape the lives and opportunities of individuals.

As part of my research, I considered other theoretical perspectives, including Bourdieu's concepts of economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011), as well as Wenger and Lave's concept of the Community of Practice (Smith, 2003). However, neither of these perspectives offered a framework that adequately addressed my research aims and objectives (see Chapter 1, 1.3).

2.6. Conclusion

The research written to date in response to Brexit has theorised on the impact of Brexit on the UK as a whole and the UK Higher Education sector (Courtois *et al.*, 2018; Marginson, 2017; Mayhew, 2017; Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). Although uncertainties remain at the time of writing this research more information is known on what Brexit will mean for the HE Sector

as the Brexit transition period has ended and government decisions on immigration, working and studying conditions are now known.

The research published on Brexit has concentrated on the key questions which were initially raised by the Universities UK regarding the loss of EU students, staff, and EU research funding (Marini, 2018b; Mayhew, 2017). There is currently a lack of knowledge and understanding of how Brexit is affecting EU citizens currently working and studying in the HE sector in England (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). Brexit has been politicised and discussed over a protracted period, even with a Brexit deal uncertainty remains. There are still many areas where the full impact of Brexit is not known (Forrest, 2022). To date, there has been no research published that has analysed the impact of Brexit on staff and students living, working, and studying at a HEI in the Southwest of England. This research aims to fill the gap in knowledge and understanding of whether Brexit has had an impact on EU students and staff's desire to remain in England in the future and the potential impact that will have on the UK HE sector. The long-term impact of Brexit on the HE sector is still unknown which means my research makes a significant contribution to knowledge.

The following chapter describes my research methodology.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology, the research design and methods used to answer the research aims and objectives. It lays out the ethical and practical considerations of the research design and demonstrates how the chosen methods fulfil the requirements of rigour, credibility, sincerity, credibility, and ethical considerations associated with a Mixed Method Research (MMR) methodology (Tracy, 2010). This chapter covers the following 3.2 Research Question, 3.3 Research Approach, 3.4 The Research Design - My Mixed Methods Approach 3.5 Ethics, 3.6 Quantitative and Qualitative Data Strands, 3.7 Sampling and Interviews 3.8 Thematic Analysis, 3.9 Positionality and 3.10 Conclusion.

3.2. Research Question

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the question:

> *What impact has Brexit had on the sustainability of a Higher Education Institute in the Southwest of England in times of change, with a particular emphasis on the impact of Brexit on EU staff and students?*

The following sub-questions highlight the key objectives of the research.

SBQ1. What are the current EU staff and student experiences of working, studying, and living In the Southwest of England, highlighting the pull and push factors?

SBQ2. How has Brexit had an impact on the numbers of EU staff and students wanting to work and study in the Southwest of England?

SBQ3. How has Brexit affected research collaborations and the opportunity to attract research funding from the EU?

SBQ4. How is Brexit affecting the sustainability of a university in the Southwest of England?

SBQ5. How does this study contribute to existing scholarship on the impact of Brexit on the Higher Education sector using Charles Wright Mills' theoretical framework?

3.3. Research Approach

The purpose of the research has informed the research design which in turn has determined the research methodology and methods chosen (Bryman, 2012).

There are two main strands to the research as outlined below.

1) The quantitative, secondary data offers insight and understanding of the macro context in terms of the 'what' of the research and provides the context for the qualitative element. This strand focused on answering SBQ2, SBQ3, and contributing towards SBQ4. The quantitative element of the research has provided the macro/public context of the situation, this has enabled me to expand on the existing wealth of knowledge that is available (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).
2) The qualitative data capture adds depth and understanding to the macro level data in strand one through the collation of data at a micro-individual level. This strand aimed to understand the factors that originally attracted staff and students to England to work, live and study and understand how Brexit is affecting the way EU participants live their lives in England since the Brexit referendum. This strand focussed on answering SBQ1, SBQ2, SBQ3, and SBQ4, and involves face-to-face interviews with each participant.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has provided me with the opportunity to triangulate my findings which in turn has added greater validity and reliably to the research findings (Ivankova, 2013; Tracy, 2010).

3.4. The Research Design - My Mixed Methods Approach

I have chosen MMR as the research methodology for my research project as it provided me with the opportunity to mix methods to provide greater validity, and completeness and enable me to answer the research aims and objectives as fully as possible (Bryman, 2012). The MMR approach is a good fit with Mills' (1959) theoretical perspective in that it allows me to research the factors at a macro/public and micro/personal level using different methodological approaches; Mills (1959, p.213) states that 'Good work in social science today is not, and usually cannot be, made up of one clear-cut empirical research'. MMR enables me to understand the 'what' in terms of the current situation as reflected through the available statistics and quantitative analysis and the 'why' in terms of the qualitative research to understand individual perspectives through more in-depth discussions with staff and students (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Combining methods allows me to research not only the experiences of the participants but also the quantitative element allows me to provide the wider English context through the data that is available. Combining methods provides a more pragmatic approach to

answering the question allowing for a flexible approach to allow the best tools and methods to be used. There are multiple approaches to mixing methods including the parallel design, explanatory design, transformative design, combined sequential design and the convergent design (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). I have chosen the convergent design approach, this allows me to collate the data independently from each strand, and then integrate the findings to enable me to answer the research aim and objectives as fully as possible, see Section 3.6. The MMR methodology is based on pragmatism i.e., 'what works;' if the methods of research and data collected answer the research question this is considered acceptable (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p.35). As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5 Mills was also drawn to pragmatism as it places a strong emphasis on the practical and the relevance of ideas to everyday life thus providing a more rounded picture of a given situation (Geary, 2009). The MMR approach aligns with the way in which Mills approached The Sociological Imagination in that Mills switches perspectives to enable him to fully understand the situation.

> 'The sociological imagination, I remind you, in considerable parts consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and of its components.' (Mills, 1959, p.211).

3.5. Ethics

Ethical approval for my research project was granted by the Institute of Education, Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Business Research Ethics Committee in December 2019, see Appendix Three.

During the ethics process, I have considered the five guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Preissle *et al* (2015) consider ethics to be uncharted for MMR and they have called for researchers to 'charter their own path' when considering ethics in MMR. A more recent study by Stadnick et al (2021) has taken Preissle's call to charter their path and has started to research the implications for Ethics for MMR. They too recognised that there is limited research available in this area, however, their findings concluded that the majority of respondents drew their strategies from quantitative and qualitative methods rather than mixing their approach for MMR. They suggested further training in MMR and recommended that ethic review boards have people with MMR expertise to ensure that MMR research ethics are appropriate (Stadnick *et al.*, 2021). For my

research, I have considered the BERA guidelines and Stadnick et al's (2021) findings to ensure my research ethics are comprehensive.

For the qualitative element of my research, I provided comprehensive information to participants providing details of confidentiality, data security and the withdrawal process, see Appendix One. As the researcher it was my responsibility to ensure participants were protected in terms of ensuring they were happy to take part but also that the research process was open and transparent (Bryman, 2012). I asked participants to sign a consent form before engaging with them in the research, see Appendix Two. The participants had a choice of whether to take part in the research after they had received all the information on how the project would be conducted, they also had the right to withdraw up to the point of the writing up stage. One participant chose not to complete the consent form so was not included in the research. Clear guidance was provided on the process if participants decided to withdraw part way through the research, none of the participants chose to do this.

I knew that discussing the impact of Brexit may be difficult for some participants and I wanted to ensure that the participants did not walk away from the interview feeling distressed or harmed in any way. I was also aware that some participants may feel threatened in terms of the fact that I work in a university so it was crucial to be very explicit that the whole process was confidential, and any information would be anonymised. During the interview process I monitored the participants' body language to see signs of distress, I provided participants the time to respond and did not probe if I felt a participant did not want to discuss a particular topic. One participant was particularly concerned about the confidentiality aspect of the process; they wanted to provide evidence on an aspect of the research topic and required additional reassurance that all participants were anonymised, and no one would be able to trace the evidence back to them. I talked through the process and provided assurance that the process was conducted in a controlled way and that all data would be held securely, see Appendix One.

For quantitative research, it is the responsibility of the data gatherer to ensure an ethical process is followed, which means the ethical process for this part of the research is out of the researcher's control. I have, however, ensured that I understand how, and why the data was collected in the first instance to ensure that I did not misrepresent the data in my research (Cowton, 1998). The level of trustworthiness of the data is also a consideration that I made

when using the data (Boté & Térmens, 2019). The data I have used has been produced by official bodies that produce data for the higher education sector and funding bodies. HESA follow the Code of Practice for HE data, the statistics they produce are regulated by the UK Statistics Agency which is accountable directly to Parliament (HESA, 2021a).

3.6. Quantitative and Qualitative Data Strands

My research is split into two distinct strands, see Chapter 2, Section 2.6. This research used the convergent parallel design methodology, where the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis were collected separately and then compared afterwards (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The convergent design is well known and was first used by researchers in the 70's, the approach was often used as a means of triangulating the results from the research to provide greater accuracy and precision in the research leading to increased validity and reliability. The convergent approach is used to get a broader range of data on the same topic to provide more clarity and understanding on the subject (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). For this research the two strands of the research have been conducted independently and are distinct from each other, each strand had a different set of questions to be addressed. The strands had equal importance and ran concurrently throughout the research and only came together when the findings for each strand had been determined separately. The mixing of the strands occurred during the final stage of the research i.e., mixing during interpretation to provide a richer deeper understanding of the problem (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The convergent design has provided a way of triangulating the research findings to see if the findings from the quantitative research are supported by the qualitative research findings thus increasing the credibility of the research (Bryman, 2012). This approach also allowed me to analyse the data using the best tools and techniques that are traditionally associated with the data type, e.g., interviews for qualitative data gathering and data analysis for quantitative data. The MMR methodology in my research has provided the macro level analysis from the quantitative research and the micro level analysis through the qualitative research this has led to well-validated and substantiated findings (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2009).

This approach is considered to have several challenges including the complications that may arise when trying to analyse the two types of data i.e., in-depth descriptive qualitative data

versus the broader more generalist quantitative data view. It is acknowledged that bringing together the two data sets, each with a different focus can be tricky and it takes a certain level of skill to enable this to be done well (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2009). For my research I used the quantitative data to set the scene and provide context and the qualitative data to provide more detailed individual information; this reduced the challenges and difficulties as highlighted by Cresswell and Cresswell (2009).

3.6.1. Quantitative Research Methods

The quantitative research focussed on accessing and interpreting existing secondary data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), (HESA, 2021a).
Three specific research aims were included in this part of the research to answer SBQ2 and SBQ3.

a. What impact has Brexit had on EU student enrolments since the BREXIT referendum in HEIs in England as a whole or in the Southwest region of England?
b. What impact has Brexit had on the number of EU staff working in HEIs in the UK as a whole or in the Southwest of England?
c. Has EU research funding reduced since the Brexit referendum?

The EU staff and student data used has been captured from HESA, as the designated body to capture statistics for the HE sector in England. HESA collect, assures, and publishes open higher education data for the UK on behalf of regulatory bodies e.g., the Office for Students, the Government, and UK Research Innovation. HESA provide data on students, staff, graduates, HE providers and widening participation. The data for staff and students is refreshed on an annual basis in February each year for the previous complete academic year (HESA, 2021a; HESA, 2022a). All HEIs must provide data to HESA as part of their obligatory annual returns. HESA follow the Code of Practice for Statistics which provides additional assurance on the quality of the data published (UK Statistics Agency, 2018). HESA also provide information on EU research funding data awarded to HEIs; this includes all research grants and contracts from all EU government bodies including the European Commission and EU based charities (HESA, 2022b).

I have collated EU academic staff and student data from 2014/15 to 2021/22 to show the number of EU academic staff and EU students studying in England and the Southwest of

England. It has only been possible to report on the number of EU Professional Services staff working in HEIs in England and the Southwest of England from 2014/15 to 2018/2019, this is because the mandatory HESA requirements changed after 2018/2019, see Section 3.5.2. EU research funding data relating to the Southwest of England has also been captured from 2015/16 to 2021/22 (HESA, 2019a).

The quantitative secondary data provides large amounts of data for England and the Southwest of England which includes data for HEIs; this allows generalisations to be made across the sector (Carr, 1994). However, there are limitations in that it can fail to provide a deep understanding of the data (Denzin, 1970). In my study, the quantitative data serves to establish the situational context at a specific point in time, thereby providing a foundation for more in-depth qualitative research. A further weakness of the quantitative research approach is that it is a snapshot of the phenomenon in time; in the case of the statistics available the HESA data is updated every year based on the previous year therefore it may not accurately represent the full picture of events throughout the year or reflect the current situation.

Although I have used a constructionist approach to analysing the data, I do appreciate that the objectivist approach means that the researcher is more detached from the research giving an unbiased view of the data. Heale and Twycross (2015) suggest that objectivism is based on the early positivist perspective where the researcher is detached from the research; the researchers' views, opinions and values should not influence the outcome of the research. However, the limitations of quantitative research were recognised in the early 1900's.

> 'We may labor ingeniously at our analyses of results and may bring from afar the most potent methods which statistical theory has evolved, but we shall accomplish little if our instruments are as grossly defective as some of those which are now being employed appear to be,' (Buckingham, 1918, p.132).

Quantitative research is often associated with the positivist objectivist paradigm and is seen by many as the best methodology for scientific research that is looking to prove a hypothesis or determine causation. It provides an epistemological view that there is an objective 'one reality' and that reality is independent of the human mind (Rahman, 2016). Objectivity is considered an advantage of quantitative research as the possibility of researcher bias is removed from the findings; however, Heale and Twycross (2015) suggest there is still an element of interpretation by the researcher with quantitative research. HESA has produced

the statistics using a positivist approach in that they do not provide an interpretation of the data, they provide the facts; the data is 'Open' data which is available to everyone (HESA, 2021a). When researchers choose which data to use to identify trends and correlations this is when bias and subjectivity come into play.

3.6.2. Use of secondary data

The data available from HESA provides researchers with an opportunity to create new knowledge, challenge existing knowledge and feed into new areas of research (Heaton, 2008). The HESA secondary data that is available spans many years and includes data from all HEIs in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, the scale and scope of the secondary data available is far greater than I could have gathered during my doctoral research project. Secondary data is seen by some researchers as a real advantage, the design and capture of the data has already been completed, saving time and effort, and the data is ready and can be used in new research (Smith, 2008). Secondary data often contains large amounts of data that is more robust in terms of providing greater validity and reliability. My research uses the secondary data to highlight the trends in EU student and staff recruitment, and EU research funding data; it cannot provide the reasons for these trends which is why a qualitative method is required to elicit this information. The researcher using secondary data had no control over the parameters used for the original research, for example, the metadata used, the scale and the population. An example of this is when HESA changed the mandatory data required from universities in 2019/2020 (HESA, 2020a). HESA gave HEIs the option to return data on the EU professional services staff working in HEIs. This means that year-on-year comparisons cannot be made as many providers have chosen not to return their data (HESA, 2023a). Following the change in approach out of the 197 providers who reported staff data to HESA in 2019/20, 131 opted to report information on their EU professional services staff whilst 66 opted out (HESA, 2023a). This means that the data cannot be compared like for like in previous years as the number of institutions returning data is fluctuating and a large proportion of the data is missing therefore caution must be taken when interpreting the data (HESA, 2023a).

The secondary data may not completely reflect the data I need for my research, there may have been a particular agenda for capturing the data in the first instance. Data may have been captured by those in power i.e., governments, and institutions to answer a specific question or agenda (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The data produced may not accurately reflect

the population, i.e., staff and students in all English HEIs. An advantage of using open-source data from HESA is that the data is underpinned by reliable high-quality processes and procedures which are established and agreed upon before the collection of the data. HESA have a set of core principles to ensure they collect, assure, and analyse data that is required by the higher education sector; this enhances the reliability, credibility, and data quality of the data (HESA, 2021a). Data produced for government bodies, and those in positions of power may have requested the data to show certain aspects that they were interested in which confirmed their viewpoint.

The data used includes EU staff recruitment data, EU student enrolment data and EU research funding information. I acknowledge that the data may not provide the perfect answers to my research as it has not been designed for that purpose, however, the data collected by HESA has equipped me with necessary information to enable me to provide the context for the qualitative research. Throughout my research, I have endeavoured to accurately reflect the secondary data to ensure that my research is rigorous and accurately reflects the HESA data (Morrow, Boddy & Lamb, 2014).

3.6.3. Qualitative Research Method

I have used a qualitative research method to understand how Brexit has affected staff and students working and studying at a university in the Southwest of England, and how Brexit has affected their lives whilst living in the UK. The eight markers of quality for qualitative research include the following criteria worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and that it has meaningful coherence, (Tracy, 2010) are discussed throughout this section.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with existing EU staff and students currently working and studying in a university in the Southwest of England. This consisted of two interviews, one held during the Brexit Transition Period[15], and a second one post the Brexit Transition period[16] when the UK had left the EU single market. This part of the research was designed to gain an insight into the lived experiences of each individual therefore it was important for me to talk to each person on a one-to-one basis. A qualitative interview approach enabled the researcher to talk to participants which provided

[15] Between 31st January 2020 and 31st December 2020
[16] Post 1st January 2021

a far greater understanding of the situation (Seidman, 2013). This would not have been possible with other methods e.g., focus groups or questionnaires. I did consider holding focus groups as this would have been a quicker cheaper way of capturing data however, I wanted to ensure that each participant had the time and space to think about their own experience (Bryman, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Individual interviews enabled the participants to discuss issues that were personal to them which they may not have shared with me if they had taken part in a focus group. I also considered using a questionnaire, however, these are often not completed, response rates are poor, and I may not have been able to understand how the participants were feeling if they had submitted a written response to an open question (Bryman, 2012). I may have missed the strength of feeling or misinterpreted what they were trying to tell me. I wanted to ensure that each participant had the opportunity to talk about their experience. One of the reasons the participants gave for opting to take part in my research was because they felt that their voices were not being heard. This was partially because the majority were not allowed to vote in the referendum (UK Government, 2018b); the participants wanted me to highlight their experiences in my research. Each person experienced Brexit in a different way therefore it would not have been possible to capture their individual experiences in such depth using any other method than an individual interview (Smithson, 2000). It was important for me to talk to people on a one-to-one basis, this enabled me to understand an individual's 'reality' of the situation.

3.7. Sampling and Interviews

My initial plan was to interview twelve members of staff and twelve students working and studying at a university in the Southwest. However, the response to my call for participants was better than I had hoped; more staff and students wanted to take part in the research than I had originally anticipated. The staff and students who wanted to take part in the research all expressed their gratitude that someone was interested in researching the impact of Brexit to understand how it was affecting their lives. I, therefore, decided to increase the number of participants to include all the people who were eligible and who had completed and returned their consent form to me, see Appendix Two. The purposive sampling approach although commonly seen as leading to problems with a lack of variability in terms of who accepts the request did lead to a good spread of participants across the faculties and schools (Bryman, 2012), see Appendix Six.

Thirty-one staff members and twenty-three students responded to my email calling for volunteers, twenty-one staff members and thirteen students completed and returned the consent form, see Appendix Two. One staff member subsequently withdrew from the study due to work commitments; ten students who originally responded to the email either did not respond when I provided further information or did not complete the consent form required to participate in the research, see Appendix Three.

I held two interviews with each of the EU staff and students from March 2020 – June 2021 as detailed below. In total thirteen EU students and twenty EU members of staff were interviewed in the first interviews. The same thirteen students and eighteen out of the original twenty staff members were interviewed a second time. I was not able to contact two staff members that I had originally interviewed as one staff member had left the university, and another staff member did not respond to my request for a second interview, see Appendix Five.

- Student first interview from February to March 2020 – 13 participants.
- Staff first interview from February to October 2020 - 20 participants.
- Student second interview in February 2021 – 13 participants.
- Staff second interview in May to June 2021 – 18 participants.

The first interviews were held during the Brexit Transition period[17], the first interviews aimed to answer the research sub-questions SBQ1, SBQ2, SBQ3 and SBQ4, see Chapter 1, Section 1.3. The period between the first and second interviews was between six months and one year. This time-lapse allowed for more knowledge on the impact of Brexit to become available. The second interviews were held after the Brexit transition period had ended when the UK had left the EU single market[18]. The purpose of the second interview was to understand whether Brexit was continuing to have an impact on participants lives whilst working and studying at the university, see Appendix Five for the interview questions.

3.7.1. Staff participants

Out of the twenty staff members, eight members of staff held a Professional Services contract that relate to managerial and administrative roles and twelve staff members held an

[17] BREXIT transition period – 31st January 2020 – 31st December 2020)

[18] Post 31st January 2021

Academic contract. The age profile of the sample ranged from 25 to 61 years. The total number of EU staff working at the University in the last academic year i.e., 20/21 is not available due to changes in the way HESA collate the information. In 2019/20 there were 195 non-Atypical[19] EU staff working at the University, broken down into 140 academic staff and 50 Professional services EU staff members[20]. The sample represents 10.2% of the total EU members of staff, i.e., 16% of professional services staff and 8.5% of academic staff (HESA, 2020b). To protect the participants' anonymity, I have changed the participants' names to a Pseudonym, see Appendix Six.

The academic staff that participated in the research included Professors, Associate Professors, Research Fellows, Lecturers and Associate Lecturers. Two members of staff were Principal Investigators actively participating in current research initiatives at the time of the interviews. The age profile of the academic staff ranged from 32 to 61 years. This is a fairly representative sample of academic staff as the majority of academic staff are aged between 26 and 65 with a few outliers aged under 25 and over 65 (HESA, 2022c). Out of the twelve academic staff interviewed five were male and seven were female, this is slightly skewed in favour of female participants as there are fewer female academic members of staff than males in HEIs in England (HESA, 2022c). Five staff members were on fixed-term contracts and the remainder on permanent contracts. The academic staff members represented six European Countries, including Germany, Holland, Italy, Estonia, Cyprus, and Ireland.

The professional services staff that participated in the research included Administrators, Research Administrators, Technicians and Managers. The participants represented six European countries Spain, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Ireland, and France. The age profile of the professional services staff ranged from 25 to 55 years and out of the eight professional services staff two were male and six females. All professional services members of staff held permanent contracts. This sample is fairly representative as the majority of staff working in professional services are between the ages of 25 and 60 with a smaller percentage over 60

[19] Atypical staff include short-term contracts/tasks i.e., typically less than 4 weeks or work that is based on as and when required i.e., student ambassadors.

[20] From 2019/20, it is not mandatory for HE providers in England and Northern Ireland to return information about non-academic staff. Of the 197 providers returning staff data to HESA in 2019/20, 131 opted into returning data about all of their non-academic staff. The remaining 66 opted-out and therefore only returned non-academic staff data about to vice-chancellors/Heads of institutions or governors. Where providers have opted out of submitting non-academic data, we have suppressed these numbers from provider-level tables along with their respective totals.

years of age. Males are slightly underrepresented in the sample, however, the majority of staff working in professional services are female (HESA, 2022c).

3.7.2. Student participants

Of the thirteen students that participated ten were on undergraduate (UG) courses and three on postgraduate (PG) courses. The PG students were at various stages of their PhD. The UG breakdown is as follows:

- One student was taking a foundation year.
- Two students were in the first year.
- Two students were in the second year.
- Four students were in the third year.
- One student was a fourth year (after completing a placement year in industry).

The age profile of the population ranged from 18 to 40. The students came from eight different EU countries Poland, Lithuania, Portugal, Hungary, Italy, Greece, Finland, and Slovenia. The total number of EU students at the University in 2020/21 was 525 (HESA, 2023b). The research sample represents 2.5% of the total population of EU students at the university.

3.7.3. Interview process

Participants taking part in the interviews had returned their consent forms to me indicating that they were happy for me to record the interview (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). At the beginning of the interview, I confirmed with the participants that they were still happy to participate and for me to record the interview. The first interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. All first interviews were recorded on an audio recorder. The interview environment and the relationship between the researcher and participant were important to promote the exchange and interchange of experiences and thoughts. Lather (1986 p.267) refers to this process as participant researcher reciprocity as 'give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power'. The interview process allowed me to get to know the participants, gain their trust and gain credibility as a researcher through the way I conducted myself throughout the interview process (Tracy, 2010).

One of the main advantages of using face-to-face interviews before the pandemic was that I was able to talk to the participants individually in a confidential safe environment. During

these interviews I shared a physical space with the participants so I was able to see and note their reactions to questions, and observe body language and emotional cues, which may not have been possible otherwise (Gray *et al.*, 2020). It was important to capture non-verbal body language to provide additional insight into how participants were feeling at the time of the interview. During the interviews I made notes about how the participants reacted to certain questions and I reflected on their body language and responses during the interviews.

The structure of the interviews was important to the success of the research, so I spent considerable time designing the questions (Roberts, 2020). I structured the interviews to find out what the pull factors were in terms of wanting to come to England in the first place. Lastly, I wanted to find out whether participants were planning to stay in England. I avoided using leading questions and I kept each question to one topic rather than confuse the participant by asking more than one question at a time (Bryman, 2012). The majority of the interview questions were qualitative open questions designed to allow me to understand how participants experienced Brexit and to enable them to give as much information as they wanted for each question (Roberts, 2020). A couple of questions were closed questions and designed to obtain information such as settled status; however, these were in the minority. The questions were designed around the research questions and goals of the research, see Appendix Five. The semi-structured interview questions allowed me to probe more deeply if I felt it necessary to further my understanding of a situation, but it also gave me a framework of questions to begin with (Tessier, 2012). This method allowed me to ask questions that were pertinent to answering the research question but not get too bogged down in trying to get the answers needed to answer the research. The participants could express their thoughts and feelings through this approach (Galletta & Cross, 2013). The participants had the freedom to explain their narrative and the researcher had the opportunity to fully understand a situation without straying too far away from the research aims. 'Well-informed judgments on the part of the researcher are important as to when and when not to interrupt the participant as he or she responds to a question' (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p.2 of 38). To ensure the participants were happy to share their experiences and narrative with me during the interviews it was important for me to quickly build a feeling of trust and reciprocity between us. I had to gauge when it was best to listen, probe for more information or move on to the

next question to ensure the participant felt engaged and willing to express their feelings and experiences to someone they had only just met (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

As an ice breaker, and to add depth and richness to the first interview I asked the participants to select three images that depicted why they chose to come and live, work and study in the UK. I wanted the participants to think about the reasons why they chose to come to work or study in England. This approach was also an effective way to make the participants feel at ease. Some participants could not find any images that reflected the reasons why they chose to live in the UK but even in this situation it prompted conversation and discussion. Interviews that use photos provide more information, are more stimulating and open up more areas for discussion (Collier, 1957). Harper (2002) and Thomas (2009) suggest that photo-elicitation is a method that is used to try to understand people's feelings, the images may prompt deeper thought about the subject or trigger memories that are important to the participant. An older part of the brain is stimulated when images are used which evoke a deeper human consciousness than using words alone which in turn leads to a different interpretation or understanding (Harper, 2002). The technique is frequently used to evoke participants' thoughts, feelings, and memories. It can help to stimulate conversation, break the ice at the beginning of interviews and put the participant at ease. However, there are limitations to this method as the images chosen by the researcher may not mean anything to the participants (Harper, 2002). The use of images was an enabler to open discussion and used as a prompt to encourage participants to talk about their experiences. The images were carefully chosen for my research, I tried to find images that represented the university setting, the social setting and Brexit. This was to prompt memories and reflection on Brexit within a HE environment, see Appendix Four.

Photo elicitation can enhance the validity and reliability of the research in ways that may not be achieved through interviews alone. 'When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs, they try to figure out something together. This is, I believe, an ideal model for research' (Harper, 2002, p.23). Research using photography can highlight discrepancies between what participants say during an interview and what the photos represent. This gives added depth to the interview as the researcher can delve deeper to achieve an understanding of the participant's feelings (Thomas, 2009). The main disadvantage of using photo elicitation is that the researcher and the participants may interpret images differently (Bryman, 2012).

One of the images I used was a picture of an open door, see Appendix Four, which I included because I felt it portrayed a sense of welcome. However, the participants who chose this image interpreted it differently. Some had no particular views, while others saw it as representing EU citizens leaving England after Brexit. Although I initially selected the image with a specific interpretation in mind, I recognised that my understanding might differ from the participants' perspectives. The use of images in the research process prompted discussion, reflection, greater validity, and rigor to the research process (Berger, 2015; Tracy, 2010).

At the end of the first interview, I asked the participants to reflect on the images they had chosen at the beginning of the interview to see if they would like to change their choice of image. The majority of participants were happy with their original choice, but four participants asked me to include another image to their list. I asked why they had requested to add another image, the reason given was that they had time to reflect on their answers to the questions during the interview and remembered other factors that were important to them (Collier, 1957). All thirteen student participants chose images, out of the twenty staff participants three academic staff participants and three professional services staff did not wish to choose any images. The participants stated that they preferred to talk through the reasons why they chose to come to the UK to work and live, the staff members that did not wish to choose images did not wish to engage with them at all.

The second interviews were shorter, and all were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing feature. The interview approach changed when the Coronavirus pandemic began[21] from being held face-to-face to Zoom video conference interviews. The interviews were recorded via Zoom with the participants' permission and the transcription facility was used on Zoom. This meant that I was able to continue with my research even though some of the participants were not physically in England. Many students had returned home during the pandemic, other students had completed their degrees and returned home. By using Zoom the interviews were easy to arrange and it allowed me to speak with participants while they were in Europe. I felt that Zoom was an effective way of communicating albeit with a few technical issues with sound and internet connections (Fox, Morris & Rumsey, 2007). During the

[21] 23rd March 2020 the UK went into lockdown, all teaching and learning and staff meetings were held remotely.

pandemic, staff and students working and studying at the university used Zoom for meetings, and teaching and learning so they were familiar with the technology which helped to avoid any complications. I felt that it was a good way to continue with the research and also enable me to continue to build a rapport with the participants (Gray *et al.*, 2020). The major disadvantage to using Zoom was the fact that I could not observe non-verbal body language as easily as I was only able to see participants' heads and shoulders, in a couple of interviews participants chose to leave their cameras off so I was unable to see them at all. A couple of participants struggled to find a private place; one shared an office, and another was at home with their children in the same room (Gray *et al.*, 2020). One interview was rearranged to enable the participant to speak freely, the others went ahead as the participants either went into another room in their house or found an empty office.

I ended each interview with an open question asking if there was anything I may have missed just in case there was something important that I had not specifically asked but the participant wanted to share. I piloted the interview process with a colleague who was willing to be interviewed, this provided valuable feedback on the questions and the interview process and allowed me to be more confident when I conducted the interviews (Bryman, 2012; Roberts, 2020).

Where I had met students face to face, I transcribed the interview by hand; where I had recorded the interview, I used the automated transcription of the interview as a starting point. My ultimate aim was to have a verbatim word-for-word account for all interviews. The automated transcription process was poor, it contained misspelt words and failed to accurately convey the intended meaning making it difficult to follow (Liyanagunawardena, 2020). I had to rewrite the automated transcripts to ensure they accurately reflected what was said in the interview. Whilst this process was time-consuming it gave me an in-depth familiarity with the data, this was extremely valuable during the subsequent thematic analysis. The transcription process involved repeated listening and verification to maintain precision (Welland & McKenna, 2014). This provided me with the opportunity to hear the transcripts many times and note the tone of voice and how the questions were answered. For both the face to face and Zoom interviews I added information which I had noted during the interview i.e., non-verbal expressions, body language and tone of voice; I didn't want to forget this important information later in the research (Gray *et al.*, 2020).

3.8. Thematic Analysis

I opted to use Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (TA) approach to understand the data I captured from the research participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The six-stage process includes: Stage 1, Familiarisation of data; Stage 2, Coding; Stage 3, Generating initial themes; Stage 4, Developing and reviewing; Stage 5, Refining, defining, and naming themes and Stage 6, Writing up, (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The reflexive thematic approach allows for flexibility and accepts that researcher subjectivity is a positive part of the process, 'Researcher subjectivity is an essential resource for reflexive TA,' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.13). I recognised early in the process that I would not be able to analyse the data without my knowledge and perspective affecting the process. Opting to use a reflexive TA has enabled me to use an inductive approach to capturing the meaning of data in my dataset. This way of analysing the data complements my pragmatic approach to life in that it provides a framework to work within but allows for flexibility in approach, an open mind with no preconceived ideas. Qualitative research aims to capture people's own perspectives and views, it would be easy to think that themes passively appear out of the data collected from participants without needing analytical rigour or input from the researcher. Ely *et al.* (1997, p.208) state on the subject of theme generation "themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough, they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about the data and creating links as we understand them."

Before following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six stage process I had tried to identify themes by just looking at the data and noting themes that were repeated in the interview scripts. This approach worked to a point however it lacked the rigour and validity that I needed for the research process (Tracy, 2010). The way in which researchers identify the themes in data varies, some researchers note themes emerging following a line-by-line analysis of each page of the transcript, whilst others have areas of interest already in mind and concentrate on the parts of the data that provide answers to those interests rather than being open minded and allowing the themes to come from the data (Bryman, 2012). Themes do not emerge from the data alone but from the researchers' theoretical assumptions, skills, and subject knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A researcher's knowledge of the subject and life experiences may influence the emergence of themes. The analytical process using reflexive TA will evolve during the process, as familiarity with the data grows this will highlight new data patterns (Bryne, 2021). This reiterative approach supports the interpretivism approach that I have

adopted for this research; my experience and knowledge will have affected the findings and theme generation. Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that the researcher should go through an analytical process to understand the data, identify areas of interest in the data then develop initial themes, theme generation is based on 'summaries of what participants said in relation to a particular topic or data collection question' (Braun *et al.*, 2019, p.5). Reflexive TA does not flourish with a rigid constrained process and researchers should become tolerant of uncertainty,

> 'Try to conceive of openness, uncertainty, and discomfort as essential travel companions, the ones who encourage you to care but nonetheless have an exciting adventure' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.12).

At the beginning of the TA process, I felt uncertain about how the analysis of the data would play out, so I reiterated the process several times with an open mindset and accepted that uncertainty is part of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). By repeating the process, I acquired a deeper understanding of the data allowing me to capture far more information and knowledge from the interview responses than I had originally. The depth and strength of feeling coming from the participant's responses were far more apparent the second time around. Reflexive TA recognises the researcher's part in the production of knowledge, it is acknowledged that theme generation is unique to the researcher and two researchers are highly unlikely to finish with the same themes (Bryne, 2021).

3.8.1. The Analytical Process

Familiarisation of the data set (Stage 1 of the TA process) began before and during the transcription process of the interviews. I listened to the audio recording many times before starting the transcription process which enabled me to become immersed in, and understand the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). During the familiarisation process, I began with an inductive approach of trying to understand the meaning of the data in that I let the data drive the meaning, I had no preconceived ideas of what the analysis would find. I wanted to let the participants have a voice and let their experiences and perspectives lead to the creation of meaning and allow me to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I soon recognised that a pure inductive approach was too simplistic for my research.

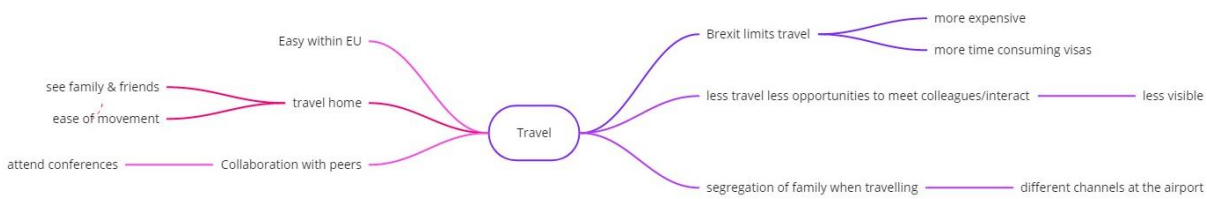
> 'The subjective and embedded process makes pure induction impossible, we bring with us all sorts of perspectives, theoretical and otherwise' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.56).

I recognised this early in the process, although my analysis was primarily inductive, I recognised that as the researcher my own perspectives and knowledge would affect the interpretation of the data, bringing my perspective and subjectivity is seen as a positive aspect in qualitative TA (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The familiarisation process ran over 18 months[22] when the first and second interviews had been completed. The time delay allowed me to take a fresh look at the data captured during the first interviews which helped me to feel more comfortable and familiar with the data.

When the data gathering phase[23] was complete Stage 2 of the TA process began. I reviewed each transcript in detail line by line. I looked for unique areas of interest in the data, I discarded information which I thought wasn't relevant to the research, but I tried to capture all the areas that would help me answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I generated codes with short semantic meanings which represented the meaning of the data i.e., Xenophobia of children, Xenophobia at home, travel in the EU, travel to conferences. This led to over ninety codes being generated in the initial stage of the process.

The ninety-five codes were sorted into cups that I had labelled with generic themes such as Brexit, travel, people, place, students, study, research, opportunities, location, family, and racism. This process enabled me to group themes that were similar in meaning so that I could begin the next stage of the process. I generated, where possible, single-word themes that represented the data in its broadest sense. Diagram 1 shows the Travel candidate theme and the data extracted from the interviews that related to Travel. This part of the process aligned with an inductive approach as I extracted the themes from the data.

Diagram 1: Initial Candidate Travel Theme



[22] February 2020 – June 2021
[23] June 2021

The refining of codes and initial theme generation led to Stage 3 and 4 of the TA process. Each of the ninety-five codes generated were grouped under an umbrella candidate theme to group similar data themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021

For example, the candidate theme 'Place' held data relating to the reasons why the participants wanted to live and study at a university in the Southwest. The reasons included being near the coast, the moors, family living in the area, and researchers working at the University.

This stage of the process took a considerable time, as the themes were defined and redefined until I was happy with them, acknowledging that I could always tweak and change them. The process of reflexive TA accepts that it is a recursive process which involves repetition. This is a natural part of the process, and each step should not be hurried, it also recognises that there is no one right answer and each researcher's own bias and subjectivity can influence the process. I recognised that although bias cannot be avoided in this process, by acknowledging bias this allowed the process to be more reflexive. During stage 5 of the process, I analysed the data held within of the cups to ensure each 'Theme' held all the data relating to that theme. I refined the names of the themes and created a new theme to reflect 'Programme'. This additional theme was required as four students had specifically mentioned that the programme of study was a pull factor.

By following the 6-stage TA process I finished with twenty themes spread across the staff and student datasets. At this stage of the process, I was initially drawn towards an inductive mode of data analysis, attempting to find data to answer the research question. However, this approach led to duplicating findings for both staff and students. Consequently, I had to change tack. I shifted to a deductive mode of data analysis, focusing on the theory that there were pull factors attracting individuals to work in England and push factors driving them away from England. This change in approach meant that I had to review the themes again to remove duplication across the datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This process led to a total seven pull themes in terms of what attracted participants to England and eight themes arising from participants' lived experiences of Brexit that were having a negative impact on their lives, detailed in Table 3.1 as follows:

Table 3.1 - Push Pull Factors

Pull factors (positive influences)	Push factors (negative Influences)
Place	Uncertainty/sadness/Anger
People	Xenophobia/Racism
Multicultural/Diversity	Segregation
English Language	Research funding & collaborations
Good education system and opportunities	Loss of academic talent & student recruitment
Programme of study	Finance
Travel	Prospects
	Travel

The final themes aligned well with the push and pull concept, despite some overlap in theme names, such as the "Travel" theme. This overlap did not pose any issues, as the narratives from the interviews related to the "Travel" theme were still consistent with the push and pull framework. The push and pull framework did pose a challenge in aligning with Mills' (1959) theory of macro public issues and micro personal troubles. Once the data was grouped into themes, further analysis was needed to understand how macro-level factors affected participants at a micro-level. This was achieved by reviewing the contents of each theme and splitting them into macro and micro issues, thus providing the push-pull factors and micro-macro factors for each theme.

I did not expect the participants to understand Mills' perspective, as I wanted to capture their narratives without influence from Mills' theoretical framework. The detailed analysis of the data collected, both quantitative and qualitative, allowed me as the researcher to use Mills' theoretical perspective to understand how the Brexit outcome at a societal-level affected individuals at a micro-level. It is this ability to shift perspectives and build a comprehensive view of society and its components that adds to the quality of the research (Mills, 1959).

3.9. Positionality

During the research, it has been important to recognise my positionality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). I consider myself both an insider and an outsider, an outsider in terms of the

language, norms, and culture of European people living outside of the UK. I consider myself an insider with regard to my knowledge and understanding of how universities operate, an employee at an HE Institute, and a parent of two children who have been through the process of deciding whether to attend university in the UK or elsewhere in the world. I am also aware of my positionality in terms of Brexit and that I voted to Remain in the Brexit referendum. Although Thematic Analysis (TA) recognises and accepts that researcher perspectives may influence the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021), I remained as objective as possible during the interview process through the use of open questions. I built a rapport with the participants but at the same time provided a forum and space for participants to express their views and feelings on the situation. This balance was harder to find with some participants as they specifically asked me how I felt about Brexit. Seidman (2013) reiterates the issue of balance and the extent to which an interviewer reveals their stance during an interview. When I was asked what my position was regarding Brexit, I said that I would answer their question at the end of the interview process. I did not want my opinion on Brexit to influence a person's view or affect the way they answered the questions.

3.10. Conclusion

The MMR methodology has provided me with the opportunity to understand the macro and micro-level context of the impact of Brexit on EU citizens. Collecting secondary data on EU student enrolments, EU staff recruitment and EU research at the national and regional level has provided me with an insight into the impact of Brexit at a societal level thus providing the context to the qualitative research. This is fundamental to Mills' (1959) grand theory that personal troubles are more fully understood when they are contextualised to public issues and political decisions that are made at a societal level. The qualitative interviews have enabled me to understand the micro-level analysis of how Brexit is affecting each person individually. The adoption of the MMR approach supports Mills' (1959) theory that social research cannot be based on scientific research alone and needs to consider the impact of societal change on an individual. The mixed methods approach has provided me the opportunity to collect a large amount of data to enable me to understand the phenomena of Brexit on EU citizens.

4. Research findings: Pull Factors

4.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the research findings that relate to SBQ1, SBQ2 and SBQ3, see Chapter 1, Section 1.3. The quantitative research findings set the scene and highlight the trends in terms of EU staff and student recruitment and EU research funding post Brexit. In effect highlighting the 'what' of the situation.

This is followed by the qualitative research which explores the factors that EU staff and students feel are important to them when choosing to come to England, in effect indicating the 'why' EU participants chose to come to England. The qualitative data provides crucial insights into the motivations and reasons behind participants' decisions to move to England, especially the Southwest, focusing on various pull factors.

The themes identified during this part of the research are detailed in descending order of importance as determined by the thematic analysis as detailed in Chapter 3, Section 3.8.

This chapter covers the following 4.2 Quantitative Research Findings: The What, 4.3 Qualitative Research Findings: The Why and 4.4 Conclusion.

4.2. Quantitative Research findings: The What

4.2.1. European Staff Numbers

There has been a steady increase in EU academic staff (non-UK) working in HEIs in England from 32,425 in 2014-15 to 37,830 in 2018/19 (HESA, 2023a). The total number of EU staff began to decline in 2019/20, the largest year-on-year decline was 3.4% in 2020/21. The proportion of EU academic staff in relation to the total number of academic staff in England peaks in 2017/18 at 16%, then started to decline from 2018/19 to 2021/22 to 14.7% resulting in a 1.3% decline from 2017/18, see Table 4.1

Table 4.1 - European Academic staff working in HEIs in England.

Number of EU academic staff working in HEIs in England								
Academic year	EU non-atypical academic staff	EU a-typical academic staff	Total EU academic staff	Year-on-year increase/decrease on the previous year	Total population of non-atypical academic staff	Total population of atypical academic staff	Total academic staff in England	EU academic staff as a proportion of the total number of staff in England
2014/15	26255	6170	**32425**		165180	61250	**226430**	**14.3%**
2015/16	28060	6560	**34620**	**6.8%**	168705	60770	**229475**	**15.1%**
2016/17	29915	6925	**36840**	**6.4%**	173360	59465	**232825**	**15.8%**
2017/18	30505	6745	**37250**	**1.1%**	175715	56605	**232320**	**16.0%**
2018/19	31045	6785	**37830**	**1.6%**	179895	57435	**237330**	**15.9%**
2019/20	31205	6510	**37715**	**-0.3%**	185600	54115	**239715**	**15.7%**
2020/21	30845	5605	**36450**	**-3.4%**	185965	48000	**233965**	**15.6%**
2021/22	30655	5450	**36105**	**-0.9%**	194320	50700	**245020**	**14.7%**

(HESA, 2023a)

The Southwest of England shows a similar trend to the national figures in that the year-on-year growth increases until 2018/19, although the rate of growth slows in 2017/18 to 2.2% and then increases to 5% the following year 2018/19. The rate then declines by 2.2% in 2019/20, rallies to 1% growth on the previous year in 2020/21 before declining again by 2.4% in 2021/22. The proportion of EU academic staff in relation to the total number of academic staff in the Southwest of England peaks in 2017/18 at 13.6% and then steadily declines to 12.4% in 2021/22 resulting in a 1.2% decline from the peak in 2017/18, see Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 - European academic staff working in HEIs the Southwest of England

Number of EU academic staff working in HEIs in Southwest of England								
Academic year	EU non-atypical academic staff	EU a-typical academic staff	Total EU academic staff	Year-on-year increase/decrease on the previous year	Total population of non-atypical academic staff	Total population of atypical academic staff	Total academic staff in Southwest of England	EU academic staff as a proportion of the total number of staff in England
2014/15	1,585	540	**2,125**		11,840	5,910	**17,750**	**12.0%**
2015/16	1,730	640	**2,370**	**11.5%**	12,320	5,735	**18,055**	**13.1%**
2016/17	1,850	700	**2,550**	**7.6%**	12,770	5,965	**18,735**	**13.6%**
2017/18	1,925	680	**2,605**	**2.2%**	13,165	5,970	**19,135**	**13.6%**
2018/19	2,065	675	**2,740**	**5.2%**	14,035	6,210	**20,245**	**13.5%**
2019/20	2,100	580	**2,680**	**-2.2%**	14,620	5,450	**20,070**	**13.4%**
2020/21	2,155	560	**2,715**	**1.3%**	15,330	5,775	**21,105**	**12.9%**
2021/22	2,135	515	**2,650**	**-2.4%**	16,145	5,150	**21,295**	**12.4%**

(HESA, 2023a)

For professional services staff, the comparison is over 5 years from 2014/15 to 2018/19[24], see Tables 4.3 and 4.4. The number of professional service staff working in HEIs in England increased year-on-year until 2018/19, however, the growth rate slowed to 5.1% in 2017/18 before increasing slightly to 6.3% in 2018/19. The trend is similar in Southwest England with a year-on-year increase to 2018/19 with a dip in growth to 7.6% in 2016/17. The proportion of professional services staff compared to the total number of professional service staff increases each year in England and Southwest England. It is important to recognise that the data does not show whether the EU staff members are full-time or part-time or whether they are on permanent contracts or temporary contracts. The data is not available for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 therefore it is not possible to see if the trends for professional services staff follow a similar line to academic staff members.

[24] This is due to the professional services data was no longer mandatory after 2018/19 therefore the data returned is incomplete so a comparison cannot be made with previous years.

Table 4.3 – European Professional services staff working in HEIs in England.

Number of EU professional services working in HEIs in England				
Academic year	EU non-atypical non-academic staff	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU Professional services staff members	Total population of non-atypical non-academic staff	EU non-academic staff as a proportion of the total number of staff in England
2014/15	9,120		167,645	**5.4%**
2015/16	10,035	**10.0%**	170,400	**5.9%**
2016/17	11,040	**10.0%**	174,500	**6.3%**
2017/18	11,600	**5.1%**	177,975	**6.5%**
2018/19	12,325	**6.3%**	182,580	**6.8%**

(HESA, 2023a)

Table 4.4 – European Professional services staff working in HEIs in Southwest of England.

Number of EU professional services working in HEIs in Southwest of England				
Academic year	EU non-atypical non-academic staff	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU Professional services staff members	Total population of non-atypical non-academic staff	EU non-academic staff as a proportion of the total number of staff in England
2014/15	645		13,840	4.7%
2015/16	725	**12.4%**	13,925	5.2%
2016/17	780	**7.6%**	14,325	5.4%
2017/18	890	**14.1%**	15,080	5.9%
2018/19	1,020	**14.6%**	16,140	6.3%

(HESA, 2023a)

4.2.2. European Student Numbers

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 show the total number of EU students studying in HEIs in England and the Southwest of England, respectively; this includes undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research students. They highlight the proportion of EU students in comparison to the total number of students studying in HEIs in England and the Southwest of England.

In 2014/15 98,180 EU students were studying in England, in 2020/21 that figure had increased to 124,395 EU students representing a growth of approximately 27% over the 6 academic years. The peak in EU students in proportion to the total amount of students in England was in 2018/19, with 5.8% of the population being EU students, this figure has steadily declined from 2019/20 with the largest drop in 2021/22 at 4.1%. In 2021/22 there was a 22.6% fall in the number of EU students studying in England from the previous year[25]. The total number of EU students in 2021/22 is now 2% less than the total number of EU students studying in 2014/15.

[25] A contributing factor to the large decline in 21/22 may have been due to COVID-19.

Table 4.5 – EU student numbers in HEIs in England

Number of EU students studying in HEIs in England				
Academic year	EU student Numbers	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU students in England	Total population of students	EU students as a proportion of the total number of students in England (rounded)
2014/15	98,180		1,893,860	**5.2%**
2015/16	101,170	**3.0%**	1,913,340	**5.3%**
2016/17	108,080	**6.8%**	1,951,075	**5.5%**
2017/18	112,030	**3.7%**	1,983,480	**5.6%**
2018/19	116,000	**3.5%**	2,015,110	**5.8%**
2019/20	118,760	**2.4%**	2,076,245	**5.7%**
2020/21	124,395	**4.7%**	2,257,580	**5.5%**
2021/22	96,240	**-22.6%**	2,342,775	**4.1%**

(HESA, 2023b)

Table 4.6 – EU Student numbers in HEIs in the Southwest of England

Number of EU students studying in HEIs in Southwest of England				
Academic year	EU student Numbers	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU students in the Southwest of England	Total population of students	EU students as a proportion of the total number of students in England (rounded)
2014/15	6,875		155,675	**4.4%**
2015/16	7,110	**3.4%**	158,095	**4.5%**
2016/17	7,860	**10.5%**	163,980	**4.8%**
2017/18	8,135	**3.5%**	163,980	**5.0%**
2018/19	8,330	**2.4%**	170,135	**4.9%**
2019/20	8,310	**-0.2%**	173,810	**4.8%**
2020/21	8,670	**4.3%**	185,860	**4.7%**
2021/22	7,080	**-18.3%**	198,210	**3.6%**

(HESA, 2023b)

Table 4.6 shows a peak in the proportion of EU students as a proportion of the total amount of students in Southwest England in 2017/18 with 5% of the population being EU students. The proportion of EU students in the population began to decline in 2018/9 by 0.1% each year up until 2020/21. The proportion of EU students is fairly stable up to 2020/21, it is the increase in the number of home students that has contributed to the small decline in EU students. However, in 2021/22 there was an 18.3% decline in the total number of EU students studying in the Southwest of England from the previous year, this follows the national trend, however, this figure is 4% less than the national figure. The total number of EU students studying is greater in 2021/22 than the number studying in 2014/15, this differs from the national trend.

It is important to recognise that the data in Table 4.5 and 4.6 does not show whether a student is part-time or full-time, or whether students have started their programme and subsequently decided to interrupt their studies or withdraw from the programme entirely.

4.2.3. EU Funding

Table 4.7 shows that EU funding in England dipped in 2017/18[26] with a 1% decline from the previous year. In 2018/19 there was an increase on the previous year of 8.9% then a decline in 2019/20 and 2020/21 with a decline of 12.5%. The year-on-year percentage then increases slightly by 2.3% on the previous year in 2021/22. The peak in EU funding as a proportion of the total amount of research grants and funding was in 2018/19 at 14.3% with a steady decline each year from 2018/19 until 2021/22 to 12.1%, which is a 2.3% decline from 2018/19. The published data does not specify whether the research funding is all funding received or funding received where the UK is the research lead.

Table 4.7 – EU funding and total research funding and contracts received by HEIs in England

European research grants and contracts in England (£000s)								
Academic year	EU Government bodies	EU-based charities	EU Industry, commerce, and public corporations	EU other	Total EU funding	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU Funding in England	Total research grants and funding in England	Proportion of EU funding to total funding
2015/16	597,795	8,152	67,819	28,285	673,766		4,793,873	14.1%
2016/17	597,207	9,445	86,215	29,386	692,867	2.8%	4,845,942	14.3%
2017/18	609,088	9,218	87,187	35,790	705,493	1.8%	5,102,563	13.8%
2018/19[27]					768,579	8.9%	5,384,353	14.3%
2019/20					710,223	-7.6%	5,170,094	13.7%
2020/21					675,256	-4.9%	5,363,590	12.6%
2021/22					690,560	2.3%	5,700,634	12.1%

(HESA, 2021b)

Table 4.8 shows that EU funding in Southwest England increases year by year from 2015/16 to 2018/19 although the growth rate slows to 6% in 2018/19. In 2019/20 there is a decline in EU funding on the previous year this continues until 2021/22 with a total decline of 4.9%. The

[26] No data is available for 2014/2015 so it is difficult to ascertain the position prior to 2015/16

[27] Prior to 2018/19 HESA collected data from HEIs. In 2018/19 the OfS started to collect the data, the level of data collected from this point was aggregated therefore the granularity is no longer available.

peak in EU funding at a regional level is in 2019/20 with 15.7% even though the decline in year-on-year percentage in EU funding began in 2018/19. The proportion of EU funding in comparison to the total amount of funding received is 12.7% in 2021/22 this is 3% lower than in 2019/20. EU funding is decreasing whilst the total amount of funding is increasing.

Table 4.8 – EU funding and total research funding and contracts received by HEIs in the Southwest of England

European research grants and contracts in Southwest of England (£000s)								
Academic year	EU Government bodies	EU-based charities	EU Industry, commerce, and public corporations	EU other	Total EU funding	Percentage year on year increase/decrease in the EU Funding in Southwest of England	Total research grants and contracts in the Southwest of England	Proportion of EU funding to total funding
2015/16	39,852	359	728	1,010	40,939		280,709	14.6%
2016/17	42,289	365	1,878	1,103	44,532	8.8%	299,709	14.9%
2017/18	47,816	422	1,205	2,448	49,443	11.0%	318,137	15.5%
2018/19[28]					52,398	6.0%	338,868	15.5%
2019/20					51,773	-1.2%	329,054	15.7%
2020/21					50,335	-2.8%	349,659	14.4%
2021/22					49,872	-0.9%	391,364	12.7%

(HESA, 2021b)

The decline in funding at the national and regional levels correlates to the beginning of the decline in academic staff. The peak of academic staff in proportion to the total number of staff in England was in 2017/18, see Table 4.1. This is the year before the peak in EU funding in 2018/19 in England as a proportion of total funding, see Table 4.7. At a regional level, the peak of EU academic staff was in 2017/18, whereas the peak in funding as a proportion of the total funding is in 2019/20, see Table 4.8.

[28] Prior to 2018/19 HESA collected data from HEIs. In 2018/19 the OfS started to collect the data, the level of data collected from this point was aggregated therefore the granularity is no longer available.

4.2.4. Conclusion

The decline in EU student numbers began in 2017/18 during the Brexit transition period, marked by significant uncertainty regarding tuition fees and access to higher education in England following the Brexit referendum. This decline intensified dramatically in 2021/22, with an 18% drop in the Southwest of England and a 22% decline nationally. By this time, the UK had officially left the EU, resulting in increased tuition fees for EU students and the requirement for travel visas. These policy changes following the UK's withdrawal from the EU have significantly impacted the number of EU students choosing to study in England and the Southwest of England.

EU academic staff numbers have declined steadily since 2018/19 in both England and the Southwest of England. Factors contributing to this decline include uncertainties surrounding research funding, international collaboration with European colleagues, and the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus+ program. Many early career researchers (ECRs) depend on research funding for their projects, making it more challenging for EU ECRs to remain in England post-Brexit due to reduced funding opportunities. Conversely, professional services EU staff numbers continued to increase until 2018/19, suggesting that they were less affected by Brexit. This may be because their positions are less dependent on research funding, providing more stability in the face of Brexit-related changes.

EU research funding has steadily declined since 2019/20 in both England and the Southwest of England, correlating with the beginning of the decline in EU academic staff numbers. This suggests a potential feedback loop: the departure of EU academic staff could further reduce the amount of research funding available regionally and nationally. As EU academic staff leave, their expertise and connections to EU funding opportunities diminish, potentially exacerbating the decline in research funding in these areas.

4.3. Qualitative Research findings: The Why

4.3.1. Introduction

The quantitative data provides the context for the qualitative research. The qualitative findings highlighted below provide an understanding of the reasons why the participants chose to come to England, i.e., the pull factors. These pull factors include Place, People, Multiculturalism and Diversity, The English Language, Good Education System and Opportunities, Programme of Study and Travel. The themes identified in this chapter were highlighted as key reasons why participants chose to work and study in Southwest of England. This narrative helps to fill the gap in knowledge regarding what EU citizens consider important when choosing where to work and study.

The EU student participants came from eight EU countries, and the EU staff participants from six different EU countries, refer to Chapter 3, 3.7. The factors that influenced their choice of where to work, and study varied based on their country of origin. Factors in their home country, including the economy, political stability, way of life, opportunities to work in their chosen field, access to suitable resources, and the chance to collaborate with renowned research staff, significantly affected their decisions. Economic and political stability, along with career opportunities, were particularly important for both students and staff when choosing where to work and study. It is also important to note that the nationality of participants was not disclosed, and the pseudonyms used were purposely chosen to be Anglo-Saxon to ensure anonymity. This approach was taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to prevent any potential bias that could arise from identifying their specific nationalities.

4.3.2. Place

The place was a significant pull factor for both staff and students when asked what first attracted them to England and the Southwest of England. Many staff and students chose photo images that represented the countryside, the seaside, and the university. The coastal image was selected by the highest number of staff participants and where participants did not select any images the location featured in their narrative as a factor that influenced their decision of where to work and live. 'Place' meant different things to different participants, four participants, when talking about place referred to the surroundings and landscape of the

area in the Southwest of England, others referred to England as a whole and others mentioned 'Place' in terms of an English university.

The Southwest of England with its beautiful coastline and moorland attracted many participants to work in the Southwest as opposed to working elsewhere in England or Scotland. Several participants mentioned that the moor and sea were easily accessible and within easy driving distance which attracted them to work in the area. Having the coast so near was a real positive for many of the participants. Three participants had lived by the sea in their country before coming to the UK and they liked living by the sea, others loved it because it was so different to where they had lived back home.

> 'It's beautiful, where I come from is flat and everywhere where I live is hilly and the landscape and the, it's absolutely beautiful here, you've got the sea, you've got Dartmoor, you've got woodlands, you've got lakes, you've got everything on your doorstep, and there's a feeling of space and I love that about the Southwest' (Rachel, staff)

> 'I like to live by the sea, it's very nice doing lots of coastal walks and we just kind of get far away. I think the sea is one of the reasons why I'm here' (Julia, staff)

> 'I want to live by the sea and by the woods I have a close relationship with nature, so this is nice and calming and is one of my dreams come true.' (Isabelle, student)

> 'I chose the university because it's by the sea, otherwise I feel suffocated, and I've been to places by the land, like you know I feel very restrained very segregated.' (Phillip, student)

Two participants felt that they could be more independent because the university is located in the city with regular public transport; they could travel around the area easily.

> 'I would say that there is a lot more to do everything is closer it is easier to walk and be independent and use buses and public transport.' (Sophie, student)

> ‘The fact that you can hop in a car and drive for 10 minutes and be in the middle of nowhere is fantastic, the beaches, the moors I thought it was a great place to bring up the kids…. Devon and Cornwall just really work for me, I’d had a few offers from other universities, and I couldn’t be tempted like Bristol and Birmingham’. (Claire, staff)

Three participants came to work in the Southwest of England because their work related to coastal and marine; the University is ideally placed by the sea and offers good research opportunities collaborating with well-known researchers in this academic discipline. James moved to the area to work at the University as he was offered a research contract that related to the sea. James was very clear that if the research project had been located anywhere else in the UK, he would not have accepted the position.

> ‘From all the places in the UK, no matter what kind of great project I wouldn’t have moved to Manchester or London or any big cities, but Cornwall or Devon has outdoor benefits…. like the project would have been a no anywhere else in the UK’ (James, staff).

Three student participants were enrolled on programmes relating to the sea and marine. The fact that the University offered a good programme of study and was located close to the sea was a big pull factor.

> ‘I come from a city by the sea and most of my studies are in the sea environment’ (Jimmy, student).

When I asked about the location of the University several participants negatively referred to the weather, although they enjoyed the coast, sea and moors, the downside was the fact that it is colder and wetter than other European countries. Although the weather was not considered a pull factor for the students, the other pull factors outweighed the negative effect of the weather.

Participants perceived the Southwest of England to be a friendlier, safer place with a sense of community compared to other larger cities such as London, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Manchester. The staff and student participants who have children particularly liked the area because of the feeling that it is a safe and beautiful place to live.

> ‘We started to have kids and my partner really didn’t want the kids to grow up in Scotland and at the time my partner’s sister had a place in Devon where we could stay and that’s why we came’ (Sarah, Staff).

> ‘To be honest, it feels like a second home because it’s a small community you get to know more people, they are more personal, and people in general are more friendly, it’s not like London where there is no connection between people’ (Clara, staff).

Another major pull factor that contributed to staff and student participants choosing to work and study in England was that the UK was a member of the EU. Amelia recognised that working in a country that was part of a bigger group of countries had its benefits in terms of collaboration, research opportunities, funding, and recognition, she felt it would be good for her career.

> ‘I want to be in the EU because I know how beneficial it has been for me for my career being part of the EU’ (Amelia, staff).

> ‘I chose to study at the university because it was in England. It was important to me that I was still in Europe’ (Sophie, student).

Belonging to a wider European community was important to most staff and student participants because it enabled them to experience a different way of life, knowing that they had the same rights as home citizens. The benefit of being able to travel freely without any visa implications in the EU was a particular pull factor for both staff and students when they made their decision to work and study in England.

4.3.3. People

All kinds of people were important in the decision-making process of whether to live and study in England. This was the case even when participants already lived in England. Family, friends, friends of friends and people that participants had met at networking events were all considered important when making their initial decision of where to work and study. The need to maintain social ties across borders were important to the participants, this was also important within their research networks. These connections enhanced the feelings of belonging and their identity (Tedeschi, Vorobeva & Jauhiainen 2022). People were a big pull

factor for both staff and students; most students decided to study in England after they had come to visit family and/or friends who already lived in the country. The 'People' theme is broken down into different kinds of people including family and friends, work colleagues and university staff members.

Four of the participants moved to England because of family reasons. Several came to work in England because they had family or friends already living in the country. Others moved to England as students then met their partners in the UK and subsequently settled with their families. The image of the 'Family' was popular and was chosen by staff and students. The participants would have liked an image showing friends, a couple of participants chose the Brexit March as they perceived this to be a festival with friends. Where participants did not choose a photo Friends and Family were mentioned a lot in their narrative during the interview.

> 'I finished my PhD and by then I had met my partner, that is the reason I did not go back home' (Christopher, staff).

> 'I married an English girl after I came, so basically I've settled' (Matthew, staff).

Two participants moved to the Southwest of England because their partners had been offered a job in the area. They had agreed that whoever got offered a job first, they would relocate to that place. Another married an English person so relocated to England.

> 'The very straight reason why I'm here is because my partner is here…we always had the agreement whoever gets the first permanent job the other has to follow' (Katherine, staff).

> 'So, my partner at the time was from the area so that's the reason I came over' (Rachel, staff).

It was also important to participants that the English language was spoken in the country they decided to settle in, see 4.3.6.

> 'I came to the UK because I was married to an English person and the decision to live here was guided by who could speak the English language and who could earn the most money' (John, staff).

Many student participants mentioned that their parents or siblings had moved to England to live and work years before they decided to study in the UK. Family members had encouraged participants to visit them which led to them coming to England to live and study.

> 'At the time, the biggest influence was I know someone living in the city and I wanted to go to a place and be familiar with at least one person.' (Johan, student).

Mia was particularly drawn to the UK because she had family living in the UK, she already knew about the culture, and she also wanted to speak English so for them the UK offered this.

> 'I actually fell in love with meeting people from different cultures, I always felt I wanted to explore more than my known territory and the UK was a country facilitating that in terms of different nationalities, and English was the language that is used more often….I had family that live in London, so I kind of knew a bit about the culture, and also when I was in high school, I did a trip, we had a summer school, and I really fell in love with meeting people from different cultures' (Mia, student).

Mia's reasons for wanting to study in the UK included several of the pull factors that are discussed in this chapter including Family, the English language, and the fact the UK is perceived as a multicultural diverse place to live. Those participants, both staff and students, who had moved to the Southwest of England with their families were planning to stay in the area even if that meant they had to commute to a bigger city or town to find a job in the future.

Academic staff that were actively engaged in research were attracted to the university by PIs who attracted research funding and were well-known in their academic discipline. Several staff participants chose the image of a researcher presenting at a conference as they felt that high-profile researchers attracted them to a particular place of work, see Appendix Four. The opportunity to collaborate with well-known academics who lead in their field was particularly attractive to early career researchers (ECRs). Several academic participants were very clear that if PIs are known worldwide for their research ECRs want to work with them wherever they are based; so ECRs are more likely to follow an academic than be tied to a specific institution or place in the world.

> ‘I like the research environment here, I feel like as a young researcher you are pushed in a way that I’ve never experienced before, like senior researchers really put you to the front and say you can do this, the research environment is outstanding and working with really famous researcher’s eye to eye, and they’re all super humble that’s really nice and also a really good experience’ (James, staff).

Three participants chose to work in England as they had opportunities to progress within their chosen field. Others felt that coming to the UK during their career looked good on their CV and was good for future career prospects.

> ‘Originally I came because it was a nice job offer which gave me the chance to follow my interest and do research on the topic I’m interested in, and it was basically a professorship’ (Mark, staff).

> ‘The reason I came to the UK was that it was a prosperous country with good job opportunities’ (Rachel, staff).

4.3.3.1. Friends, acquaintances, and university staff

Friends and family work acquaintances of the people that participants knew were also important influencers for EU students. Sophie spoke to a family member who knew of someone working at the University in the Southwest of England and they recommended that she look at the course being offered there. Sophie had previously set her mind on studying at a university in Scotland until she visited the University in the Southwest. Sophie liked the institution far more than her original choice in Scotland. Sophie subsequently made the HEI in England her first choice. Sophie was surprised by how much she liked the university because she was sure she was going to study in Scotland.

> ‘So particularly this university, because my uncle loved the people he worked with from here, then I really loved it when I came to the open day, I just loved the lecturers, and all the students that I talked to were really nice and friendly and really happy’ (Sophie, student).

After deciding to live and work in England ‘People’ continued to influence EU students. Evie was impressed by the support she was given during her studies by individuals in the

University. Evie did say that she found it hard to connect to people on a personal level outside of the University which had made it more difficult for her to settle in England but on the other hand, the support she had received from the University was excellent.

> 'It's difficult because people are difficult to kind of connect to, everybody's very friendly, but going from there to let us go out for a coffee or why don't you come over and watch TV or whatever, there is a big, big difference' (Evie, student).

Evie felt sad about the difficulties she had developing friendships and connections outside the university setting, she felt that Brexit had pushed people further apart when they should all be working together. The impression I gained from Evie during the interview was that although she found it easy to integrate with work colleagues, she was finding it hard to make outside social connections. However, this did not deter her sense of enthusiasm for working in England.

Meeting people at national and international conferences also played a pivotal part in influencing people to move to the university and the Southwest of England. Several participants were encouraged by their peers and colleagues to apply for jobs at the University in Southwest of England.

> 'People recommend places to each other, and you start collaborating, sometimes it's informal, sometimes it's formal in a funded research collaboration' (Claire, staff).

> 'It just happened because I knew a guy, he was the Head of School, and I knew him because he had been an external examiner. We were talking one day, and he said we are looking for a new senior position in the faculty' (Charlotte, staff).

4.3.4. Multiculturalism and Diversity

Several participants felt that the UK had a feeling of being an open country that welcomed inclusion and diversity. Participants felt the UK was welcoming, friendly and less judgemental than their own country and an exciting opportunity where all nationalities could work and share things. The image showing lots of people from different ethnicities in a group was

perceived by staff participants to reflect a multicultural society. This was the third most popular image and was equally chosen by academic and professional services staff members.

> 'All of a sudden I found myself in an environment in which everybody's welcome also doubled up in a professional world, it felt like that if I had good ideas, I could use them' (Charlotte, staff).

> 'Culturally it was quite exciting, and it did seem like the country was a bit more open and maybe multicultural' (Caroline, staff).

Two professional services staff specifically sought employment within a university setting as they thought that universities have a diverse multinational workforce and student population. The participants had many international friends working at the University and in the area where they lived which was important to them when choosing where to work and live.

> 'I have many international friends here, I have a lot of Greek friends, I have Spanish friends, I have American friends here' (Charlotte, staff).

A multicultural diverse society was also important to the student participants; they valued the fact that the UK was inclusive, multicultural, and accepting of diverse cultures. The participants felt that the university setting was diverse and welcoming because many of the students and staff were from different countries. They welcomed the fact that different views and cultures were accepted both in England and within the university setting. The feeling of being accepted and welcomed was very important to many of the participants.

> 'I think that here it really shows the different people that live here and how everybody is different, like there's not many problems and people just get along and you see so many races, ethnicities and opinions so it's really nice' (Edward, student).

Participants perceived England to be open and welcoming when they first arrived. Two student participants chose the image showing an open door; in their view, this image showed a welcoming community, career opportunities and good prospects, See Appendix Four. Evie chose the image of different nationalities; it was important to her that irrespective of their nationality they were part of a larger group of people that had a connection that brought

them together. Evie felt that the image represented a group of like-minded people working towards a common goal, just as students do in a university setting.

> 'This group of people where you don't know whether they are British, European, non-European what whatever they belong to the same group, something connects them and that's what is important to me' (Evie, student).

One staff member initially came to the UK as a student to study. They felt welcome, and part of a multicultural society so decided to stay and find work in England after their studies. Oliver suggested in his interview that other EU countries were becoming more multicultural, but the UK was far more accepting of diversity and more multicultural than most other EU countries.

> 'There are so many international students at university that you get to mingle with so many different cultures and obviously, it's quite similar to other European countries as well and it's getting better, but nowhere to the same extent' (Oliver, staff).

> 'Basically, the reason why so many people from other European countries decided to come was because the culture was very good in supporting each of those students in their own development…. I think the British sense of creativity and also being kind of at the timeless dogmatic kind of was really appealing' (Sarah, staff).

Other staff participants felt that working in an English university enabled them to work with many nationalities. They felt that the British people working in universities were well-travelled, so they understood the different cultures and were very welcoming.

> 'University is a good place when you come from abroad because you meet people a) from many places abroad and b) but also lots of British who have been travelling around themselves who understand you better' (Christopher, staff).

One student participant was drawn to study in the Southwest of England because of its literary heritage; a poet they greatly admired lived in the Southwest of England, so they opted

to study in the area at the University. After their studies they were offered a job at the University so remained in the area.

> 'I decided to come to Devon as Sylvia Plath had come to Devon and at 18 years old that was the best reason to base my university choice on, it was for literary heritage' (Paul, staff).

The participants felt that living, studying, and working in a HEI in England offered them the opportunity to work in a diverse inclusive society and that England welcomed people from other countries. The academic participants wanted to be part of the excellent research that England is renowned for. The British education system is considered by many of the participants to be welcoming, multicultural and diverse; many of the participants valued the fact that the students and staff are culturally diverse, and this was important to them when considering where to study. Participants expressed concern that Brexit may reduce the number of EU students wanting to study in England, which would further reduce the multicultural and diverse nature of the setting. This would then have a knock-on effect of attracting fewer EU students in future years.

4.3.5. The English Language

The English language was an important factor for both staff and students when deciding where to study and work. The English language was a key reason why the majority of EU students chose to come and study in the UK. For the majority of participants, English was their second language. They had learnt English from an early age; they loved speaking English and wanted to study in English. The English language, together with the English culture, were strong pull factors. Three participants had considered other English-speaking countries when choosing where to study i.e., Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand and the USA or countries where universities teach in English such as the Netherlands. Three participants felt drawn to England because of the English traditions, they had studied English for many years so wanted to experience the language and culture of England.

> 'I absolutely love the English language and I've always felt drawn to England.' (Isabelle, student)

> 'I was studying English seeing all these English traditions and I wanted to experience that, I wanted to see it first-hand, my very big point in it was

> the same for my classmates we studied English for 13 years by the time we graduated, it kind of made sense to come to the UK' (Oliver, staff).

Johan wanted to study in a country that spoke English but was also aware that Brexit was happening, so he decided to come to England before Brexit happened. He was concerned that Brexit would affect his chances of coming to England in the future. The HESA statistics clearly show a rise in the number of EU students studying in England and the Southwest of England in 2016/17[29], refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.

> 'I made the decision around the time that Brexit happened, 2016, I thought at the time I'm pretty good at English and I wanted to study in a country where I wouldn't have to learn another language, I didn't want to learn another language, I already knew English' (Johan, student).

Another participant wanted to speak English and be part of the European community where different cultures are together and are bound by a sense of belonging. Sophie wanted to study in a country that spoke English and near to her home country so she could travel home frequently and was a part of Europe.

> 'It's just one language which you can communicate everywhere, and the main reason was that the UK because it's so close by and It's just a melting pot of Europe' (Sophie, student).

4.3.6. Good Education System and Opportunities

The higher education system in the UK is perceived to be good both in terms of reputation, how programmes are taught and the opportunities available to students such as field trips and placements. Both staff and students were attracted to the UK to study and work because of its excellent reputation in terms of quality of education and research excellence.

Lily and Evie considered having a degree qualification from an English university a real advantage when applying for jobs as English HEIs and English degree qualifications were considered prestigious around the world.

> 'Well British education is one of the best university educations and for what I'm studying in marine it is right at the top' (Evie, student).

[29] The year of the Brexit referendum

Lily also felt that receiving an education in England was beneficial because there would be no need to have her qualification translated into English.

> 'So, one of the benefits of having a qualification from the UK is that it is in English so you don't have to translate it, you can apply for jobs anywhere' (Lily, Student).

One of the participants who had originally come to England to study felt that the education system in the UK was better than at home. They felt that they had the opportunity to develop as a person. They felt that in their home country they had to learn to emulate the style of their master.

> 'At home, we don't have the freedom to develop as a person, there is an expectation that we emulate the master' (Marco, student).

Chloe chose the image of a graduation. She felt that the graduation ceremony was the culmination of a good educational experience. She wanted to share her educational success at an English graduation, wearing a traditional mortar board and gown; she felt this was typically English and she was proud to be part of the English educational system.

> 'That's where I see myself in three years, and it's because in Britain you've got these robes and everything so it's very special thing for me, we don't have that at home, we wear black tie, fancy, but not the proper gown and the hat that's so very British' (Chloe, student).

Two participants chose the image of a guest lecture that showed an area of international research. The research profile of the University was an important factor as this confirmed the quality of the education received. The fact that the UK Higher Education system is recognised as an excellent system, and has a renowned reputation for excellent quality research, was why many staff members chose to work in the UK.

Many participants felt that the opportunities in terms of placements, career prospects, progression and earning a good salary in the UK were better than in their home country. Johan chose the image of an open door as he felt it represented lots of opportunities and was welcoming.

> 'How I feel is that coming to the UK has been sort of an open door of like possibilities; in symbolic meaning that it's opened more doors I feel like in

terms of career prospects like studying here and living here and I've developed from it' (Johan, student).

Johan felt that he was able to develop more as a person in England, he felt there were more opportunities open to him than they would have in his home country.

'I've really enjoyed it, it's given me an opportunity to develop as a person, I'm big on personal development I just want to jump at the opportunity' (Johan, student)

Edward felt the UK economy was better than in his home country, he wanted to stay here and raise his children in the UK so they could have a better standard of living.

'There's so many things out there, you always have a sector to go into, coming from a country where the economy's not so great I'm just like comparing and thinking no I want to stay here' (Edward, student).

Another participant felt that job opportunities and career progression were quicker in the UK and the pay was better. In their home country, they would have to start their career as a graduate intern on approximately €500 per month, the participant was surprised when students in the UK expected a placement salary of approx. £21k.

'One of the lecturers said there was a job offer of £15k as a starting salary, this is a good salary I suddenly realised when he said raise your hand if you are interested and soon, I realised I was the only one, other people expected salaries around £21/22k' (Jimmy student).

4.3.7. Programme of study

The programme of study was a deciding factor for two student participants, and in both cases the fact that the programme was unique to the University was important to them. Although other universities offered similar programmes no others offered the same content. Evie was quite adamant that if it were not for the course offered at the University she would have gone elsewhere to study. Evie would have preferred to be in London as she perceived London to be more culturally diverse.

Alexander did not specifically choose the UK; it was the language and the programme of study that influenced him to come to England. Others chose England for the programme of study alone.

> 'The UK wasn't my first choice to be honest, the bottom line was the language cos I knew that I wanted to study a specific course, so I looked round Europe, the other places didn't have the right course so that left England' (Alexander, student).

> 'It was course specific, otherwise I wouldn't have come here' (Evie, student).

> 'So, one of them was the course, the University really excited me cos it was all in one place, it was by the coast like I said, that really attracted me and then the course was the main reason because the course just fitted with me' (Edward, student).

> 'The course was main reason I chose to study in the Southwest of England, I know some people that had already completed the course and it was recommended to me' (Marco, student).

Sophie chose the programme as there was little choice back home. In her home country, the programmes on offer did not offer the opportunity to go on field trips or have work experience embedded within them so she chose to come to England to have this opportunity.

> 'I really didn't want to study back home, cos the programme in my country there's only one university that does it and the programme is not nice compared to the programmes here, I really love the field component of the university here' (Sophie, student).

Another participant was looking for a particular course and also wanted to complete his course in English, although he didn't specifically set out to study in England, the place that offered both the course and the language was in England. One participant found that other countries offering similar degree programmes meant that his existing entry qualifications would not have been recognised and he would have had to repeat a couple of years of the degree.

In the majority of cases, the programme of study was linked to other themes that have been identified such as opportunity, quality of higher education, people, and place; there was only one participant who purely came to study in the Southwest of England because of the programme of study alone.

4.3.8. Travel

Staff and students commented that travelling around Europe at the time of the interviews[30] was easy without visa restrictions. They could travel as often as they wished without any difficulty. The ease of movement in the EU, without needing visas or having any restrictions on the amount of time they could stay was important to several participants.

> 'I wanted to stay in the EU because it's really close to home and if I want to go back then I can just, I expect if it had been Brexit I wouldn't have come to the UK, maybe I would have gone to Ireland' (Amelia, staff).

There was a real concern, primarily from the staff participants, about the restrictions on travel between the UK and EU countries post-Brexit; the ease of travel before Brexit was a real positive for the participants as they frequently travelled to their home countries to see family and friends, and they felt that freedom was under threat with Brexit. Student participants were concerned about travel but not to the same extent as staff because in most cases the students were in the UK for a temporary period, whereas the staff participants had made the UK their permanent home.

4.4. Conclusion

Many factors have contributed to the participants wanting to study and work in England. In all but one case it was not just one factor that pulled participants to England but an eclectic mix of factors that were different for each participant. Participants wanted to work and study in a place that spoke English but also had a culture and heritage that was different to their home country. The fact that England was part of the EU when the participants decided to study or work in England was a big attraction. Being part of the EU meant that the participants could travel freely and collaborate internationally with peers on equal terms.

Various factors such as the geographical appeal of the Southwest of England, personal relationships, multicultural environment, English language, and the UK's education system

[30] March 2020 for students – October 2020 for staff members

are key reasons why participants chose to come to England. These qualitative insights complement the quantitative data, offering a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the participants' decisions. My research provides valuable insight into the pull factors important to EU staff and students, helping to bridge the gap in knowledge regarding the 'word of mouth' on emerging trends to EU students' inbound mobility (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018, p.4).

During the interviews, I could see that the participants were very enthusiastic when talking about the reasons they came to work and study in England. I did, however, note[31] a tinge of sadness as the majority of participants had already begun to fear that Brexit would have an impact on the way they lived their lives in England even though the details of the referendum were still largely unknown when the first interviews took place[32]. The next chapter highlights the push factors that affected the participants' choice of where to work and study.

[31] Taken from the notes I made on the transcripts.
[32] March 2020 for students – October 2020 for the majority of staff members

5. Research Findings: Push Factors

5.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the research findings that relate to SBQ1, SBQ3 and SBQ4, see Chapter 1, Section 1.3. This chapter evaluates the individual experiences and feelings of EU staff and students, aiming to provide an understanding of the challenges they face while working, studying, and living in England post-Brexit. This chapter highlights the push factors that may drive EU staff and students to leave England following the Brexit outcome. The themes identified include Uncertainty and Sadness, Xenophobia and Racism, Segregation, No Voice, Research funding and Collaboration, Loss of academic talent, Finance, Prospects and Travel. The research findings provide crucial insights for the HE sector to understand what is affecting EU staff and students, enabling proactive changes in policies and actions to retain as many EU staff and students as possible.

This chapter includes 5.2 Push Factors, 5.3 Future Plans and 5.4 Conclusion.

5.2. Push Factors

The following section highlights the factors arising from Brexit that may push EU citizens away from wanting to work and study in England in the future.

5.2.1. Uncertainty, Sadness, Anger and Frustration

The overwhelming response in terms of the impact of Brexit on staff and students was that the participants felt uncertain and sad that a once welcoming open country was trying to build walls when other countries had tried so hard to remove their walls and barriers. The majority of staff participants felt real anger, sadness, and disbelief when the referendum result was announced. Three staff participants said that they burst into tears on the morning of the result. All staff participants struggled to understand how some British citizens could believe the information presented by the UK Government and media before the Brexit referendum.

> ‘At a societal level in terms of sadness about the increased levels of xenophobia and boundaries, it’s so counterintuitive to build a wall’ (Matthew, staff).

> ‘I felt incredibly angry, frustrated, powerless and voiceless…. having come here to stay. I planned my life based on certain assumptions, having them

> taken away from me without me being able to do anything, incredibly angry' (Mark, staff).

James suggested that he hoped that there would be a second Brexit referendum; However, although a second referendum was hoped for by many people, this did not happen. James' statement below just shows how there was real confusion and uncertainty at this time.

> 'I just felt speechless, I think it was just before the second referendum, somehow, I ended up in a pub with very pro-Brexit people and it was very uncomfortable, I feel like I can't really connect' (James, staff).

Participants expressed fear, and anxiety and felt threatened because they thought they may not be able to stay in the country or may not have their contract of employment extended. Many of the staff members actively gained settled status or applied for British Citizenship at this time. One staff member was in the process of buying a house in the Southwest of England but when they experienced a rise in hostility towards EU citizens; they questioned whether they would still be welcome in the Southwest of England. Another participant had just had his house tenancy terminated because the owners of the house were moving back from the EU to the UK because of the uncertainty for British citizens living in EU countries.

None of the participants had experienced any malice or xenophobia from their work colleagues; many staff participants felt that they were amongst like-minded people working in a university where diversity and inclusivity were valued. This is not to say that xenophobic incidences did not happen at the University but none of the participants experienced it. The participants also felt that as international staff members, they were valued and recognised as an important part of the university. Several participants referred to their 'bubble' of peers/colleagues or friends that were open-minded and shared similar views to themselves; this 'bubble' gave support during times of uncertainty.

> 'So, before it was more the European feeling and yes, we were all in the same boat, and we were trying to work together, now turns out for me that people are getting a little bit separated, UK first or something like that which makes me a little bit concerned.' (Mark, staff).

This feeling of uncertainty, anger, anxiety and feeling unwelcome in the country where they have made their home has caused the majority of participants to re-evaluate their plans.

The outcome of the Brexit referendum made twelve of the student participants feel uneasy, uncertain, unwelcome, and sad. All the student participants knew that Brexit was a possibility at the time of their application to the University and hoped that conditions would not change for them while they were here; however, the majority of participants stated that they would think seriously if they had to make the decision again whether to come and study in England post-Brexit. Other participants were not sure what Brexit would mean for them in terms of being able to travel, live, work and continue to study in the UK. The protracted timescale and the lack of information from the UK Government made all of the participants feel uneasy and unsure of their rights. Participants were unsure whether they would be able to stay in the country or take advantage of all the opportunities, i.e., home tuition fees and placement opportunities that were open to them at the time of applying to the University.

> 'It has caused a lot of uncertainty for everyone, a few times I have looked at the news very often and gone through a panic with… What if I can't continue to study, can I continue here or do I need to go back home?' (Johan, student).

> 'I do feel a bit more insecure and sometimes I just feel I'm not wanted in a sense, after January I'm referred to as an international student and not European anymore' (Evie, student).

The student participants started their studies after the Brexit referendum in June 2016. Three participants decided to come and study in England before the UK left the EU because they knew that Brexit may change the terms and conditions of studying; however, Brexit still caused anxiety.

> 'So, before I came to the University there was always uncertainty of how it was going to be, this year I will be fine because it's settled, they can't just kick me out, but how will it be next year, that is uncertain and that can be a bit unsettling because I'm a young person. I'm trying to build a life here and I don't know what is going to happen next year' (Chloe, student).

> ‘It’s put extra pressure on me not knowing what is going to happen, what if I can’t for some reason stay in this country’ (Lily, student).

Alex made the decision not to complete a placement due to the uncertainty about fees. Alex was unsure whether he would have to pay more in future years if he decided to take a professional placement that lasted for one academic year. His placement opportunity was lost through the lack of information at the point that he needed to make a decision.

> ‘It affected a decision I’ve made regarding my placement. I’m not doing it anymore because at the time I had to decide it was still uncertain what the fees would be next academic year, not 2021 but the one after, and I felt if something changes it’s too much risk for me’ (Alexander, student).

The participants felt that the University provided them with as much information as they could have given the situation; however, the majority of students were actively searching for information on Brexit on government websites and websites in their home countries to try to make sense of how Brexit would affect them. Participants also asked their family and friends for their advice and interpretation of the situation unfolding with regards to Brexit as they found it very confusing and frustrating that there was so little information available to them. There was a real sense of frustration that the UK Government had not been prepared for Brexit; the information was not readily available, and the situation kept changing, leading to more uncertainty and anxiety.

All staff participants had or were in the process of obtaining settled status. Five staff participants felt compelled to apply for settled status after the Brexit referendum even though beforehand they had not considered it in the hope that it would give them some assurance that they could remain in the UK to live, work and study.

> ‘Before I never did anything, ever worried about my legal status, I have since, after about a year I decided to apply for settled status’ (Anna, staff).

Other participants sought the additional security of British citizenship, so they were in the process of applying for it.

> ‘Yeah, the whole situation because I don’t trust that my settled status is going to be sufficient in the future’ (Caroline, staff).

Before the second interview, I expected the prolonged Brexit Transition period, the emerging clarity on immigration, travel and tuition fees may have softened the participants strength of feeling towards Brexit. However, this was not the case and their feelings remained intense and unchanged from the first interviews.

> 'I'm still angry that the UK left the EU and still angry that we couldn't vote' (Ben, staff).

> 'Not positive and that hasn't changed' (Paul, staff).

> 'I still feel uncertain, I'm not sure how long this settled status will last' (James, staff).

One academic participant who had already left the UK to go to live back in Europe was very sad that Brexit had happened; she had wanted to stay in England to work but felt that she had no choice but to leave because of the impact that Brexit was having on her family and her role at the University in terms of research funding and job security (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5). The participant had lived in England for 14 years before leaving and had developed a really strong bond with the country; she loved the countryside and coastal walks.

> 'I really like England, the culture, language and the films and music' (Claire, staff).

The majority of student participants felt the same way as they did during the first interviews; however, they still felt that there was still a lot of uncertainty and concern and in some instances were even more concerned than they originally were during the transition period.

> 'It worried me then and still worries me now, now it is still the same feeling that I had before, may be worse now that it is happening, it is not going to be fixed we cannot revert back to how it was before…. Now Brexit is happening, and everything is falling down even harder we are both thinking of moving back to Europe' (Johan, student).

Johan and his sibling both lived in England and wanted to remain in England but due to the continued uncertainty and feelings of being unsettled were both thinking about moving back home to the EU.

One student participant was feeling more positive about the general situation post Brexit.

> 'Personally, I feel a bit better, the people in my circle don't like it anymore, but there is not so much hostility to foreigners as before' (Evie, student).

Six participants still felt sad about the situation particularly with respect to the fact that the UK is so close to Europe but had decided to isolate itself from Europe.

> 'I think it is a pity to be so close to Europe and not be a part of it, I think only the people with a certain socio-economical background will be able to study in the UK and I think this will demotivate people to study here' (Mia, student).

5.2.2. Xenophobia and Racism

The uncertainty and sadness felt by staff and student participants were exacerbated by xenophobic and racist incidences. The staff members interviewed experienced a variety of racist and xenophobic comments outside of the University setting.

Sixteen participants had been exposed to racism or xenophobia; they felt uncomfortable in certain situations and several commented that they felt that they should not speak in their native language when out and about as it attracted unwanted attention.

> 'In the run up to the referendum going into the supermarket, we might tell the kids to get some milk, and we'd say it in the language we would use at home and people were hissing at us to speak English.' (Claire, staff)

The student participants also experienced racist and xenophobic incidents. The xenophobic incidents made the student participants feel more unwelcome which added to their feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Two student participants felt that Brexit encouraged, and to a point gave the British people permission to speak out about their views rather than before Brexit when people were more considered in what they said.

> 'Before 2016 I felt more at ease, and people were more aware of not saying the negative thing about foreign people. They didn't voice their views, I don't want to call it fully racist because it's the racist undertones that they've got, it's like they have a nice way of being racist. I've spoken to

> other people about this, and they have described it as polite racism…… and like now it's more in your face you know'. (Phillip, student).
>
> "Sometimes if customers where I work find out that I'm from an EU country they will ask my opinion on Brexit, sometimes I do get the vibe of people being 'oh you're still here even though we have left the EU'" (Alexander, student).

Several participants experienced a form of xenophobia where people were making comments such as, 'I have got nothing against you, it is just all these Europeans coming here, taking our jobs, and living off our NHS.' The participants felt angered by these statements, perceiving that both they and fellow Europeans were taking on jobs that British people did not want to do. They also felt that they were contributing to the UK economy by paying taxes. They felt aggrieved that they were now the subject of such comments because of Brexit; this all contributed to feeling unwelcome.

One student, whilst at work in a pub was told to go back home and was verbally and physically abused.

> 'In my experience, it's middle-aged people coming up with ideas and opinions I've been shouted at, I've been spat at and told to f*** off and go back to my country' (Isabelle, student).

There were several incidences of xenophobic attacks on both staff and students and their children. The children of two staff participants, and one student participant, had experienced xenophobic attacks at school and in the neighbourhood where they lived. One incident was where the European children at a school in the area had been rounded up in the playground by English children and were chanted at to 'go back home.' Another family was in a local park when they were physically and verbally attacked. This family no longer felt safe, and they no longer took their children to the local park; the police were involved in this incident. One family felt that their children had recovered from the incident fairly quickly whilst the other did not. Following on from the incident one participant decided that the UK was no longer for them because of the situation with Brexit and they have now moved back to Europe. Another participant had planned to bring his children to the UK when he started his job at the

University. However, because of the uncertainty he decided not to and the participant lives in the UK and commutes home to see his family in Europe.

The participants felt that the situation had changed for the worse; before Brexit people were more friendly and open but now, they felt unwelcome and had been told to go home.

> 'I feel like we were first invited here and now people from the surrounding area want to kick us out because they feel we are pests. It is definitely escalating more and because of those situations I feel that I can't use my own language when we walk through the shops' (Ella, student).

Ella's child had experienced verbal attacks and then a physical attack from other children at their school.

> 'It was escalating every time and up to when they physically attacked him, they punched him in the face' (Ella, student).

The family went to the school to complain[33] and initially, the complaint was not taken seriously until their son was physically attacked. During this period Ella's child did not want to go to school and was very unhappy; this had a knock-on effect on the rest of the family making them feel anxious and very unhappy. This incident also affected the participant's studies as her son was her priority at this crucial time. Criminal proceedings were underway at the time of the interviews; Ella's child was still feeling angry and disappointed. His feelings were affecting the whole family, and the parents were very concerned about his well-being.

The majority of participants experienced some level of xenophobia, from feeling uncomfortable when out and about to more serious incidents including verbal abuse and physical attacks on their family, at school or in the area where they live. During the interviews, I could feel the anger and hurt especially where participants' children had been affected. Even though the children had recovered quickly from the incident the participants had been affected by the situation. Their feelings about Brexit were very strong and tinged with a real sadness that Brexit had had an impact on their families; this made them feel uneasy about the whole situation.

[33] This was after the first lockdown when all children returned to school in September 2020

In the second interview, the participants felt that the COVID-19 pandemic[34] had taken the British people's attention away from Brexit however, two participants were still being affected by racist remarks or comments. One participant felt even more unwelcome in the workplace, whereas during the first interview, they had not mentioned this. This implied that as time had gone by the participant felt more uncomfortable with the situation perhaps because policies around immigration and travel had been published. Another participant continued to hear jokes being made about different nationalities which he felt was disappointing. The participant whose child had been bullied after the Brexit referendum was still affected by the incident; the child rarely left the house and was actively trying to increase his physical strength. I interpreted this to mean that the child would be in a better position to protect himself in future.

> 'The children still haven't got over the bullying the youngest hasn't left the house much, he's doing strength training' (Sarah, staff).

> 'People still make jokes about nationality but nothing directly at me' (Matthew, staff).

Participants whose family members had experienced xenophobic attacks during the transition period were still experiencing problems, one participant's son who was bullied and physically attacked was still being subjected to abuse which was making him feel incredibly angry about the situation.

Jimmy went home during the pandemic to complete his degree and is now working in Europe. He wants to take a master's degree but is now considering the Netherlands, Germany, and France as they all offer programmes in English. Jimmy also mentioned that high UK tuition costs had influenced his decision to study in Europe; UK HE fees are high in comparison to other EU countries.

5.2.3. Segregation

The student participants referred to segregation in terms of dividing people in the UK, as the majority vote to Leave was very narrow[35] thus, dividing the nation, and also in terms of

[34] The Covid Pandemic began in March 2020 and continued through to March 2022 with several lockdowns and restrictions on behaviour.

[35] 51.9% of the 72.2% turnout51.9% of the 72.2% turnout voted to 'Leave' the European Union

dividing the UK from the rest of Europe leading to the UK becoming more insular. Eight out of the thirteen student participants thought that Brexit had segregated and divided people in the UK from other EU countries. The UK was seen to be closing borders with Europe thus affecting internationalism, globalisation, diversity, and inclusivity. This was genuinely concerning to the participants as they originally chose to study and work in England because they believed the UK to be an open inclusive country.

Several participants commented that they could not understand why the UK would want to separate from the EU and were surprised that the majority of English people who voted, voted to Leave the European Union. The referendum outcome made the participants feel unwelcome.

> 'I find it bizarre that this is happening in the UK, like from the images that I just described like everything's open and all this globalisation suddenly closing borders and being a little island.' (Mia, student)

> 'I just don't understand why the UK would want to split their country from the EU.' (Marco, student)

> 'Some people think they don't need the EU or people from the EU, the people are torn between opposite views, extreme views.' (Johan, student).

Another participant thought that being part of a larger group such as the EU had benefits in terms of getting better deals as their negotiating power was greater than one country on its own. Evie felt real sadness about the situation.

> 'I strongly believe that everybody is stronger when they stick together. Whether that means that at some point I'm going out of my way help somebody else it doesn't mean that I'm worse off, it actually means that we're all stronger together' (Evie, student).

Staff members also referred to segregation in terms of the UK isolating itself from other countries. One of the reasons participants wanted to come to study in England in the first place was because of the diversity, inclusivity and feeling part of a larger group of people. The participants now felt that this was being eroded because of the Brexit outcome. One participant was having second thoughts about whether to stay in the UK because they wanted to be part of a multicultural society that welcomed everybody. They felt that the

segregation of the UK from the EU would be detrimental to their role in terms of research, and opportunities so would carefully watch how the situation unfolds.

> 'I had second thoughts whether in the future I would like to stay in the UK, because one of the reasons I was staying was exactly because of this international element, this global element, so in that case, If I'm so restricted or things change to much, I will have to think twice whether I want to be part of this or not' (Mia, student).

Two staff members who had married UK citizens mentioned that they would be segregated at the airport when they travel after Brexit. EU citizens would travel through one channel through customs and British people through another. They said this would be confusing and upsetting for their children if they were separated in this way.

5.2.4. No Voice

Staff participants felt angry and frustrated that a country that they called home, where they had contributed to society and the economy had left them without a voice. This lack of 'a voice' was expressed very strongly during the interviews. Several participants felt that they had no way of making their opinion heard even though it was likely to affect them the most in terms of living and working in England. Eight participants commented that they were not entitled to vote in the 2016 referendum as they were not British citizens; they felt powerless as their voice did not count even though many of them had lived and worked in the UK for many years, paying taxes and contributing to the UK economy.

> 'Well, it's frustration, because of not being able to vote was very frustrating, because having lived here for 5 years already in the UK I just thought 'why should I not be able to actually have a voice here?'' (Sofia, staff).

> 'I proactively seek political debate that's my only way, cos I can't vote, that's my only way to make sure my voice is heard' (Matthew, staff).

Several participants attended the Brexit protests in London[36] to try and get their voices heard.

[36] During the Brexit transition period several demonstrations took place in major cities across the UK demonstrating against Brexit in the hope that the decision would be reversed.

> ‘Initially, I was quite frustrated and angry about not being able to do much about it, so as a family we’ve done what we could around making it known that we aren’t happy, so it goes from local protests to London protests too’ (Sofia, staff).

In contrast, one participant was pleased that they were not allowed to vote as they were not sure which way they would have voted as they could see the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to the EU.

> ‘So, when the Brexit referendum came around part of me was glad, I wasn’t allowed to vote cos I hadn’t been able to make up my mind, I do think there are a lot of things wrong with the EU, the British option is a bit drastic though’ (Caroline, staff).

The majority of student participants did not live in the UK permanently so did not express this as an issue for them. However, the students who had made the UK their permanent home did feel that they should have been allowed to vote in the referendum. The strength of feeling among the students differed from that of the staff members. Staff members expressed anger and upset over not being allowed to vote.

5.2.5. Research Funding and Research Collaborations

Two of the participants were PIs at the time of the interview in October 2020. Following the Brexit referendum one of the primary concerns was the impact of Brexit on research collaborations and whether Brexit would result in a reduction in research funding and international collaborations which could affect job prospects and continued employment. Several participants expressed this concern; they thought that Brexit may affect their research in the future whilst others had first-hand experience of being excluded from research bids and proposals.

> ‘It does change in terms of European funding, with European funding you have got at least three partners from three different EU countries and there was this thing where even though officially you have not left the EU yet, they were advising you to stay away from British partners because they would be a liability…., and yes, I have written research proposals and apart from one, we have avoided having UK partners. (Claire, staff).

One participant had spent several years preparing a research bid as part of Horizon 2020 which was led by a European team. The bid was unsuccessful each year until an email notification was received stating that they were unable to support a grant application from a university in the United Kingdom. English HEIs were still actively engaged in Horizon 2020 projects as the UK had not officially left the EU. The participant contacted the research team at an institution in Germany to understand why their bid had been unsuccessful. The research team confirmed that it was out of their control; they had been told by their research office to exclude UK applications. A participant stated that whilst in discussion with colleagues in Germany and Austria who were considering putting in a grant proposal, they openly said that they do not invite UK partners at the moment. Another participant believed that it would affect future opportunities as other institutions will be hesitant to involve the UK because of the ongoing uncertainty with Brexit. A further participant was aware that other governments were excluding the UK from their research projects because they were not part of the EU.

EU countries were avoiding collaborations with the UK because of its withdrawal from Europe and because of the uncertainty of not knowing how Brexit would play out. Several participants had experienced a feeling that the UK was being ridiculed. Staff participants had experienced pity and ridicule at international conferences from their European research peers. The participants themselves were European working in an English university, however they still felt ridiculed and pitied.

> ‘Apart from the pity and ridicule you feel when you go to an international conference, but then I don’t feel responsible for that because I’m European,’ (Matthew, staff).

> ‘People constantly making comments of poor you, what’s going to happen and comments of the kind of shooting yourself in the foot.’ (Matthew, staff)

The fact that research peers were feeling sorry for their EU counterparts working in the UK was a contributing factor to participants feeling uneasy and unsettled. Many participants stated that not knowing and the uncertainty led to heightened levels of anxiety. The protracted Brexit withdrawal and transition period exacerbated these feelings. Amelia felt that Brexit may affect her employment at the University because of a lack of funding for

research, meaning that she would have to leave the UK to return home. The fact that there was very little information or clarity on what would happen to EU citizens after the referendum made it exceedingly difficult for Amelia to deal with.

> 'I thought it was something that was going to keep me out of the country, it is a threat in a way, I do not know how to deal with this.' (Amelia, staff).

At the second staff interview[37] participants felt continued uncertainty on the impact of Brexit on research funding. Two participants had managed to secure further funding for their projects and two others were still waiting to hear whether funding was available. This uncertainty was causing stress because they did not know whether their fixed-term contracts would be extended. One participant felt that it was hard to get research funding before Brexit and Brexit had made this even harder. The participant felt she was still able to compete for grants, but it was proving very hard.

Participants felt that it was harder to get EU research funding post-Brexit and that there was still a sense of reluctance from international partners to work with the UK as they perceived the UK was a liability in terms of research collaboration.

> 'I sense a certain reluctance to work with British universities' (Claire, staff).

Claire attended a research meeting where the majority of attendees were European, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss research partners for their research proposal; even though many of the people at the meeting were very familiar with the English system they were hesitant to invite UK partners.

5.2.6. Loss of academic talent, career opportunities

The HESA statistics show that research funding had declined both regionally and nationally by 2019/20, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2. The qualitative analysis shows that staff and student participants were concerned that Brexit was already affecting people's choice of where to work and study, and they feared that fewer EU citizens would choose to work and live in the UK because of Brexit in the future.

[37] 2nd staff interviews held in May 2021

> ‘Droves have already left, there’s only one way this goes, there’s no win here, people are leaving, people aren’t going to come we are isolating ourselves in an academic sense.’ (Katherine, staff)

Another participant had accepted a post in the UK as a Principal Investigator and wanted to continue to work with his European colleagues so he asked if any of them would be interested in working with him in the UK and apply for research positions at the University, but his colleagues were hesitant to move to the UK because of Brexit.

> ‘One argument was Brexit, so no one from my lab, we were happy working together, decided no it’s too risky for them, they didn’t want to take the chance and so none of my colleagues decided to move with me to the UK.’ (Mark, staff).

Brexit was the primary reason why one staff participant had already decided to leave the UK and move back to Europe. The impact of both Brexit and a racist incident that his family had experienced played a significant role in this decision. Interestingly, the departure of this participant triggered a chain reaction, leading to five European staff members leaving the University to return to Europe in quick succession.

Several participants mentioned that it was not the University that attracted early researchers and funding but the ‘people.’ This supports the findings highlighted in the ‘People’ theme that people attract people to collaborate with them.

> ‘It’s a lot about the people, universities aren’t that important, we go to where the people are’ (Claire, staff).

Claire’s feeling was fairly representative of the staff participants in that ‘People’ were an important part of the decision-making process of where they chose to work. Five participants on fixed-term contracts expressed concern about whether their contracts would be renewed as many were subject to future funding. Others felt that if key researchers left or if the university could not recruit internationally renowned researchers they would go to where the research funding is which is linked to people. So, if the people who are awarded funding leave the university, they will leave too to follow them. The majority of staff participants expressed concern that Brexit may affect research funding and research collaborations.

5.2.7. Travel

Both staff and student participants were concerned that travelling to and from the EU from England would be more difficult with visas and immigration border control. Participants believed that Brexit would restrict the number of times they would be able to go back home to Europe and return to England if new visa restrictions were introduced. The participants felt that they had not signed up for travel restrictions when they originally chose to live in England, and ease of movement was important to them.

> 'Travelling will be very different, the simple thing like travelling with my partner, we will have to go in different lines…. you'll feel the difference going in different lines, if we had family do they go with Mum or do they go with Dad? That is going to feel very weird for families' (Katherine, staff).

> 'I think travelling home is becoming more and more difficult, my parents and I like to arrange trips to Europe, and now I realise ok now I need to get paperwork if I want to rent a car, all this used to be much simpler' (Oliver, staff).

> 'So, we were going to do certain things, so we want to have a base here and one in my home country in the EU. We thought we were going to be able to move freely between, now we have travel restrictions on travel and it's completely different' (Christopher, staff).

The participants' unease about the situation stemmed from the UK no longer being part of the EU and the anticipated increased difficulty in travel. Participants felt the restrictions in travel between countries would create problems in both directions, for EU citizens wishing to travel home and English citizens wanting to visit Europe for conferences and exchanges. The participants thought the complicated visa requirements would put people off travelling to conferences and training events thus reducing opportunities for networking, sharing knowledge, and hearing those word-of-mouth recommendations of career opportunities.

One participant highlighted the impact of the possible withdrawal from the Erasmus+ scheme; they were concerned that this would lead to less mobility between countries thus reducing opportunities for international travel particularly as this initiative is open to staff as

well as students. Any alternative[38] may be more restrictive and limit opportunities; the concern was that any future funding would only be available to students and not staff.

5.2.8. Finance

At the time of the first interviews the implications for EU students in terms of tuition fees were not known, however, the students were still concerned about this. Several participants felt that as they were already studying in the UK before the UK left the EU, they would not be subject to an increase in tuition fees. However, as mentioned earlier financial issues and worries made a participant change his plan not to go to placement just in case there was an increase in fees in the future, for which he had not budgeted.

One participant said that they chose to come and study in the UK before Brexit happened because they would not have been able to afford to study in the UK if tuition fees changed to international fees for EU students after Brexit.

Sophie said her sister wanted to come to England to study however she was reconsidering where to study due to the increase in fees for EU students[39].

> 'Especially because the tuition fees are the highest in Europe, in all other European countries, in my country tuition is free, it's paid for by the government it's so much cheaper to study back home.' (Sophie, student).

The majority of participants said they would not have chosen to study in England if the tuition fees were higher than 'Home'[40] fees. Staff participants feared that any increase in tuition fees would reduce the amount of EU students choosing to study in the UK.

One participant was concerned about the fluctuating exchange rate, although this had always been an issue, after the Brexit referendum the exchange rate was at an all-time low. The participant had a maintenance grant from his home country and the exchange rate made a difference in how much money he received each month.

[38] At the time of the interviews, it was unknown what would happen to the Erasmus scheme. The Turing scheme was introduced after the interviews were held https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/

[39] The change in EU student classification from Home to International has led to an increase of tuition fees from £9250 pa to over 14k pa. From 2021 EU students are not entitled to an English government loan to help cover the cost of their education.

[40]

> ‘I have a loan and maintenance grant from my own country in Euros so every month I transfer the money into my account over here that pays for my rent sometimes a bit less or a bit more and the rest of my money for fees, food comes from my part-time job.’ (Johan, student).

Finance was a strong theme in the second interviews. Both staff and student participants felt that the change in tuition fees for EU students from home to international fees was a big mistake and that this would affect EU students’ choice of where to study in the future.

> ‘In general terms, no EU student has 30K waiting around for tuition fees so from that point of view that’s a disaster’ (Lily, student).

> ‘I wanted to study a Masters in the UK, but the international tuition fees are so high’ (Chloe, student).

> ‘I have decided not to do a Masters in the UK because basically there is no funding it is impossible to maintain myself, I’m considering Norway and Sweden’ (Alexander, student).

> ‘I will be treated as an international student and have to pay international fees, as an international student cost will be raised, I will have a few choices the Netherlands or Germany’ (Jimmy, student).

5.2.9. Prospects

One student participant expressed a fear that Brexit would impact their future prospects, potentially hindering their ability to work in the UK after completing their studies or affecting their chances of securing employment. However, although the remaining students did not specifically mention the word "prospects," they expressed concerns about their future employment opportunities and the possibility that the UK may lose its reputation and credibility post-Brexit. Meanwhile, another participant harboured concerns about the recognition of their degree in other countries. Additionally, a third participant perceived that the repercussions of Brexit, particularly the attitudes and sentiments held by some British people towards EU citizens would impact their prospects of studying in the UK in the

future. On a more positive note, one participant hoped that being an EU citizen would be a positive thing for employers in the UK as they would be able to travel freely around Europe.

> 'Hopefully, I will have more of an advantage having EU citizenship they may want me to travel which will be an advantage as I can travel to the EU' (Johan, student).

The potential impact on prospects also adds to the participants' feelings of uncertainty.

5.2.10. Student Recruitment

A new theme emerged from the second interview around the recruitment of EU students. This was not highlighted as a push factor in the first interviews, but EU staff were beginning to notice the decline in the number of EU students in their classes, and this concerned them. Mark had noticed a significant decline in the number of EU students on a postgraduate programme. In fact, this was the first year that there were no EU students enrolled at all. Mark did not find this surprising, particularly as tuition fees have increased to an international fee level, however, this also saddened him.

> 'There is no one from Europe on the programme, it's the first time we've had no one from the EU' (Mark, staff).

> 'EU applications for the master's programme have declined around 20/30%' (Anna, staff).

Several of the participants felt that the number of EU students coming to England to take a degree will decline because of the increase in tuition fees, the limitations on travel i.e., visas, and because other EU universities are now offering degree programmes in English where the tuition fees are less.

> 'Other European countries are jumping on the bandwagon to offer programmes in English for example Norway, Netherlands, and Brussels' (Claire, staff).

> 'Students will go to Ireland rather than England' (Ben, staff).

> 'English degrees are now offered in Germany, and they pay only a nominal fee' (Matthew, staff).

One participant felt that EU students may still come to England for shorter periods may be up to one year but would not want to stay for longer programmes of study.

All the participants interviewed felt that an increase in tuition fees would reduce the number of EU students coming to England. They also felt that it would change the demographic of students coming to England. Only the wealthiest students would have the chance to come and study; this was mentioned several times, and this caused real sadness about the whole situation.

> 'It is just off, it is really awful, disheartening, and sad to see the university just turned into like a profit for the business, the students are made to feel as though they are a customer, it is a business rather than a place of ideas and learning. England will only open to a certain kind of demographic which is really dangerous, only people are able to partake from wealthy backgrounds' (Paul, staff).
>
> 'I think international fees are unreasonable there will be more of a gap between those that can afford to pay for education, less people will come to stay for long programmes' (Charlotte, staff).
>
> 'More students will be from Asia and China only rich foreign students.' (Matthew, staff).

5.3. Future Plans

At the time of the first interviews[41] there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding Brexit, many policy decisions on how Brexit would work were unknown.

Out of the twelve academic members of staff:

- Two staff members were planning to leave the UK.
- One had already left the UK.
- Five were planning to stay if conditions remained the same and/or the funding was available to extend their contracts.
- Two were planning to stay if they were offered permanent contracts.

[41] March 2020 for students, October 2020 for staff

- Two were uncertain and were waiting to see how things worked out when the situation with Brexit settled.

> ‘The UK has lost its shine, the UK used to have the moral high ground in lots of areas, this once great nation that had such a cultural impact upon the planet…. Its excellent universities that are all now tarnished’ (Claire, staff).
>
> ‘I was very proud when I arrived, I wore it as a badge of honour, I don’t feel proud to be here anymore’ (Charlotte, staff).
>
> ‘Well one impact in terms of behaviour is that I will definitely leave, I’m leaving because of the current situation’ (James, staff).

The staff members who were going to leave or who were seriously considering their options were planning to move back to countries in the EU.

Out of the eight professional services staff:

- Four were planning to remain in the UK, some for-family reasons others for their careers.
- Three were seriously considering what they were planning to do over the next few years and considering whether they would remain in the UK.
- One participant was planning to go to Europe to study for a PhD as the UK was no longer a viable option due to the cost and ability to travel freely around the EU.

There was a real sense of sadness resulting from Brexit, where participants thought they were established and settled with their families Brexit made them question their plans and re-evaluate what was important to them.

Out of the thirteen student participants, three wanted to leave England after their studies, and two of these wanted to go and live somewhere warmer i.e., Australia. Five participants wanted to stay in the UK, one wanted to move to London as they perceived it to be more multicultural, diverse, and accepting of different nationalities.

> ‘In London, it’s such a busy place that you’re not really being judged and it’s a mixture of people and I feel a bit better there because like there’s going to be a lot of people who are not going to be against you’ (Phillip, student).

Two participants wanted to stay in the area in the future.

> 'I wouldn't mind commuting, but I want to stay in the city' (Edward, student).

The remaining five participants were unsure what they were going to do. Two said they wanted to stay in the UK, but it was dependent on what happens with Brexit; another two wanted to continue with their studies in an EU country as it was important to them to remain in the EU. The participants felt that they could not plan because they just did not know what was going to happen after the UK had left the EU; many were keeping their options open.

At the time of the second interview[42] out of the eighteen staff participants interviewed one more academic staff member had left the UK to go to work and live in Europe; this was despite being offered two contracts at the University[43]. The reason they chose to leave was because of the funding cuts and also because they wanted to be part of the EU.

> 'I want to be part of the EU that's why I'm leaving – the UK is very against Europe. I feel that is such a shame' (James, staff)

One participant on a permanent contract was actively seeking work in Europe and wanted to leave England primarily because of the impact on research funding.

> 'Research funding is affected due to limited options, I'm going to leave the UK and sell the house' (Mark, staff)

Two research participants wanted to remain in the UK, however, there was still uncertainty over funding and whether their fixed-term contracts would be renewed.

> 'The job is due to finish as it's linked to funding there is no guarantee of an extension, I'm waiting for contracts but can't afford to wait with no income' (Matthew, staff).

> 'I still don't feel 100% secure' (Clara, staff)

[42] Staff May 2021 and students February 2021

[43] One PI left during the Brexit Transition period, which was between 1st February 2020 and 31st December 2020, another left after the UK had left the EU single market in January 2021.

One professional services participant intended to leave the University and the UK to pursue further education in the EU, they wanted to be part of the EU.

Out of the thirteen student participants, three participants were still planning to leave the UK after their studies, primarily because it was so expensive to continue with their postgraduate studies in England. One student had already left England at the end of their degree programme and did not have any plans to return. I sensed that there was real sadness that the participants felt that they had no option but to choose other countries to continue with their studies because of the increased costs of higher education in England. The remainder of the participants were either completing their degree programme or were unsure what they would do in the future.

5.4. Conclusion

Brexit has caused uncertainty, anger and sadness, and the strength of feeling was still apparent at the time of the second interview five years after the Brexit referendum in 2016. The EU participants felt angry that they were not able to vote in the referendum even though many of them had lived in the UK for many years and had contributed to the British economy. They could not understand why the UK would want to split from the European Union and become isolated and insular when there were so many benefits of being part of a larger community. The majority of participants no longer felt welcome in England; after the referendum, there was a significant increase in racial tensions and some of the participants experienced this first hand which was very distressing and made them feel even more unwelcome.

The five ECR participants on fixed-term contracts were concerned that their jobs would not continue; this has resulted in three leaving the university. Two senior academics that were PIs decided to leave the university because of Brexit, one because of the impact of racist attacks on his family and the other because the EU were not prepared to partner with the UK in research collaborations. This has had a knock effect as other more junior researchers left the university to follow the PIs who attract the research funding.

The EU students felt that they would be secure as they started their studies before the UK left the EU; however, they stressed that they would have chosen to study in a different country if they had to pay international tuition fees at the time they applied. Two of the student

participants who were planning to study at Postgraduate level in the UK have now decided to continue with their postgraduate studies in the EU.

Many factors have impacted the lives of the participants, five participants have decided to leave England even though they had no intention of leaving the UK before the Brexit referendum. They felt helpless, they thought that they would not be able to change what was happening in the UK so the only option they had was to leave the country; others have decided to wait and see how things pan out in the longer term.

Ultimately, Brexit has not only disrupted lives but also severed the sense of belonging and security that many EU staff and students once felt in the UK, leading to a significant brain drain and loss of talent. The narrative identified in this research provides the HE sector with valuable insights into the factors that are pushing EU citizens away from participating in the UK HE sector. This enables institutions to proactively identify where additional support is needed and to address concerns effectively. Brexit has significantly impacted EU staff and students, affecting research collaborations, international partnerships, and their sense of belonging. These factors highlight the urgent need for strategic responses to retain EU talent and maintain collaborative efforts in the UK HE sector.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

There has been considerable speculation on the impact that Brexit has had, and will continue to have, on the HE sector. Many questions remain on the long-term impact of Brexit on EU student and staff recruitment, EU research funding and the financial consequences for English HEIs (Marginson, 2017; Marini, 2018a; Mayhew, 2017).

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research aims and objectives and includes the following sections: 6.2 SBQ1 - What are the EU staff and students lived experiences of Brexit, working, studying, and living in England; 6.3 SBQ2 – How has Brexit had an impact on the numbers of EU staff and students wanting to work and study in England; 6.4 SBQ3 - How has Brexit affected research collaborations and the opportunity to attract research funding from the EU; 6.5 SBQ4 - How is Brexit affecting the sustainability of a university in the Southwest of England; 6.6 SBQ5 - How does this study contribute to existing scholarship on the impact of Brexit on the HE sector, using Charles Wright Mills' theoretical framework; 6.7 The Future; 6.8 Implications for Practice; 6.9 Limitations, Challenges and Final Thoughts, and 6.10 Epilogue.

6.2. SBQ1: What are the EU staff and students lived experiences of Brexit working, studying, and living in England.

Brexit has had a far greater impact on EU staff and students in terms of the way they live their lives in England than was anticipated (Mayhew, 2017; Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018). The fact the majority of EU citizens[44] were not allowed to vote in the referendum sent a strong message to the participants saying that they were not welcome in the UK anymore. The staff participants were unhappy with how the UK Government had operated leaving huge uncertainty for themselves and their families (Emerson, 2017). They felt they had no voice or any way of being heard, even though they contributed to the English economy, supported the higher education sector, and paid their taxes in England. Feelings of sadness, hurt and anger were evident and are on-going. The participants felt ignored, this resonates with Roshers' view that 'EU migrant voices and experiences in the UK have been ignored at best, and often actively silenced' (Rosher, 2022, p.1).

[44] Unless they are from Ireland, Cyprus, or Malta. The latter two countries are in the commonwealth.

6.2.1. Where to work, study and live

The participants were enthusiastic when describing why they first came to the UK, the participants were proud to live in England, and they did not question their rights as EU citizens to live in another EU country. The participants felt they belonged to a larger community of the EU where they were entitled to the same rights as British nationals. My findings resonate with the findings by Sigona *et al.* (2022) in that EU participants valued being part of the EU. EU membership granted individuals rights and opportunities that were embraced before Brexit. Mills (1959) argued that even if an individual is constrained by societal factors and manipulation, as long as they did not perceive a threat to their values, they accepted the situation and had a sense of well-being. The values individuals hold are shaped by their knowledge and understanding of how society functions; this helped EU participants feel welcome and at home in England before Brexit. Following Brexit, the participants feelings towards the UK changed as it was no longer part of the EU.

The majority of participants chose England over other English-speaking countries that were not part of the EU. Participants felt that they could enjoy England and the benefits of living in England and remain part of the larger European community (Sigona *et al.*, 2022). Before Brexit, EU staff had no immediate plans to leave, they had been drawn to the UK due to the conditions of the EU membership, i.e., ease of travel, shared regulations, and proximity to home.

When the outcome of the Brexit referendum was announced, this all changed, the participants felt anxiety and uncertainty as they did not know how this would affect them. The participants felt that the UK Government had not prepared for a Leave outcome as very little information was available. The participants felt invisible and powerless as they were not allowed to vote (Bale, 2022). Mills' theory that 'those in power often feel no need to make it explicit and to justify it,' (1959, p.169), was partially true in this situation. Although the people of the UK voted to Leave in the Brexit referendum, the UK Government decided to hold a referendum in the belief that people would vote to Remain. They leveraged support for their next general election through the promise of an EU referendum (Bale, 2022). Immediately after the Brexit referendum there were calls from scholars to research the impact of Brexit on EU citizens working and studying in higher education in the UK (Courtois et al., 2018; Marginson, 2017; Mayhew, 2017).

The findings from my research, highlight the pull factors that attracted EU citizens to work and live in England, see Chapter 4. Most participants had more than one pull factor that attracted them to England; England was perceived to be a multicultural, diverse, and welcoming country that embraced difference before Brexit. The participants felt this to be true in the UK HE sector where many nationalities work and study together. The English language, the quality of education and the research opportunities available were a particular attraction. ECRs wanted to work where senior research academics worked as they attracted large research grants and provided opportunities for international collaboration. Mazzarol & Soutar's (2002) research highlighted several pull factors that were similar to the findings in my research, including quality of education, cost of living, environment, personal recommendations, geographic location, and social links. In addition to this my research identified that the pull factors included language, culture, heritage, and programme of study are key factors. My research also found that the environment was important in terms of feeling safe and that participants wanted to go to a country that was diverse, inclusive, and multicultural, see Chapter 4.

The English language was a pull factor; however, this was linked with other factors. The English culture, quality of teaching and research excellence were linked with the language. Some student participants had considered going to other English-speaking countries and countries where degree programmes are taught in English. However, they felt that studying in England gave them an advantage when applying for jobs. Even though other countries charged less tuition fees than England[45], participants chose to study in England because of the advantages in terms of opportunities and the experience gained. However, they did confirm that they would not have chosen to study in England if the tuition fees had been raised before joining the University, see Chapter 5. These findings provide evidence for the call from Tsiligiris et al (2018) to identify the factors affecting an EU students' choice to study in the UK. Although EU students may decide to study in other English-speaking countries or EU countries delivering degrees in English post Brexit, this may be complicated by the fact that HEIs in another country may teach in English but speak in a different language outside of the HEI setting. This would limit the students' opportunity to speak the English language. More research is needed to ascertain whether this would affect a students' choice of where

[45] At the time of the first interviews EU students were paying 'Home' fees of around £9000

to study. The fact that other countries are enhancing their provision of degrees delivered in English, poses a threat to English HEIs trying to attract EU students. My research findings confirm the concerns raised by Courtois *et al.* (2018) that Brexit will push EU students to other countries that offer degree programmes in English.

The lack of opportunity in the participants' home country was also a factor that affected a students' choice of where to study. Bouwel and Reinhilde (2013) found that EU students opted to study in a different country if opportunities in their home country were limited, particularly in terms of higher education, especially at the PhD level. This perspective was reaffirmed across all levels of HE by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). This was certainly the case for two of the EU student participants, see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.9. However, another two students highlighted limited educational opportunities in their home country. Nevertheless, their desire to study in a different country was linked to other pull factors such as having the opportunity to speak the English language.

Participants also felt that the UK was more diverse, and inclusive, and offered more opportunities in terms of career progression. Where participants had families, feeling safe and living in a safe place was especially important to them. My research found that participants felt safer in the Southwest of England, rather than other larger cities in England such as London, Manchester, and Southampton. Highman's (2019) research suggests that EU students tend to favour UK Russell Group universities in larger cities, primarily to feel that they are getting value for money in terms of reputational added value. Interestingly, none of the participants referred to league tables in terms of being important to them when originally choosing where to study, instead, people were more important. My research supports the theory that students looking to study at a university in the Southwest of England are less concerned about prestige in terms of reputation (Highman, 2019) or league table position (Findlay *et al.*, 2011), but because of the location of the University, and feeling safe and welcome.

Family and friends were key influencers in the decision-making process for both staff and student participants. When participants knew of someone already living in England or the UK, they valued their knowledge about the English culture and their experience of living in England. This is similar to Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002, p.4) findings although they referred to other 'Gatekeepers' being important to the final decision, it is unclear who these

Gatekeepers are, but social links were found to be important in my research. The pull factors identified in my research are similar to the findings of Van Mol and Timmerman (2014) in terms of improving language skills, personal growth, culture, and people being important. However, none of the participants in my research specifically referred to experiencing independence or love as a factor for their choice of where to study or work. None of the participants came to England to be with a partner, some met their partner after arriving in England which then affected their desire to stay in England, post Brexit.

Both staff and students' felt that England was an open and welcoming country before the Brexit referendum. They believed that England was more accepting of diverse cultures, especially in the HE sector. The participants appreciated the diversity and multiculturalism within the university's staff and student population. They perceived that the people they worked and studied with were more inclined to embrace and welcome individual differences. This offers an additional perspective to the research carried out by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) on the student push and pull factors affecting a students' choice of where to study.

Staff participants were drawn to the university by research opportunities and the chance to collaborate with leading academics in their field; key academics who attract research funding also attract ECRs. Just after the Brexit referendum, there was concern that Brexit would have an adverse effect on ECRs in terms of job security, however, it was too early to know (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). The academic staff participants on fixed-term contracts felt extremely vulnerable; two had already left and two more were anxiously waiting to hear whether their contracts would be extended, see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5. People are a more important pull factor than the place when considering where to work. Well established academics who work on high-profile research projects which attract funding draw other academics to the University, particularly ECRs.

The participants who had experienced the Erasmus+ programme before full-time study in England, chose to study in a different country based on factors which included improving a foreign language, experiencing a different culture, and improving employment opportunities, these factors were similar to those identified by Lesjak *et al.* (2015). However, none of the student participants in my research mentioned that experiencing a European identity was important to them. The Erasmus+ programme helped to provide a diverse and multicultural experience in English HEIs and universities in Europe (Cairns, 2017; Jacobone & Moro, 2014;

Papatsiba, 2006). Several participants, both staff and students, took advantage of the opportunities offered by Erasmus+ to expand their knowledge of the country and to improve their language skills. Many EU students travelling via the Erasmus+ scheme felt that studying and living in a different country allowed them to acquire personal skills that would help them with their careers and provide additional career opportunities (Soares & Mosquera, 2019). The participants were concerned that the UK was no longer going to participate in the Erasmus+ scheme, they felt this would have a detrimental effect to student and staff mobility in the future. This resonates with the findings that the Erasmus+ scheme acted as a 'warming up' effect for future visits (Jacobone and Moro, 2014, p. 325); which, if removed will impact the number of EU staff and students choosing to work and study in the UK. This also aligns with one of the concerns made by German universities. Their worry, however, was linked to the mobility of their own students coming to British universities, stating that 'our students might not be so flexible to shift to newly generated cooperation partners,' (Jungblut & Seidenschur, 2018, p.47). This implies that it will affect their desire to work with the UK in the future on research collaborations and other initiatives. The pull factors differed slightly when the participants were considering where to study for a full degree programme as highlighted in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.

The pull factors outlined in Chapter 4, have been eroded by Brexit. The staff participants particularly felt that the 'Place' is no longer as attractive because the UK is no longer seen as the diverse welcoming country that it once was (Moss & Solheim, 2022).

6.2.2. Impact of Brexit

EU staff members were shocked and saddened by the outcome of the Brexit referendum, some broke down into tears when they heard the result. They were concerned that Brexit would fundamentally change their work and home lives for the worse and affect their plans. The staff participants felt that the UK Government had made lots of promises to the British people which they could not keep. They believed that the British people voted for Brexit on false pretences, such as the impact on the NHS and immigration control, as highlighted by Cassidy (2020). Some felt that the UK Government could just change the rules again and felt that the EU settlement scheme would not offer them enough security (Barnard, Butlin & Costello, 2022). The staff participants felt very unwelcome in the country that they had decided to make their home. The long-term plans of many of the EU participants have

changed because of the direct impact of Brexit. Having prior knowledge of what it was like to work and live in England before Brexit helped them feel in control of their lives and the decisions they made. The participants may not have been aware of the aspects that were important to them in terms of their values because they had not been threatened before. Before Brexit, the participants were passively accepting the ways things were in England by not challenging societal norms (Parsons, 1951).

This all changed post-Brexit; the uncertainty and not knowing, caused so much uncertainty that some EU staff left the UK because they felt they had no choice because of the impact that Brexit had on their families. Some left because they felt that the UK was not considered by other European countries to be in a stable place following Brexit, particularly regarding investment and research funding. The findings of my research confirm that the UK is less welcoming, is losing key academics which in turn affects the recruitment of ECRs, and that the UK is being excluded from EU research projects; These concerns were raised by the EU academic staff interviewed by the Universities UK (2019c). My research findings also support and expand on the research conducted by Barnard, Butlin and Costello (2022) in that some of the EU staff working in HEIs in England also felt they needed an extra level of safety and security so had decided to apply for British Citizenship.

Brexit instigated a situation where people did not know what would happen which led to a feeling of unease and disquiet during this period. According to Mills (1959), when people are aware of a threat but do not know how that threat will affect their values, they will feel uneasy. The UK Government used its power to enforce the terms and conditions of the referendum leaving the EU participants feeling powerless and manipulated.

> 'Social arrangements do change without benefit of explicit decision. But in so far as decisions are made…. the problem of who is involved in making them…. is the basic problem of power' (Mills, 1959, p.40).

The wider political agenda surrounding Brexit affected each participant individually, and each participant dealt with these feelings differently. The not knowing of the situation heightened these feelings of uncertainty and anxiety, the values they cherished in terms of their living conditions and work life were threatened by the national decision to withdraw from the EU. The Brexit referendum brought into focus what was important to the participants in terms of

what they valued. The staff participants felt uneasy, angry, and sad, although the students felt some of these emotions, they did not have the same strength of feeling as the staff members.

The majority of staff participants said they were not aware of how other EU staff were feeling. At the end of the second interview, several participants asked me to share my key findings with them; this dissemination of key facts helped them put their feelings into perspective and understand that they were not the only ones feeling this way. By asking about the research findings, the participants, as Mills suggests, were stepping outside of their individual experience to look at the bigger picture to understand why they were feeling this way (Mills, 1959). Knowing that they were not the only ones experiencing the feelings of uncertainty, anger and confusion gave them a certain amount of comfort and relief. Following the research in 2017, Courtois *et al.* (2018) found that EU citizens were feeling uncertain about the future in fact 'the dominant theme was uncertainty, (Courtois, 2018, p.17); this still resonates at the time of writing this thesis, six years later. However, in the interim Brexit policies have become clearer, and the way that EU citizens are affected in terms of living in the UK has been clarified in terms of immigration and travel. Even though the participants know far more than they did in 2017 at the time of Courtois et als' research, the staff participants still felt uncertain and uncomfortable by the situation. Many were waiting to see how Brexit plays out in terms of job security, feeling safe and being welcome, to decide whether to remain in England. For ECRs, job security was linked to the availability of research funding and the continuation of the projects they were working on. My research findings differ slightly from the study carried out by Sigona *et al.* (2022) in that, Sigona et al found family, relationships, and work to be a key driver in the decision-making process of whether to stay or leave the UK.

With Brexit effectively severing the UK's connection to Europe and its regional identity within the EU, the shared values and perspectives have been cast into doubt. This shift has caused uncertainty and anxiousness which has led to unrest and threatened the participants' personal values (Mills, 1959). Before Brexit, the participants may not have been aware of what they valued in terms of living, working, and studying in England as they had not felt any threat; in this situation Mills refers to people feeling indifferent to a situation (Mills, 1959). If the participants had felt indifferent to the situation before Brexit, this certainly changed after Brexit.

Two senior academics and two ECRs from different academic disciplines decided to leave the university to work in other EU countries because of the perceived lack of opportunity for international collaborations. My research provides evidence to support the findings by Highman, Marginson and Papatsiba (2023) in respect to a loss of key academic staff and decline in the ability to attract research funding. Xenophobic attacks and racism towards the family of one senior academic was the final straw, he felt he could no longer stay in England, although this saddened him because he loved the English culture, see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2. The other PI left the University because he felt unable to control or accept the environment in which he lived in England, so he felt that he had no choice but to leave the UK. As Mills suggests people either learn to live with the rules and regulations or choose a different path (Mills, 1959). Brexit was the trigger that forced the two senior academics to leave the University.

Although 'People' are perceived as a greater pull factor than 'Place,' one academic working at the University had recently moved to England from a university in Europe. He wanted to bring his research team with him, but they were not interested in working in England because of the uncertainty of Brexit. So even if English universities can still attract high-profile researchers and research funding in the future, they may still struggle to attract EU researchers to their team. This will lead to a loss in the diversity and the multicultural feeling of the university, thus affecting the student experience. This may lead to senior academic PIs locating themselves in an EU country which inevitably leads to a loss of research funding for the University.

Even though some academics left the University post-Brexit, the EU staff participants had not actively been poached by other EU countries. They left because of the effect of Brexit on their families and the threat of a reduction in research funding. It was clear that the participants would follow where the funding goes, and if that means that EU Institutions are receiving the majority of funding and attracting internationally recognised academics as PIs then other academic staff will follow. There was no evidence from my research to suggest that other EU countries were actively trying to 'poach' UK-based academics post-Brexit as highlighted by Courtois (2018). There was concern that ECRs would feel vulnerable and insecure because their posts were reliant on research funding. One Institution in Denmark had planned to go to the UK to run a 'Recruitment Drive' to attract top academics to come to work in Denmark

(Courtois, 2018, p.22). The five academic staff on fixed-term contracts linked to research funding were all concerned that the continuation of their jobs was precarious and linked to future research funding. This caused anxiety as the staff members had families and bills to pay, so they were beginning to question whether to stay in England. Although the findings of this research suggest that ECRs are more affected and more likely to leave the UK, this is intrinsically linked to research funding and the ability of the more senior academics to attract funding in the future. These findings expand on the knowledge from Marini's (2018b) research which highlighted a tailing off in the number of EU staff in the age group up to 34 years.

The EU students did not feel the same level of shock from the Brexit outcome as staff participants. Most of the student participants were in the country temporarily to complete their studies; many planned to return to the EU after their studies. However, the lack of information available and the not knowing how Brexit would impact their studies caused concern and uncertainty, this once again resonates with Mills theory that when values are threatened this causes uneasiness (Mills, 1959). Where EU students lived in England before deciding to study at an English HEI, they felt more anxious about the situation because they did not know how it would affect their future and whether they would be able to remain in England. Many of the students in this position were here with their family members so they also worried about the ability of their family to stay in the country (Sumption & Fernández-Reino, 2020). Where EU students had been living in England for several years with their families, they applied for settled status and were considering applying for British citizenship for extra security. They had similar feelings to the staff members who thought that getting British Citizenship would provide an extra layer of security and safety (Barnard, Butlin & Costello, 2022).

The Brexit referendum result was known by most student participants at the time of their application to study at the University. They felt that as the UK was not due to leave the EU until January 2021, it would still be possible to study in England on the same terms as before. They thought they would continue to pay home tuition fees[46] as they had commenced their programme of study prior to the UK leaving the EU. They also hoped that they would either

[46] EU students were eligible for home tuition fees i.e., the same tuition fees as English students until July 2021

have completed their degree or be most of the way through their programme before any changes were applied to their terms and conditions of study. The majority of students did confirm that if their tuition fees had been set at an international level, they would not have come to study in England[47]. They also thought that only the affluent EU students would be able to come and study in England in the future, which would affect the diversity of the University in terms of including students from all demographic backgrounds. My findings provide some clarity on the impact of tuition fee changes post Brexit and the expectations and perceptions of EU students as called for by Tsiligiris and Ruyter (2018).

Ultimately if EU students do not feel that they have the same opportunities and prospects as before Brexit, they will choose to study somewhere that does provide the opportunities they seek. Two of the students who had intended to continue with their studies in England chose to return to the EU; they had evaluated what was important to them and chose not to accept the situation, in effect making the decision to move out of the UK because of the impact of Brexit (Mills, 1959).

EU students were quite clear that they would not consider studying in England now that the tuition fees had increased to international fee levels; this is evidenced by the dramatic drop in EU student applications in 2021/22, see Chapter 4, 4.2.2. The students who were considering postgraduate opportunities in England were now planning to study in Europe where fees are much lower. Wakeling and Jefferies (2013) suggested that when 'Home' tuition fees were raised in 2013 this had little effect on the number of 'Home' and EU students applying to UK universities. However, my research indicates that raising EU student tuition fees to an international level is certainly a factor affecting an EU students' choice of where to study post-Brexit. Word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends were an important pull factor for the EU student participants in the decision-making process of where to study. With fewer EU students attending universities in the UK this will diminish; this will further reduce the number of EU students studying in the UK, in the future. This research supports the theory made by Marginson (2018) that the increase in tuition fees because of Brexit will devastate the UK's lead in educating EU students.

[47] International fees are for a typical undergraduate programme for entry in 2024 are ~ £17/18 per annum dependent on programme in comparison to £9,250 for a 'Home' student.

Although Brexit has caused many challenges for the HE sector, new opportunities may arise from Brexit as highlighted by Courtois (2018) with partnerships with other English-speaking countries such as Australia and the United States which may help to offset the notion that the UK is insular and inward-looking (Highman, 2018). However, this does not address the fundamental issue that the UK will lose the European diversity it once had and will also affect its standing in terms of EU collaboration and its reputation internationally.

6.2.2.1. Xenophobia and Racism

Participants considered England to be a safe welcoming country that had a multicultural environment before Brexit, this was felt to be true in the HE sector. After the Brexit referendum this changed, and most participants felt some kind of hostility towards them. The Southwest of England was no exception; the majority of participants experienced increased xenophobia and racism which was fuelled by nationalism and anti-immigration views (Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Some participants were told to go home, spat at, and physically abused. Children of the staff and student participants were targeted at school and in their local area, the repercussions are still being felt, refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2. The participants felt uncomfortable speaking in their native language when out of their homes and very conscious of their nationality living in England after Brexit. They had not felt this type of hostility so openly before Brexit[48], these findings add further knowledge to the findings of Sime *et al.* (2021) and Devine (2018a) that Brexit acted as a trigger for increased racism and xenophobic incidence. Even though many EU staff and student participants felt that the Southwest of England was a safer place to live than larger cities in the UK; post Brexit hate crimes were more prevalent in areas that had voted to Remain, which included parts of the Southwest of England (Albornoz, Bradley & Sonderegger, 2021). The participants felt that the propaganda campaign during the Brexit transition period increased tensions between British nationals and EU citizens and that the Government propaganda contributed to this (Golec de Zavala, Guerra & Simao, 2017). Although participants did not specifically refer to 'Englishness' in the way that Virdee and McGeever (2018) described it, they did feel that Brexit gave the English people permission to express their hatred of foreigners more openly. They also felt that the UK was becoming more insular and nationalist; they felt that they no longer had the privilege of

[48] That is not to say that racism and xenophobic incidences did not happen before.

feeling ‘invisible’ in regard to their status living in England as they had before Brexit (Mulholland & Ryan, 2023).

The findings from my research suggest that Brexit impacted the Eastern European participants more in terms of the extremity of the xenophobic incidents, which included verbal and physical attacks. This adds an extra dimension to Devine’s (2018b) research as it relates to the severity of incidents experienced by Eastern Europeans.

Where staff and students had family members, the whole family were affected. The children of the participants were targeted at school and in their local area, leading to anxiety for the whole family. There was a sadness that what they once perceived in terms of England being diverse and multicultural was no longer true. These feelings of not-belonging worried the participants, particularly the staff members who had made England their home. Many of them could not understand why Brexit had led to such a huge change in attitude towards them, although some participants had experienced xenophobia before they had never experienced it on the scale that made them feel unsafe. The strength of feeling was as strong when I held the second interview four years after the Brexit referendum. Xenophobia and racism have been one of the biggest push factors in terms of EU participants leaving England. When one senior academic left the university, this triggered a snowball effect of five more EU staff members leaving the University. The participants that had decided to leave the country had decided not to be turned into a ‘robot’ through acceptance of the situation, they decided to do something about it and leave (Mills, 1959, p.171).

6.3. SBQ2: Has Brexit had an impact on the numbers of EU staff and students wanting to work and study in England?

6.3.1. EU Staff

The statistics show a steady growth in the numbers of both EU academic and professional services staff choosing to work in England in the years leading up to the Brexit referendum (HESA, 2020b). The year-on-year increase in EU staff suggests that England was a popular choice when choosing where to work, study and live pre-Brexit. In terms of the Brexit timeline, the decline in the number of EU academic staff members (in proportion to the total number of staff working in HEIs) began after the Brexit referendum but before the UK had left the EU on 1st February 2020. It was during this period that there was a great deal of uncertainty about

how Brexit would impact EU members of staff working and living in England and scholars called for more research (Marginson, 2017; Marini, 2018a; Mayhew, 2017).

Up to 2018/19,[49] the data suggests that there has been little impact from Brexit on the number of EU staff on professional services contracts choosing to work in England and the Southwest of England. The proportion of EU Professional Services staff compared to the total number of staff has continued to rise slightly each year both nationally and regionally, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1. The decline in professional services staff at this time may have been to the initial shock felt from the result of the referendum. Both national and regional figures have seen growth, although there has been stronger growth in the Southwest of England.

Although there was a decline in the year-on-year growth rate of EU professional services staff, the narrative from the qualitative research confirms that EU professional services staff felt more secure in their jobs than their academic counterparts because their employment was not linked to research funding. My findings support Luthra's prediction that academic staff will be more difficult to retain than professional services staff, primarily because academic staff have to move jobs to follow research funding (Luthra, 2021).

The HESA data shows the rate of growth slows year-on-year in the percentage of EU academic staff in proportion to the total number of staff at a regional and national level in 2017/18 (HESA, 2023a). 2019/20 saw the first fall in the numbers of EU academics at a national and regional level, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1. The word-of-mouth narrative from EU staff members was mixed. Most EU professional services staff were planning to stay in England. Some EU academic staff were going to stay in England in the short term and reconsider their position in a few years when the uncertainty had settled. Others had left or were planning to leave due to the uncertainties in research opportunities, the end of free movement and additional visa costs. Although it is still not clear what the ultimate impact of Brexit will be on the recruitment of EU staff, Mayhew (2022) believes that EU staff recruitment fears have been allayed, although he does acknowledge that research funding and immigration remain a threat to future recruitment. My research confirms that Brexit is having an impact on the recruitment and retention of EU academic staff, primarily due to the uncertainty of research funding.

[49] HESA data post 2018/19 is not available for all professional services staff in English HEIs

The HESA data does not highlight staff members on fixed-term contracts, so it is difficult to see the impact on fixed-term academic staff, however, the narrative from my research supports the theory that ECRs have been affected by Brexit in terms of continuous employment. Courtois (2018) highlighted ECR's vulnerability with regards to research funding, this has been confirmed by my research.

The decline in the numbers of EU academic staff working in HEIs in England and the Southwest of England since 2019/20 is worrying. The gradual reduction in the number of EU academic staff working in the Southwest of England may have an impact on the amount of EU funding received in the future. This, in turn, will mean a further reduction in the number of EU academic staff working at the University, thus diminishing the diversity and expertise even further. The word-of-mouth narrative suggests that this decline will continue if the universities do not actively seek to engage with Horizon Europe and other funding bodies to ensure that they attract high-profile researchers from the EU. The fact that the UK has broken away from Europe means that HEIs need to find ways of connecting with European countries to ensure their research reputation is upheld (Kushnir & Brooks, 2022).

6.3.2. EU students

In 2016/17 the year of the Brexit referendum there was a 6.8% increase in the number of EU students studying in England and a 10.5% increase in the Southwest of England on the previous year, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2. The narrative from the EU student participants confirmed that they wanted to start their studies in England before the UK left the EU. Tsiligiris and Ruyter (2018) suggested that EU student recruitment in 2017 was similar to 2016, however, this is difficult to interpret because it is not clear which academic year this refers to. It is also unclear whether they are looking at UK recruitment or recruitment in England, they do not include any regional data.

Although the number of EU students studying started to decline in 2018/19 in England and 2018/19 in the Southwest of England as a proportion of the total number of students studying, there are slight differences in student growth in England and the Southwest of England. In England there is continuous growth in the number of EU students studying each year, albeit at different levels each year from 2015/16 to 2020/21, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2. This differs in the Southwest of England in that there is a decline in EU student numbers in 2019/20 on the previous year of twenty students. This small decline could be because

students undertaking a three-year undergraduate degree in 2016/17 would have finished their degree in 2019/20. This factor together with a reduction in the number of EU students applying to study in England each year could have contributed to the decline. In 2020/21 EU student numbers rose slightly in England and the Southwest by 4%. This could be attributed to the fact that the UK had left the EU, there was more information available on immigration, tuition fees and travel, or that Covid-19 and the move to online learning encouraged EU students to study remotely from their home country. There is currently no scholarship to support or reject this theory.

England and the Southwest of England have both seen dramatic falls in the number of EU students choosing to study in HEIs in 2021/2022. The number of students in the Southwest region has declined less than at a national level, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2. The pull factors attracting students to the Southwest of England included place, and programme of study, so these factors may provide answers to the difference in rate of decline. The steep decline in EU student numbers is worrying, even though Mayhew (2022) suggests that HEIs can make up the financial shortfall by increasing other international student numbers. The cultural diversity of English institutions will change which will affect the choices made by EU students in the future.

One of the pull factors for students to study in England was the fact that they were treated as equal to home students in terms of the fees they paid. This was even though home fees[50] in England were higher than in other European countries before Brexit. This did not deter EU students from coming to England to study as indicated by the year-on-year increase in EU student numbers prior to Brexit (HESA, 2019b). However, the 'word-of-mouth' narrative that was requested by Tsiligiris and Ruyter (2018) is that EU student participants would not be willing to pay the full international tuition fees that now apply to EU students if they were to study in England in the future. They stated that they would consider other universities delivering programmes in English or going to other English-speaking countries confirming the speculations by Courtois (2018). The fall in EU student numbers in England and the Southwest supports this narrative; some participants had family and friends who had decided not to

[50] £9250 per annum

study in England post the Brexit referendum because of the increased tuition fee. The impact being the number of EU students studying in England in future years is likely to fall further.

A high level of mobility among students both outgoing and incoming is a sign of quality and prestige in the HE sector (Foster, 2016 ; Green, 2012; Wildavsky, 2010). Student mobility is also seen as a benefit in terms of generating a diverse academic setting and contributing to the English economy (Falkingham *et al.*, 2021). The loss of EU students in English HEIs may not affect the English economy as much as expected, but it will erode the diverse academic setting which was a pull factor for EU students in the first instance. The impact of fewer EU citizens working and studying in England will erode the feeling of belonging to a larger European community and further distance the UK from the EU (Kushnir & Brooks, 2022).

My research highlights that prospective EU students are more likely to look at alternative providers outside of England which deliver their programmes in English due to the increased costs in tuition fees. Costs were seen as an important factor for many EU students when considering where to study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The student participants felt that in the future EU students looking to study in England will be from affluent families where their parents can support them financially. This impacts the demographic of the EU student population which again affects the cultural diversity in universities. One of the pull factors highlighted in this research was the proximity of England to other EU countries; as the UK is no longer a member of the EU, students may decide to travel further afield to other English-speaking countries such as the USA, Australia, or New Zealand as predicted by Courtois (2018). Any reduction in EU students will lead to a decline in the number of 'word of mouth' recommendations thus affecting the number of students interested in studying in England (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The EU students were adamant that they would not have been willing to pay the increased tuition fees in England.

Scholars have noted that other countries were growing their transnational offerings and hoping to attract more EU students (Courtois *et al.*, 2018). Ireland appears to be one of the winners it has seen a 49% increase in the number of EU students applying to Irish Universities in 2021-2022 (HESA, 2023b). The loss in EU student numbers is detrimental to UK institutions, and even though the UK has managed to increase international student numbers from other regions, a UUKi/Studyportals report predicts that future losses look likely. They recommend that the UK should 'devote more thought to including the EU in their recruitment goals'

because they feel that once the UK has stabilised after Brexit the European market may be less susceptible to future shocks than other regions (ICEF Monitor, 2022, p.1).

6.4. SBQ3: Has Brexit affected research collaborations and the opportunity to attract research funding from the EU?

The HESA data shows a decline in the amount of EU funding received nationally and regionally with the largest decline in England in 2019/20 of 7.6% and in the Southwest of England in 2020/21 of 2.8%. The Southwest of England has seen a smaller decline year on year in comparison to England, however both England and the Southwest of England have seen a 2% decline in funding since 2019/20 in proportion to the total funding received, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.

Senior EU academics are leaving the UK to work in European countries and in some instances, they are taking their research teams with them. The qualitative research findings suggest that the decline in EU research funding will continue as European countries are opting to exclude the UK from joint research projects due to the uncertainty of Brexit, refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3. The replacement Horizon Europe programme has been running for 3 years at the time of writing this thesis; however, there is uncertainty around the association of the UK with Horizon Europe which has added to the reduction in EU funding that the UK is receiving. This continues to cause additional stress and insecurity for EU academic staff in the sector. If an agreement cannot be reached this will lead to a greater decline in research funding and collaborations.

In the past England has relied on internationalisation and academic mobility to help fill the labour gap in research positions (Ackers & Gill, 2005). However, Brexit is affecting the number of research opportunities available in England thus reducing the research funding available to the sector. The decline in the number of EU PIs at the University has also led to further insecurity for ECRs on fixed-term contracts which has meant some have left the university. The impact on EU academic staff is intricately linked to research funding and collaborations see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5. Brexit has had an impact on EU ECRs working in England, they are more concerned about their long-term job security due to the uncertainty with regard to the research funding available in English HEIs post-Brexit (Marini, 2018a). In a way, EU ECRs are competing with English ECRs for research opportunities but also face the additional hurdle of obtaining a visa to work in England. Many of the EU academic staff were still waiting to see

how Brexit pans out before they decide whether to stay in England or not, therefore further research will be needed to assess the long-term impact of Brexit on the EU academic staff working in HEIs in England.

EU participants have experienced being excluded from research bids led by international institutions because they work in a UK university, see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5. The academic staff on fixed-term contracts which were primarily ECRs were concerned about job security and felt that the opportunity to work on international research projects may be affected because of Brexit. Senior academics who attracted research funding were considering their position and whether to remain in England in the long term. One PI left the university, this had knock-on repercussions as other academics followed the PI. Other EU academic staff had left the university because of Brexit, this was partially due to the ability to be partners in large international research projects and partially due to xenophobic racist attacks on their families. This is in comparison to the professional services staff where only one was thinking about leaving the university. This was not linked to their job role but because they wanted to continue with their studies, and they were not prepared to pay international tuition fees. This is supported by the UCEA (2019) study that indicated that one in four institutions had concerns regarding the recruitment of EU staff post-Brexit; their primary concern was attracting academic staff members rather than professional services staff. Although the data only shows a slight decline in the numbers of EU staff coming to work in England, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1, this does not take into account the number of EU staff leaving each year. The narrative from my research tells a different story. One researcher involved in international collaboration research had evidence that other European countries are avoiding working with UK institutions as full research beneficiaries because of the uncertainty around Brexit. The decisions made by EU Institutions not to include the UK in their international research will lead to a further decline in the status of UK research, the amount of research funding attracted through international collaborations, and the opportunity to share knowledge across different contexts. International collaboration is widely regarded as strengthening research through the creation, and dissemination of knowledge (Horizon, 2022).

UK universities have relied on funding from the EU; being a member of the EU has given the UK access to EU funding and facilities, and programmes such as Horizon 2020 have benefitted the UK (Horizon, 2022). Different countries held different views on the potential impact of Brexit on research, funding, and status. Some countries were concerned, while others were

more relaxed about Brexit and felt that it might benefit them in terms of their research position (Courtois, 2018). The UK was concerned about international social mobility, access to EU research funding and collaborations at a national level as the situation was still unknown in 2018. England has seen a reduction in the amount of funding received by 11.0% between 2018–19 and 2019-20. Although other funding has increased slightly by 3.3% for the same time-period this still shows a deficit of 7.7% (Universities UK, 2022d). There was no evidence from my research to confirm the suggestion by Amsen (2022) that PIs who were awarded funds from the ERC post-Brexit had to relocate to an EU country or decline the funding. The PIs that left the University left because they wanted to be part of Europe and they were not prepared to accept the impact that Brexit had on their families.

The displacement of the UK as a front-runner in terms of attracting European research projects means that Brexit has had an impact on the amount of funding received by the UK from the ERC. The UK and Germany were in the top two rankings between 2014-2017, however in 2018 and 2019 the UK slipped to third place, and in 2020 the UK slipped to fifth place with the countries receiving the most EU funding being Germany, France, Spain, and Italy (European Research Funding, 2023). Brexit has split the UK from a European academic community that worked together on joint international research projects, the long-term impact of which is still unknown. The loss in research income is significant for universities in England. Cambridge University has not received any funding from Horizon Europe to date, they received €483 million from Horizon 2020. Oxford University has received 2 million euros from Horizon Europe but previously won €523 million from Horizon 2020 over seven years (Fazackerley, 2023). PIs working in the UK will decide to work elsewhere which will affect the recruitment of ECRs. If the number of PIs and ECRs is reduced this will affect the reputation of the UK, HE sector in terms of its research profile. Not only will the university lose some of its funding, but it will lose some of its diversity as European students and staff will be attracted to other countries.

6.5. SBQ4: How is Brexit affecting the sustainability of a university in the Southwest of England?

Brexit has had an impact on the society and economic pillar of sustainability at the University. As highlighted in 6.2 there has been a decline in the number of EU students studying at the university which has reduced the tuition fee income from EU students. EU funding is declining

year on year which has reduced the funding for vital research projects, see 6.4. Although universities are classed as non-profit making organisations, they still need income to ensure they continue to invest in their business, any reduction in income will impact their ability to grow (PWC, 2024). The reduction in income from EU students' tuition fees could mean that programmes that once attracted a high number of EU students are no longer viable, resulting in fewer programmes being offered. The programmes on offer at the university were identified as a pull factor to the university, see Chapter 4.3, so any reduction in programmes could lead to fewer EU students in the future.

Scholars raised their concerns that a reduction in EU research funding would lead to a reduction in international research collaborations (Marini, 2018a; Mayhew, 2017), thus impacting the reputation of HEIs in the UK. This has been evidenced in my research where research staff at the University have been excluded from international research projects because of Brexit, see Chapter 5.2, Section 5.2.5. This reduction in funding not only leads to less international collaboration but also could affect the recruitment of European PIs and ECRs. Word-of-mouth recommendations were an important pull factor for both staff and students when they were choosing where to work and study, see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.

The economic and social pillars of sustainability are interlinked as one affects the other (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). The reduction in EU students and staff also affects the society pillar of sustainability; this affects the environment and society as the diversity, and culture of the student and staff population is diluted. Staff members welcomed the opportunity to work with a diverse workforce and understand different cultures to expand their knowledge and share knowledge. The programmes offered, the multicultural feel of the University, and the diversity of staff and students at the University were all pull factors that attracted EU students to want to study in England, see Chapter 4.3.

Institutional sustainability is a fine balance of delivering the programmes that students want to study, having an environment that supports diversity and inclusivity, and having a multicultural feel where students can feel safe and secure in being who they are, irrespective of nationality. It is broader than merely thinking that institutional sustainability is linked to funding. Scholarship around sustainability in higher education has focused on the sustainable development of teaching and learning (Jones, Selby & Sterling, 2010; Muller-Christ *et al.*, 2014) and the environment in which we live (Bruntland, 1987) rather than focusing on the issues that affect people. Žalėnienė and Pereira (2021) and Lozano *et al.* (2013) advocate that

for universities to be truly sustainable they need to understand the issues that are affecting people to provide a basis from which to build. The concept of sustainability in funding through the introduction of higher tuition fees, as proposed by Browne (2010), did not adequately consider the other pillars of sustainability, such as society and environment. My research has provided an understanding of the issues affecting EU citizens working and studying in a university in the Southwest of England, impacting the sustainability of the University, see Chapters 4 and 5. This insight will enable the University to take appropriate measures to ensure they retain this demographic of staff and students, which is important to the diversity and culture of the institution.

6.6. SBQ5: How does this study contribute to scholarship on the impact of Brexit on the Higher Education (HE) sector using Charles Wright Mills' theoretical framework?

The findings from this research contribute to the scholarship on Brexit and how Brexit is affecting the sustainability of HEIs. The Universities UK (2018b) called for further research and understanding of the impact of Brexit in the HE sector. My research provides a valuable insight into the 'word of mouth' narrative regarding emerging trends in EU students' inbound mobility in the future (Tsiligiris & Ruyter, 2018, p.4), and the impact of Brexit on EU staff and students currently working, studying, and living in the Southwest of England.

Mayhew (2017) researched the impact of Brexit following the call from the Universities UK; however, his research was completed in 2017 which was shortly after the referendum when the full effects of Brexit had not been implemented. This research adds depth to existing scholarship by providing a micro and macro-level approach to the analysis. The research was also completed over a longer period from the beginning of the Brexit transition which began on 1st February 2020 to June 2021, which was four months after the UK had left the EU single market in January 2021. This has provided a greater insight into the issues affecting EU citizens' living, working, and studying in England, and the factors that have already made EU citizens leave England or may eventually affect their plans to stay in England in the longer term. This new knowledge provides an insight for the University to understand the factors affecting EU student and staff recruitment.

Secondly, the theoretical perspective using Mills (1959) is unique in the way it has been used to understand Brexit. Understanding the general context through the quantitative research

and the granular level qualitative information at an individual level has provided an in-depth understanding of how Brexit has affected the experience of EU staff and students in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum at a HEI in the Southwest of England. Mills had the foresight to understand that meaning cannot be gained by looking at facts or systems alone, true understanding is found only when you consider the lived experiences of people in those systems. This theoretical framework worked well for my research. The Brexit referendum was initiated at the government level and affected how EU citizens were planning to live their lives in the UK. The feelings of unrest, uncertainty and insecurity came from not knowing what was going to happen and from a feeling of having no control over their situation. Mills' (1959) theory that people have to step outside of themselves to understand that their feelings may relate to societal change was not true in this instance. The participants understood that Brexit had caused these concerns, however, what they did not expect was the British people's aggression and intolerance towards them and how this made them feel. Brexit made the participants evaluate their lives and understand what was important to them. In doing this, they were able to decide whether to accept the changes to their lives and remain in England and adapt to the new way of being, as Mills suggests 'by steady coercion' (Mills, 1959, p.171), or decide that they could not accept the change and leave the UK. The use of Mills' theoretical framework has helped me to understand why some of the participants decided that they had no option but to leave England and return to the EU.

Thirdly this research has highlighted that institutions in the UK are receiving less funding from the EU, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3. The turmoil with regard to the UK's association with Horizon Europe is causing damage to the UK's collaboration with other EU countries. Many EU countries are cautious of partnering with the UK because of Brexit. Other EU countries are now receiving a greater share of EU funding from Horizon Europe (Universities UK, 2023). This is affecting the number of UK PIs that are receiving funding which has implications for ECRs as their research posts are reliant on research funding. The decrease in EU academic staff and EU funding received by UK HEIs is damaging HEIs income, diversity and inclusivity, and the reputation of the UK HE sector.

6.7. The Future

The findings of this research provide the basis for a worrying outlook. Where EU staff and students were once actively seeking to work and study in the UK, they are now considering

other options in the EU. Other EU countries are hoping to gain from Brexit by attracting high-profile researchers and research funding. This will, in turn, attract more ECRs. The UK's EU research funding is in decline, this is likely to decline even further if the UK government decides not to actively engage in Horizon Europe. A reduction in funding will affect the recruitment of EU staff in the future and will damage the reputation of English universities as EU research grants will be allocated to countries in the EU. If English universities struggle to attract high-profile researchers, funding will decline further, and this will lead to a further reduction in European collaboration estranging the UK from their neighbouring EU countries. Universities may well be able to attract international staff and students from other parts of the world which will help to maintain a diverse workforce and expertise however their link with Europe will be weakened.

Brexit has had an impact on the lives of both EU staff and students, it made them feel unwelcome and they have questioned their plans for the future; many are still considering whether to remain in England. The full outcome of Brexit will only be known when policies and procedures are known and embedded. Any uncertainty remaining around Brexit with regards to processes and procedures will continue to cause unease with EU staff and students which may result in more EU citizens leaving England.

For students, the English culture, heritage, and language were considered important pull factors. In the future this may not be enough to attract EU students if other countries are offering their degree programmes in English and their tuition fees are far less than the international fees charged in England. The increased fees together with the higher cost of living in England post-Brexit may push students to other countries which speak English and are still part of the EU. Ireland has already seen a big increase in EU students which is likely to increase as students want to study in a place that speaks English and is part of the EU. The change in the demographic of the students coming from the EU i.e., the more affluent students who can afford the increased fees will affect the diversity of students studying in England. Even if HEIs in England try to diversify their international population with students from other countries the mix of nationalities will change which may further affect the number of EU staff and students wanting to come to England in future years. As the UK is no longer a member of the EU, students may decide to break away from the EU entirely and travel further afield to other English-speaking countries such as the USA, Australia, or New Zealand. Any

reduction in EU students will lead to a decline in the number of 'word of mouth' recommendations thus affecting the number of students interested in studying in England. Even though the UK left the EU in January 2021 the full impact of Brexit on the HE sector in England is only just beginning to be felt. The EU student applications dropped significantly both nationally and regionally in 2021/2022. The UK is losing its share of EU students to countries such as Germany, Spain, and France (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Many Institutions are actively trying to recruit international staff and students from other countries, however, the loss of collaboration and research with the UK's close neighbour, the EU, is at risk.

6.8. Implications for Practice

6.8.1. Institutional Level

The University needs to take action to ensure it is actively seeking opportunities to attract EU staff and students to the UK to work and study post Brexit. Many universities were already considering their international strategy; however, this now needs to be accelerated and the impact of Brexit should still be considered as part of this process. Many TNE arrangements have concentrated on agreements with institutions in territories such as China, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These countries equate to the top five territories for UK TNE students (Universities UK, 2022b). The University should consider extending their TNE strategy to include more EU countries to maintain their links with the countries in the EU (ICEF Monitor, 2023). This strategy could improve the situation with the declining TNE market as highlighted by Healey (2020). This arrangement could also help maintain international research collaborations. A one-to-one partnership could be developed between English and European Institutions where student mobility is encouraged between the partners. This could be a reciprocal exchange programme to encourage student mobility.

The University could start to communicate with school-age pupils in EU countries in a similar way to the widening participation agenda in the UK. If connections are made with other EU countries from an earlier age, EU students would know what to expect if they choose to study in England. Help can be provided with visa applications, housing, and finance at an early stage, this will ensure students know what to expect. Mentor or buddy systems could be set up for EU applicants from a current EU student, so they have someone to ask if they have concerns. A package of additional support should be available to EU and international students including

language courses and extra pastoral care to ensure students are settling in and coping with their studies in a different country and language.

Many EU students want to work when they arrive in England to help pay for their fees and living costs. Specific career advice for EU students could help students find work[51]. Universities could employ EU students for specific tasks i.e., student ambassadors or project work. Rather than pay the students an arrangement could be made to offset the cost of part of their tuition fee. The University of Leicester recognised the importance of EU students in their student population, and they honoured their 'home' fee status for a brief period of time (Owen, 2020). As an incentive to EU students UK HEIs could offer their first year free or at a much-reduced rate to attract them to England.

The HEI reputation and standing in league tables help to attract high-profile researchers. Regular marketing campaigns need to focus on the pull factors highlighted in this research to attract and get the attention of overseas academic talent. Assistance with visas, travel arrangements and housing administration will help. However, the University could consider offering PIs additional support in terms of financial incentives for themselves and their team to help attract and recruit ECRs. Permanent employment contacts could be offered as an incentive even on short-term projects that have a finite end date.

The information available to EU staff and students needs to be clear, accurate and up to date. The information needs to be accessible internally and externally to ensure prospective staff and students know what the processes and procedures are when applying to the university to work or study. Clarity and availability of information are important with additional signposting to a person, if required.

6.8.2. Regional Level

The reduction in the number of EU students and staff at a regional level will likely lead to a decrease in diversity within the population of the Southwest of England. This decline in diversity may exacerbate issues faced by remaining EU staff and students, potentially increasing instances of xenophobia and racism in the region. A less diverse community can often lead to a heightened sense of isolation among minority groups, making them more

[51] If EU students have settled status, they are retaining their work rights, if not EU students will need a Student Visa which has conditions attached which detail the number of hours you can work.

vulnerable to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, the lack of cultural exchange and understanding that typically comes with a diverse population could contribute to a less inclusive and tolerant environment overall.

Beyond social implications, the local economy is also at risk. EU students and staff significantly contribute to the regional economy through tuition fees, housing, and day-to-day spending in local businesses. The reduction in their numbers could lead to financial strains on local businesses, particularly those that rely heavily on the student population, such as rental housing markets, retail, and hospitality sectors. The presence of EU staff often brings specialised skills and research opportunities, which are vital for innovation and economic growth. Their absence could result in a brain drain, adversely affecting the region's competitiveness and economic vitality. Additionally, the reputation of the Southwest of England as a vibrant, diverse, and attractive place for international talent could suffer, further diminishing its appeal to prospective students and professionals from around the world.

6.8.3. National Level

The national impact reflects the regional trends, with significant changes to the EU social demographic in England post-Brexit. Word-of-mouth recommendations, highlighted as crucial in Chapter Four, are expected to decline, resulting in fewer endorsements for EU staff and students considering where to work and study. Additionally, the reduction in EU students and staff who bring unique skills and contribute significantly to the economy will adversely affect the nation’s economic and cultural landscape. Table 6.1 highlights the main policy recommendations required to mitigate the impact of Brexit at an Institutional, Regional and National Level.

Table 6.1 Recommendations to mitigate the impact of Brexit at an Institutional, Regional and National Level.

Level(s)	Recommendation	Details
Institutional	Review International Strategy	• Review the international strategy to mitigate the risk and impact of Brexit. • Actively seek opportunities to attract EU staff and students to the UK post-Brexit.
Institutional	Extend TNE Strategy	• Extend TNE arrangements to include more EU countries.
Institutional	Establish feedback mechanisms	• Gather input from EU students and staff to improve, support and address concerns.
Institutional Regional	Promote diversity and inclusion	• Launch initiatives and programs to promote diversity and inclusion on campus and within the community. • Enhance cultural exchange programs to foster understanding and tolerance.
Institutional Regional	Strengthen local business relationships	• Collaborate with local businesses to create opportunities for EU students and staff to engage with the local economy. • Develop initiatives to support businesses that are impacted by the reduction in EU students, such as rental markets and hospitality sectors.
Institutional Regional National	Expand outreach	• Develop targeted marketing campaigns and recruitment strategies aimed at EU countries to attract students and staff. • Forge and strengthen partnerships with EU institutions to facilitate student and staff mobility and exchanges.

Institutional **Regional** **National**	Improve support systems	• Provide streamlined support for visa applications and immigration processes to ease the transition for EU students and staff. • Implement comprehensive orientation and support programs to help EU students and staff integrate into their new environment. • Ensure information for EU staff and students is clear, accurate, up-to-date, and accessible internally and externally. Provide signposting to contacts for additional guidance.
Institutional **Regional** **National**	Increase financial incentives	• Offer scholarships, grants, or reduced tuition fees to attract EU students. • Provide financial incentives or relocation packages for EU staff to make positions more attractive. • Consider offering the first year free or at a reduced rate to attract EU students.
Institutional **National** **Regional**	Maintain and enhance reputation	• Implement strategies to maintain and enhance England's reputation as a desirable destination for international students and professionals. • Highlight success stories and achievements of EU students and staff to attract new talent.

By implementing these mitigating actions, institutions and policymakers can help counterbalance the negative impacts of reduced EU students and staff, ensuring continued diversity, economic vitality, and cultural enrichment.

6.9. Limitations, Challenges and Final Thoughts

Research limitations

Several limitations need to be acknowledged in this research. This research focuses on a university located in the Southwest of England, the findings of this research may not be representative of other universities located in the region or nationally. The HESA data analysis has provided the context in terms of the numbers of EU staff and students, and the research funding figures available in England and the Southwest of England, however, there are limitations with the data. HESA changed some of the mandatory data required part way through the period meaning that year-on-year comparisons could not be made. The HESA data captured was not specifically for my research it was produced for the government. Although the data has helped me to understand the situation, additional data such as whether staff members or full or part-time may have helped me to provide a more accurate picture.

The qualitative research enabled a more detailed analysis of the impact of Brexit on EU participants; however, this part of the research was based on a sample size of thirty-three which is small in comparison to the whole population. Therefore, the findings may not represent the entire population of the University or the EU population in England. The small sample size does not enable me to generalise the findings to the whole University or region; however, using this approach has enabled me to show the depth and breadth of the participants' experiences which has added to the richness of the data.

Finally, it is important to note that the findings of the research are based on data gathered from January 2020 to June 2021. The situation around Brexit is continually shifting as more becomes known about Brexit. The findings of the research may have been affected by the fact the first interviews were held during the Brexit Transition period and the second interviews were held shortly after the UK left the EU Single Market, so Brexit was very much at the forefront of everyone's mind at this time, opinions may have changed as time has gone by.

Although this research has increased the knowledge of EU citizen's experiences working, studying, and living in England from 2020-2021, further research is now needed to evaluate the long-term impact of Brexit on EU staff and students to understand whether Brexit will affect university sustainability in the future.

Challenges

In 2017, when I decided to research the impact of Brexit on HEIs and EU staff and students I was aware of the timeline for Brexit. I thought that by the time my research was published, it may be considered out of date. However, in 2023 as I complete this thesis, Brexit is still a topic of debate, and the impact and uncertainty of the situation is still being felt.

As I started my fieldwork the pandemic, Covid-19 unfolded across the world. My original plan was to interview students and staff members face-to-face. I managed to complete all the student interviews prior to the national lockdown in March 2020. Covid-19 had a significant impact on the way we worked; the majority of staff and students working at the University[52] were asked to work and study at home in March 2020 meaning many EU students returned to their home country. Staff and students had no physical contact with their peers, all meetings and teaching were delivered via Zoom. Initially I thought this would be for a short period of time however these restrictions remained in place until 2021. I found the constant Zoom calls during the working week exhausting, and I had little head space to focus on my research. The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) complied a survey to assess the impact of Covid-19 on research in February and March 2021; 61% of researchers felt that Covid-19 had negatively impacted their research and 58% stated that Covid-19 had made it impossible for them to do the research they had planned (UKRI, 2021). I dealt with this by concentrating and understanding the data I had already captured during the research and delayed the remainder of the interviews until the situation had settled in terms of workload. My intention before beginning the research was to begin with the quantitative element of my research and run this in parallel with the qualitative data gathering. However, as Covid-19 had an impact on the amount of time I had to dedicate to the research and the timings of the interviews were important, I concentrated on the interviews first and then went back to look at the quantitative element of the research.

Covid-19 masked the full effects of Brexit on the economy and within the UK HE sector. The pandemic caused global economic disruptions, making it difficult to isolate the specific economic impacts of Brexit. Travel restrictions and lockdowns limited movement, which temporarily obscured the impact of new immigration rules and travel restrictions imposed by Brexit. The shift to remote work environments mitigated the immediate impact of Brexit-

[52] Excluding front line staff i.e., security staff

related changes to workplace regulations and mobility. As my research coincided with the pandemic some of the findings may have been influenced by the pandemic, in some instances making it difficult to unravel the consequences of each event.

Staff and students felt very strongly about Brexit, and some were emotional; I remained calm and objective throughout the interviews. My ultimate aim in delivering this research was to give the participants an objective voice to convey their message.

One of the main challenges I had was my capacity to complete this research whilst in full-time employment. I changed job roles at a critical time, so I had to focus on the new job rather than my research.

Final Thoughts

It has been seven years since I started my Doctorate in Education, I knew from the beginning that I wanted to research the impact of Brexit on EU citizens working and studying in a HEI in England. My research journey has provided me the opportunity to talk to many EU citizens working in different areas of a university to understand how Brexit has affected them, this has given me a greater insight into many aspects of Brexit that I had not considered before. Mills (1959) grand theory resonated with me from the beginning when I was first introduced to his theory. I have in the past, felt uneasy about a situation, and not fully understood why. Using his theoretical perspective for my research has enabled me to reflect on situations where I feel uncertain and uneasy, thus enabling me to understand different perspectives other than my own. It has taught me to step outside of my own situation and try and understand the situation from a societal viewpoint and from other peoples' points of view to help put my feelings into context. I now know that if something is beyond my control I can either learn to live with it or choose an alternative path. This new knowledge will help me in the future in times of uncertainty.

Most importantly I have had the privilege and honour to talk to the EU participants in this research to understand how Brexit has affected their lives. It was humbling to hear their personal stories, which they openly shared with me. I hope I have accurately and adequately represented their experience in my research.

6.10. Epilogue

Recent research into the impact on Horizon Europe has been released. Horizon Europe is now in its third year of operation; at the time of writing this thesis, the UK had still not agreed its association with Horizon Europe. This is continuing to cause considerable uncertainty and anxiety in the HE sector. Funding has been affected, Cambridge University was awarded £433m over seven years in the Horizon 2020 programme, however, they have received no funding at all from Horizon Europe. Professor Simon Marginson from Oxford University stated, "For higher education and research, there are no new opportunities and no actual possible upsides from Brexit," He stated that it was more than the loss of income it also means that the UK is less attractive to European students and researchers describing the situation as 'very worrying' and 'a historic error of monumental proportions' (Fazackerley, 2023, p.1).

On a more positive note, now that a new Northern Ireland Brexit Deal has been agreed the UK can re-join Horizon Europe with effect from 1st January 2024 (European Commission, 2023a). This may be a turning point and EU funding may increase. Although EU research funding may increase, further research will be needed to understand whether Brexit has had a long-lasting impact on an EU citizen's desire to work and study in England and on the reputation of HEIs in England.

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Appendices

Appendix One - Information for Staff and Student Participants

Information for Participants (Staff)

'University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on staff and students

Dear Participant,

The Higher Education (HE) sector has faced a turbulent and challenging few years with changes in government policy such as the introduction of the 9K fees, the lifting of the cap on student numbers and HEIs offering unconditional places. The Brexit referendum in 2016 and the subsequent withdrawal period poses several challenges for the HE sector. University systems, policies and support mechanisms will need to change to support students and staff working and studying in UK HEIs.

The **aim** of my project is to understand how the Brexit process is affecting students and staff members working and studying in a UK HEI in the Southwest. The ultimate aim is to understand how staff and students are dealing with the current uncertainty and whether this uncertainty is affecting their desire to study or work in a UK HEI.

I am planning to interview twelve members of staff and twelve students currently working and studying in an HE Institution in the Southwest of England to understand how external factors such as Brexit affect them. I am hoping this research will enable me to make recommendations to University Policy.

I would like to ask you if the current situation regarding Brexit is affecting your work at the University, your experience at the University and/or whether the situation is affecting how you live your life in England.

I am asking you to take part in two interviews one at the beginning of Semester 2 (January 2020) and another in the next academic year 2020/21.

The interview will take approximately 40 mins and will be held in a room on campus at the University of Plymouth, or at a place that is convenient to you off campus, such as the Theatre Royal. I will audio record the interview if you give me permission to do so and I will take notes of our conversation. The interview will be informal, and you will have the choice whether to answer the questions I pose to you.

At the beginning of the Interview, I will bring a number of images with me for you to look at. I will ask you to choose three images that you feel depict your experience at the University and living in the UK. I will then ask you to explain why you have chosen the images.

During the interview, I will ask you a series of semi-structured questions to enable me to understand what influenced your decision to work at a UK Institution and help me to understand your experience of living in the UK.

At the end of the interview, I will summarise the information I have collated to ensure I have correctly captured your feelings. You will have the opportunity at this stage to correct my understanding.

Anonymity/Confidentiality

It will not be possible to remain anonymous, as you have agreed to be interviewed by me. However, all participants will be anonymised and given pseudonyms.

I will ensure all the information gathered from your interview is confidential, access will be restricted to the Director of Study, Second Supervisor, and myself.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation is voluntary, you can stop the interview at any point, and I will delete any information I have captured if you wish me to do so. If you withdraw from the research this will not affect your relationship with the University of Plymouth.

At the end of the interview, I will ask whether you are happy for me to keep the recording of the interview and the notes I have taken.
I will ensure the audio recording and my notes are securely held to restrict anyone else accessing the information. The information will be held on an encrypted password protected device.

I will use the transcripts from our interviews during the research project to analyse the findings. I will contact you at this point to ensure that you are still happy for me to use the information I have collected from you. After I have submitted my research thesis, I will ensure your notes and recordings are kept in a secure place for a period of ten years, this is the current University of Plymouth research retention policy.

Debriefing

At the end of the interview, I will summarise our discussion, this will give you the opportunity to correct my understanding if I have interpreted the discussion incorrectly.

I will check that you are happy with the way the interview was conducted and are happy to continue with your daily routine.

During the interview debriefing, I will ask if you will be willing to help me disseminate the research findings at the Postgraduate Research Conference in June 2020/21. If you agree to this, I will contact you nearer the time of the conference to ask if you would still like to participate and arrange to meet with you to discuss the conference session.

Research Dissemination

The information I gather during the interview will be disseminated through my research thesis, journal articles and presentations at conferences. I will use the information gathered to present at the Postgraduate Research Conference at UoP in June 2020. I will ask participants, if they would like to present with me at this conference, (prior permission will be sought). Research dissemination may also include tweets and use of other social media platforms.

Contact Details

You can contact my Director of Studies, Dr Ulrike Hohmann at Ulrike.Hohmann@plymouth.ac.uk if you have any queries relating to this project.

If you have any complaints about the way in which this research is carried out, please contact the Research Administrator to the Faculty Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

If you have any queries or questions regarding the research project, please contact me by email at Diane.stanley@plymouth.ac.uk

Information for Student Participants

Information for Participants (Students)

'University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on staff and students

Dear Participant,

The Higher Education (HE) sector has faced a turbulent and challenging few years with changes in government policy such as the introduction of the 9K fees, the lifting of the cap on student numbers and HEIs offering unconditional places. The Brexit referendum in 2016 and the subsequent withdrawal period poses several challenges for the HE sector. University systems, policies and support mechanisms will need to change to support students and staff working and studying in UK HEIs.

The **aim** of my project is to understand how the Brexit process is affecting students and staff members working and studying in a UK HEI in the Southwest. The ultimate aim is to understand how staff and students are dealing with the current uncertainty and whether this uncertainty is affecting their desire to study or work in a UK HEI.

I am planning to interview twelve members of staff and twelve students currently working and studying in an HE Institution in the Southwest of England to understand how external factors such as Brexit affect them. I am hoping this research will enable me to make recommendations to University Policy.

I am asking you to take part in two interviews one at the beginning of Semester 2 (January 2020) and another at the beginning of the next academic year 2020/21 (September 2020) if you are available.

The interview will take approximately one hour and will be held in a room on campus at the University of Plymouth, or at a place that is convenient to you off campus, such as the Theatre Royal. I will audio record the interview if you give me permission to do so and I will take notes of our conversation. The interview will be informal, and you will have the choice whether to answer the questions I pose to you.

At the beginning of the Interview, I will bring a number of images with me for you to look at. I will ask you to choose three images that you feel depict your experience at the University and living in the UK. I will then ask you to explain why you have chosen the images.

During the interview, I will ask you a series of semi-structured questions to enable me to understand what influenced your decision to study at a UK Institution and help me to understand your experience of living in the UK during your studies.

The interview questions are semi-structured to help me understand your reasons for studying in the UK, understand your experiences of living in the UK and whether you if you feel that Brexit may have influenced your decision to study in the UK.

At the end of the interview, I will summarise the information I have collated to ensure I have correctly captured your feelings. You will have the opportunity at this stage to correct my understanding.

Anonymity/Confidentiality

It will not be possible to remain anonymous, as you have agreed to be interviewed by me. However, all participants will be anonymised and given pseudonyms in my research.

I will ensure all the information gathered from your interview is confidential, access will be restricted to the Director of Study, Second Supervisor, and myself.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation is voluntary, you can stop the interview at any point, and I will delete any information I have captured if you wish me to do so. If you withdraw from the research this will not affect your studies or relationship with the University of Plymouth.

At the end of the interview, I will ask whether you are happy for me to keep the recording of the interview and the notes I have taken.
I will ensure the audio recording and my notes are securely held to restrict anyone else accessing the information. The information will be held on an encrypted password protected device.

I will use the transcripts from our interviews during the research project to analyse the findings. I will contact you at this point to ensure that you are still happy for me to use the information I have collected from you. After I have submitted my research thesis, I will ensure your notes and recordings are kept in a secure place for a period of ten years, this is the current University of Plymouth research retention policy.

Debriefing

At the end of the interview, I will summarise our discussion, this will give you the opportunity to correct my understanding if I have interpreted the discussion incorrectly.

I will check that you are happy with the way the interview was conducted and are happy to continue with your daily routine.

During the interview debriefing, I will ask if you will be willing to help me disseminate the research findings at the Postgraduate Research Conference in June 2020. If you agree to this, I will contact you nearer the time of the conference to ask if you would still like to participate and arrange to meet with you to discuss the conference session.

Research Dissemination

The information I gather during the interview will be disseminated through my research thesis, journal articles and presentations at conferences. I will use the information gathered to present at the Postgraduate Research Conference at UoP in June 2020. I will ask participants, if they would like to present with me at this conference, (prior permission will be sought). Research dissemination may also include tweets and use of other social media platforms.

Contact Details

You can contact my Director of Studies, Dr Ulrike Hohmann at Ulrike.Hohmann@plymouth.ac.uk if you have any queries relating to this project.

If you have any complaints about the way in which this research is carried out, please contact the Research Administrator to the Faculty Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

If you have any queries or questions regarding the research project, please contact me by email at Diane.stanley@plymouth.ac.uk

Appendix Two – Consent Forms

Student Consent Form

Doctorate in Education Research Project Student Consent Form

Research Project Title:

'University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on staff and students

Researcher Investigator: Diane Stanley

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research project. UK institutions require that ethical procedures are followed and require me to obtain your explicit agreement to take part in the research and for me to explain how I will record the information I capture during the interview.

How I will collect and store the data I gather during the interview

- I will take notes during the interview and would like to record your interview if you provide consent for me to do so.
- I will summarise our conversation at the end of the interview to give you the opportunity to correct my understanding.
- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by me as part of the research investigation and will be held on a secure encrypted password protected USB device. The data collected will be kept for ten years after the thesis has been published; this is in line with the University of Plymouths' data policy.
- I will ensure the data collected during the research is held confidentially; access to the data will be restricted to the Director of Studies, second supervisor and myself.

Please tick all that apply.

I consent:

1. To take part in the interview for the research project listed above. ☐
2. For you to audio record my interview ☐
3. To assist you in the dissemination of the research at the PG Conference in June 2020 ☐

I confirm that I have read this document. ☐

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research. ☐

I give permission for you to contact me in the future. 

Research Participant Name: ……..

Research Participant Contact details……

Research Participants Signature: ……Date: ……..

Research Investigator Signature: ……Date: ……..

Staff Consent Form

Doctorate in Education Research Project Staff Consent Form

Research Project Title:

'University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on staff and students

Researcher Investigator: Diane Stanley

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research project. UK institutions require that ethical procedures are followed and require me to obtain your explicit agreement to take part in the research and for me to explain how I will record the information I capture during the interview.

How I will collect and store the data I gather during the interview

- I will take notes during the interview and would like to record your interview if you provide consent for me to do so.
- I will summarise our conversation at the end of the interview to give you the opportunity to correct my understanding.
- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by me as part of the research investigation and will be held on a secure encrypted password protected USB device. The data collected will be kept for ten years after the thesis has been published; this is in line with the University of Plymouths' data policy.
- I will ensure the data collected during the research is held confidentially; access to the data will be restricted to the Director of Studies, second supervisor and myself.

Please tick all that apply.

I consent.

4. To take part in the interview for the research project listed above.
5. For you to audio record my interview
6. To assist you in the dissemination of the research at the PG Conference in June 2021

I confirm that I have read this document.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research.

I give permission for you to contact me in the future.

Research Participant Name: …….

Research Participant Contact details……

Research Participants Signature: ……Date: ……..

Research Investigator Signature: ……Date: ……..

Appendix Three – Ethical Approval

19 December 2019

CONFIDENTIAL

Diane Stanley

Plymouth Institute of Education

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Plymouth

Dear Diane

Application for Approval by Education Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-committee

Reference Number: 19/20-268

Application Title: University sustainability in times of uncertainty: The impact of Brexit on staff and students

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-committee has granted approval to you to conduct this research.

Please note that this approval is for three years, after which you will be required to seek extension of existing approval.

Please note that should any MAJOR changes to your research design occur which effect the ethics of procedures involved you must inform the Committee. Please contact Claire Butcher on (01752) 585337 or by email claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk

Yours sincerely

Professor Jocey Quinn

Chair, Education Research Ethics Sub-committee -

Plymouth Institute of Education

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Appendix Four – Images

Appendix Five – Interview Questions

Staff Interview Questions – First Interview

Interview Plan (Staff)

This interview plan provides the list of questions that I will ask staff members during the interview. Additional questions may be asked during the interview if I need to expand on their answer to enable me to fully understand what is being said and to ensure that I understand their response. These questions may vary dependent on the participant's response.

During the first part of the interview, I will display a number of images that I have gathered for the participants to look at. I will ask participants to choose three images that most depicts their experience at the University and living in the UK.

I will then ask the participant why they have chosen the images.

I will then ask a series of semi-structured open questions.

1. What encourages, influences, and motivates you to come to the UK to live and work?
2. When did you come to the UK? And why?
3. Why did you choose to work at a University in the UK?
4. Why did you choose a university based in the Southwest of England?
5. What is it like to work in a University in the UK?
6. What is it like to live in the UK?
7. Do you feel that the situation with Brexit has affected this experience?
8. What is your experience of Brexit? I.e., research proposals/ funding collaboration with other EU nationals
9. Do you think Brexit has affected students? If so in what way?
10. As a member of staff have you experienced any change in the way your colleagues work with you.
11. Do you feel that you know where to go for information when new initiatives arise?
12. Can you explain what support mechanisms you use to help you manage during times of change?
13. Do you feel that staff communities are changing at the University because of Brexit?

14. Do you feel that student communities are changing at the University because of Brexit?
15. Has Brexit affected your life outside of the University?
16. Would your choice of where to work change if you made the decision again now?
17. Are there any other factors that relate to Brexit that you feel is having an impact on your work, your experience at university or your life in the UK? If so, can you please explain?
18. Do you have anything else you would like to add?
19. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

I will then ask if the participant has any questions.

At the end of the Interview, I will display the same images I displayed at the beginning of the interview, I will ask the participant a second time to choose the three images that depict their work and life in the UK. I will then ask them to explain why they have chosen the images (these may be the same images, or they be different). This will give me a second opportunity to capture their views and feelings. I may ask the participants to explain why they have chosen different images if they are different from the first selection if this is applicable. Participants may not opt to choose the same images, after answering the interview questions the participants may have thought in more detail about the situation and may wish to choose different images.

Staff Interview Questions – Second Interview

Follow up - Interview Plan (Staff) 2nd year.

1. Are you still working in the same role as last year?
2. Confirm settled status / job status.
3. How do you feel about Brexit now a year on?
4. Has Brexit affected you at all since I spoke to you last year? Personal and work lives
5. How do you feel about Brexit and research opportunities/funding?
6. We now know more about the impact of Brexit from a policy perspective i.e., tuition fees, Erasmus+, research funding, what are your thoughts on this?
7. What are your future plans?
8. What do you think the University could do to encourage EU staff to continue to want to work in the UK?

Thank you.

Student Interview questions – First Interview

Interview Plan (Students)

This interview plan provides the list of questions that I will ask students during the interview. Additional questions may be asked during the interview if I need to expand on their answer to enable me to fully understand what is being said and to ensure that I understand their response. These questions may vary dependent on the participant's response.

During the first part of the interview, I will display a number of images that I have gathered for the participants to look at. I will ask participants to choose three images that most depicts their experience at the University and living in the UK.

I will then ask the participant why they have chosen the images.

I will then ask a series of semi-structured open questions.

1. Which country were you born in?
2. Have you lived in any other European country before coming to the UK? If so for how long?
3. How long have you lived/studied in the UK?
4. What encourages, influences, and motivates you to come to the UK to live and study?
5. Why did you choose to study at a University in the UK?
6. Why did you choose a university based in the Southwest of England?
7. What is it like to study in a University in the UK?
8. What is it like to live in the UK?
9. Do you feel that the situation with Brexit has affected this experience?
10. What is your experience of Brexit?
11. Have you noticed or experienced any difference in the way staff treat you since starting your studies?
12. Do you feel that you know where to go for information when changes arise such as Brexit?
13. Can you explain what support mechanisms you use to help you manage during times of change?
14. Do you feel that student communities are changing at the University because of Brexit?

15. Has Brexit affected your life outside of the University?
16. Would your choice of where to study change if you made the decision again now?
17. Do you know any European students that have chosen to leave the UK?
18. Are there any other factors that relate to Brexit that you feel is having an impact on your studies, your experience at university or your life in the UK?
19. Do you have anything else you would like to add?
20. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
21. Do you mind me asking you how old you are?

I will then ask if the participant has any questions.

At the end of the Interview, I will display the same images I displayed at the beginning of the interview, I will ask the participant a second time to choose the three images that depict their study and life in the UK. I will then ask them to explain why they have chosen the images (these may be the same images, or they be different). This will give me a second opportunity to capture their views and feelings. I may ask the participants to explain why they have chosen different images if they are different from the first selection if this is applicable. Participants may not opt to choose the same images, after answering the interview questions the participants may have thought in more detail about the situation and may wish to choose different images.

Student Interview Questions – Second Interview

Follow up - Interview Plan (Students) 2nd Interview.

1. Where are you living now?
2. Are you still studying at the University?
3. Has Brexit affected you at all since I spoke to you last year?
4. How do you feel about Brexit now a year on?
5. We now know more about the impact of Brexit from a policy perspective i.e., fees, Erasmus+ How do you think this will affect future EU citizens choice of where to study?
6. What do you think the University could do to encourage EU students to continue to come to the UK?
7. Do you have any further you would like to add?

Thank you.

Appendix Six – Staff and Student Participant Pseudonyms

Table 1 – Staff Participants

	Pseudonym	**Job Role**	**Job Category**
1	Amelia	Project Support	Professional Services
2	Anna	Professor	Academic
3	Ben	Manager	Professional Services
4	Caroline	Administrator	Professional Services
5	Claire	Professor	Academic
6	Clara	Research Fellow	Academic
7	Charlotte	Administrator	Professional Services
8	Emma	Funding Manager	Professional Services
9	James	Research Fellow	Academic
10	John	Associate Professor	Academic
11	Julia	Professor	Academic
12	Katherine	Lecturer	Academic
13	Mark	Professor	Academic
14	Matthew	Research Fellow	Academic
15	Michelle	Researcher	Academic
16	Oliver	Associate Lecturer	Academic
17	Paul	Administrator	Professional Services
18	Rachel	Research Fellow	Academic
19	Sarah	Senior Technician	Professional Services
20	Sofia	Technician	Professional Services

Table 2 – Student Participants

	Pseudonym	**Year**	**Area of study**
1	Alexander	PhD	Science, Engineering and Environment
2	Chloe	1st year	Health
3	Edward	1st Year	Health
4	Ella	2nd Year	Health
5	Evie	PhD	Science, Engineering and Environment
6	Isabelle	4th Year	Health
7	Jimmy	3rd Year	Humanities, Arts and Business
8	Johan	3rd Year	Arts Humanities and Business
9	Lily	Foundation Degree	Engineering and Environment
10	Marco	2nd Year	Humanities, Arts and Business
11	Mia	PhD	Humanities, Arts and Business
12	Phillip	3rd Year	Health
13	Sophie	3rd Year	Science, Engineering and Environment