

A message from us

The Young Academy of Scotland, in collaboration with the Royal Society of Edinburgh, has launched a call for case studies on 12 May 2017, with the objective of capturing the impact, whether positive or negative, perceived or factual, of the Brexit vote on **people** involved in research, innovation or further/higher education.

By providing a platform where evidence can be submitted in confidence and directly by the affected individuals, we want to make these voices heard, in order to inform policy and raise awareness of such impact.

Up until 20 September 2017, we received 35 submissions, all of which were considered in defining the main trends emerging from the survey. Around two-thirds of the respondents were happy for their anonymised responses to be made publicly available and they are presented in this report.

We would like to thank all the respondents for their input.

The survey will remain open for submissions¹, and this report will continue to be updated accordingly.

We are keen to continue to collect evidence, particularly in light of the ongoing Brexit negotiations.

We encourage you to make your voice heard.

The clock is ticking.

Young Academy of Scotland and the Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Young Academy of Scotland

The Young Academy of Scotland was established by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2011 to provide a platform for young professionals to address the most challenging issues facing Scotland. There are currently 129 people in YAS, with members coming from all areas of academia, business, third-sector organisations and public life.

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voices of the future

¹ <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/news/brexit-observatory-assessing-the-impact-of-the-brexit-vote.html>

1. Objectives of this initiative

The Brexit Observatory aims to capture the multiple implications of the Brexit vote on people's lives, which are hard to translate in statistics alone.

The survey was focused on those working in the Research, Innovation and Tertiary Education sectors. These three sectors are intricately linked and form an important part of Scotland's economic growth strategy². Indeed, universities are mentioned "as a determining factor in almost half of all foreign direct investment projects that come into Scotland"³.

The dynamic and international environment of this ecosystem makes it particularly vulnerable - its equilibrium is set to be deeply affected by Brexit.

At the heart of this research-innovation-skills ecosystem are the people that make it a success. The Brexit vote is already having an impact on their lives as well as those of their families, colleagues, employees, employers, with an inevitable impact on society at large. This is what we want to capture with this initiative.

We very much hope that this will enable a more complete picture of the implications of Brexit, while complementing the ongoing work by the Royal Society of Edinburgh Brexit Working Group⁴ and the Young Academy of Scotland⁵.

2. A snapshot of the submissions

So far, around a quarter of respondents to the Brexit Observatory survey⁶ are UK nationals. Among the non-UK nationals, the nationalities are diverse and included (in no particular order): Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Finland, Switzerland, Romania, Slovenia, Norway, Canada and United States.

Around two-thirds (23) of the respondents were happy for their response to be made publicly available – their full responses are transcribed in their entirety in the final section of the report. The 35 submissions originated from a diverse group of academic staff members (15), PhD students (10), post-doctoral researchers (4), business (3), administrative/research support (3). While there was a focus on Scotland, we also received a number of case studies from the rest of the UK.

In the following sections, we highlight the major trends emerging from the responses so far. A selection of quotes is used to illustrate these trends, with a reference to the full case study from where it was extracted (Case study 1 - C1, Case study 2 - C2, ...). However, in order to fully understand the wider context associated with each individual and the multiple dimensions at stake, it is important that each case study is read in full.

² Scottish Government, Scotland's Economic Strategy, March 2015, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/5984>

³ Universities Scotland, Grow, Export, Attract, Support - Universities' contribution to Scotland's economic growth, <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/publications/grow-export-attract-and-support/>

⁴ RSE, Brexit Challenges & Opportunities: Research, Innovation & Tertiary Education, Advice Paper 17-15, <https://www.rse.org.uk/advice-papers/brexit-challenges-opportunities-research-innovation-tertiary-education/>

⁵ RSE Young Academy of Scotland, 2017, Brexit: the impact on Scotland <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/news/brexit-the-impact-on-scotland-report.html>

⁶ <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/news/brexit-observatory-assessing-the-impact-of-the-brexit-vote.html>

3. EU (non-UK) citizens' status

Overwhelmingly, this was one of the major issues that emerged from the responses. The vast majority of EU (non-UK) nationals highlighted the uncertainty concerning their status. The most immediate concerns are whether EU non-UK citizens will have a right to live and work in the UK after Brexit. UK nationals have also highlighted this issue, particularly in relation to the impact that this is having on their EU (non-UK) partners, friends and colleagues. This issue is also pointed out as one of the key factors that have led several respondents to leave already or actively look for an opportunity elsewhere in EU (alongside with access to EU funding and a perception of sudden shift in society).

When the government announced that the status of EU citizens would be part of the negotiations my decision to leave became final: if I would talk about our dogs that way my spouse would kick me out of the house. C1 (Professor, EU national, already moved to elsewhere in EU)

Would have preferred to stay on a personal level but the funding situation and uncertainty around what rights I will retain after Brexit would have made it a very stupid move professionally. C2 (PhD student, EU national, moving to elsewhere in EU)

My wife is an EU citizen. Currently we are in a no-man's land where we don't know whether she will have the right to live and work here after BREXIT. On a day-to-day level that brings huge amounts of stress and anxiety. C13

To highlight how the submissions revealed the impact on others around the respondent, we mapped out the words associated with relationships in Fig. 1.



Figure 1 – Word cloud for the relationships described by all the submissions received.

In order to reduce uncertainty and secure their status, many of the respondents have secured or applied for a permanent residency card and emphasise the time spent in what is a laborious process under the current system (the paper form is 85 pages long; the amount of evidence requested is disproportionate; typically the passport is held by the Home Office throughout the process which

Now, as I approach retirement, I am finding myself in a country that is hostile towards the many people who, like me, have contributed to its growth. I am not actually sure anymore, whether I really do want to remain here. C14

My personal life on the other hand has been filled with doubt and feelings of insecurity. (...) I don't know if in a couple of years I'll have to leave the home I've built here. C11

Scotland is my home but I feel like this could change at any time. C16

4. “What sort of country are we becoming?”

A significant number of respondents (from all nationalities) have expressed strong concerns over anti-immigration rhetoric and xenophobia. Worryingly, a number of respondents experienced or witnessed hate crimes/discrimination/xenophobic remarks. Some of them have revealed coping strategies, others have commented that they can “pass” as natives due to skin colour and accent, but colleagues and friends that can't are subject to hateful comments.

My kids have been verbally abused by neighbours, and people threatened to glass our house. C4

I've become more weary of telling people my last name which is definitely not British. C8

I keep listening about how we are stealing jobs from the British people and taking advantage of their taxes. C11

Emotionally however it is disappointing to see that the majority of the British population disagrees with the free movement of EU citizens. It gives it a bitter taste. C10

That [stress and anxiety] is further deepened by the xenophobic rhetoric that borders on the racist that is spouted by our politicians. C13

As someone with a non-UK and non-EU partner, antipathy towards non-UK nationals places much uncertainty and strain on us, even though she is white and a native English speaker; to put it bluntly, what sort of country are we becoming? C17

Several of the respondents were also very concerned with the change in values of our society.

I despair at the shallowness of the arguments against the EU and how poorly informed the debate was up to the referendum. C8

The RSE was founded and was guided the values of the Scottish enlightenment. Unfortunately, that candle has gone out in these isles and I don't expect it to be relighted in my lifetime. It saddens me deeply and I no longer consider myself British, rather trapped in an identity by misfortune of where I was born. C13

We have seen, and continue to see, a denigration of expertise, a wilful misuse of data, a disinclination to accept uncomfortable facts, a trivialisation of debate, and a lack of rigorous, rational thinking. These challenge what we academics stand for and what we value. Brexit is more than just a major shift in the UK's relationship with the world, it is a challenge to Enlightenment values. C17

5. Limited opportunities in the future

A number of respondents pointed out that the likely future arrangements will limit the opportunities for recruiting researchers from elsewhere in the EU and for UK-based researchers to work there. Problems with international staff and student recruitment were also mentioned several times.

Thinking of my own future, I would like to work in Europe at some point post-PhD, but the 'harsh' nature that the Brexit negotiations have taken to date make any future work outside of the UK appear more challenging. C9

The research group I work in is very international and has always attracted good postdocs from the EU. I worry that we end now. On the flip side many of our PhD students have started their careers with postdocs in the EU. I worry they will no longer have that option. Given the limited options in the UK they will most likely leave the field. I did my first postdocs in the EU before returning here. That was beneficial to my career. It is sad young people will not have that option. C13

But the harder it is for EU nationals to study and work here, the less likely we are to build those collaborations, and the more likely it is that EU nationals look elsewhere. And it is not just a matter of staying within a "European Research Area". Whilst that might help maintain funding, it the ease with which non-UK nationals can live and work here that will be crucial, and a country that is unwelcoming will suffer. C17

6. Funding

Several respondents commented on the loss of access to EU research funding. The perspectives varied, depending on the career stage: PhD students were concerned about funding for post-doc positions, post-docs were concerned about job security and academic staff were worried about the inability to support research in their fields, particularly in the case of "blue-sky research". A few respondents also commented that it has become increasingly more difficult to be involved in European consortia.

My science - avowedly discovery science - is already under pressure thanks to the growing, short-sighted focus on "impact", a focus that threatens to send UK science spiralling out of the top tier. It is no accident that most countries only basically fund applied science, and that those countries are not in the top tier. The ERC therefore represents a shining light to many of us, couched as it is so decidedly in discovery or blue-skies sciences (and it is also perhaps no surprise that UK-based researchers have been so successful thus far in winning ERC funding). Threats to EU funding are a clear and present danger to my own research, and to the sector more generally. C17

7. Business

So far, three submissions have been received from the business sector (including one confidential). One business was shutting down its UK operations and another will also be relocating elsewhere in EU due to Brexit. The devalued pound was also highlighted as a positive factor (most sales were not in pound, so revenues increased). One of the submissions also mentioned that it was impossible to make plans to stay in the UK, as it is still not known what Brexit will mean in practice.

Our UK operations are now closing down as a direct consequence of Brexit. We cannot export out of the UK as an EU member, which is what we need to do. C3

Both a Brexited UK and a move to the EU require enormous software changes. But in the UK, we couldn't even begin, because we've no idea what post Mar-2019 UK will look like, legislatively, administratively. C6

8. The Scottish dimension

Some of the comments received highlighted various aspects unique to Scotland:

So by Brexit we'll [the business] have completely migrated. Where to? Considering options. If an Independent Scotland with competitive corporation tax remained in the EU, that would be the favourite. C6

Though overall Scotland voted against Brexit, there was still a high proportion of voters for Brexit but strangely I have not been confronted with anybody openly supporting Brexit. C10

Brexit risks engendering yet more uncertainty over the position of Scotland in the UK. Whilst born in England, I consider myself British, yet the rise of nationalist politics has cast a shadow over my own residence in Scotland, and of course an independent Scotland would be in no-way able to fund the research and university system we currently have (this should be not be forgotten or down-played - very few countries have the research-base we do, and certainly not countries like New Zealand - our universities would be very different in an independent Scotland, and I doubt I would be part of them). Whether we like it or not, Brexit cannot progress independently of renewed uncertainty over an independent Scotland, bringing economic and social concerns that again risk recruitment and retention. C17

This being a Scotland-specific survey, it has to be said that it has been very reassuring to know that the majority of people in Scotland rejected Brexit and I have never felt less welcome than I was before Brexit. C19

Because of its World class university, St Andrews is the most international place I have ever lived. This is a small community where Europeans, British and overseas students share a common interest. Make the world a better place! C23

Case Studies – in full

In this section, we reproduce in full the case studies of those respondents that were happy for their response to be made publicly available.

For simplification, EU national refers to EU non-UK national. Unless otherwise stated, all of the respondents are based in Scotland.

The text is transcribed directly from the submission, apart from minor edits needed to anonymise a small number of the case studies.

C1. When the government announced that the status of EU citizens would be part of the negotiations my decision to leave became final

From day one this was bad news also because most of my funding has come from EU. When the government announced that the status of EU citizens would be part of the negotiations my decision to leave became final: if I would talk about our dogs that way my spouse would kick me out of the house. At the first international conference in July last year I talked to colleagues and now I moved to one of the top research institutes in my field. A bit sad because my problem is not with British science, I have great collaborations and respect my UK colleagues highly, but not Westminster. Glad though that the home office was too late to send me a letter of deportation.

Professor, EU national, previously lived in Scotland for more than 10 years, already moved to elsewhere in EU.

C2. Accepted a joint position elsewhere in EU in the end and will leave Scotland in October.

Was planning to stay in the UK for postdoctoral research or a job in tech after my PhD before Brexit. After Brexit I decided to apply all over the world. Ended up getting offers from the US, rest of the EU, and some from the UK. Accepted a joint position elsewhere in EU in the end and will leave Scotland in October. Would have preferred to stay on a personal level but the funding situation and uncertainty around what rights I will retain after Brexit would have made it a very stupid move professionally.

PhD student, EU national, living in Scotland for 6-10 years, moving to elsewhere in EU

C3. Our UK operations are now closing down

I work for an EU company that designs high performance computers and software algorithms for them, specifically for cryptography or computational biology. Our UK operations are now closing down as a direct consequence of Brexit. We cannot export out of the UK as an EU member, which is what we need to do.

Business Manager, UK national

C4. My kids have been verbally abused by neighbours, and people threatened to glass our house.

Brexit vote added uncertainty and a feeling of not being welcome/not part of the society, despite having lived and worked in the UK for more than 10 years. My kids have been verbally abused by neighbours, and people threatened to glass our house.

I have the premonition that the present economic downturn will impact on research funding, especially for blue-sky research like my field. In addition to that, Brexit threatens to hamper our chances of funding through the EU, which currently contributes about 1/3 to the overall funding envelope of our institute.

I also anticipate that Universities will struggle to hire new faculty at the highest calibre and will struggle to keep student numbers up. This will be particularly true for PhD students and, by extension, also to young researchers who are the lifeblood of our research.

Professor, EU national, based in England

C5. My supervisor has taken a job elsewhere in the EU

My supervisor has taken a job elsewhere in the EU due to the Brexit vote and him being from an EU country, This means that for the last 6 months of my lab work he will not be around, whilst this does not make things impossible it makes research life more complicated, affecting both myself personally and my work.

PhD student, UK national

C6. So by Brexit we'll have completely migrated. Where to? Considering options.

We create subscription-based electronic services.

- Most of our sales are not in GBP, so the weak pound since the Brexit vote has increased revenue. The mathematics of that has allowed us to take on an additional developer (in Spain).
- If outside the EU, we would be required to register for VAT with every one of the 27 Member states and fill-in VAT returns according to their differing and variable laws. (As a Member, we have to register only for one.)
- Moving to within the new borders of the EU and selling back to a hard-Brexit UK means we wouldn't have to account for VAT on UK sales (opportunity for increased gross profit and business development)
- Both a Brexited UK and a move to the EU require enormous software changes. But in the UK, we couldn't even begin, because we've no idea what post Mar-2019 UK will look like, legislatively, administratively.
- So by Brexit we'll have completely migrated. Where to? Considering options. If an Independent Scotland with competitive corporation tax remained in the EU, that would be the favourite. Otherwise maybe Ireland. Or Spain. Or Macron's new France.

Software Architect, UK national (based in the UK, but not in Scotland)

C7. Stress and dismay have also deeply affected the quality and quantity of my work in the past months.

A great waste of energy, time and goodwill. I came to the UK ten years ago, as a European citizen, attracted by the openness and vitality of British society, and above all by its capacity to valorise talent and hard-work over background or 'nationality'. The realisation that I'll soon become a foreigner, and more importantly that British society is not as open as I expected, has been a painful coming of age. I have calculated that I have wasted at least one month of work to acquire my permanent residence, and soon my citizenship, filling endless forms and 'gathering evidence', not to mention the stress and dismay which have also deeply affected the quality and quantity of my work in the past months.

Lecturer, EU national

C8. I came here full of enthusiasm 11 years ago and that disappeared overnight.

On a personal level, it feels like I no longer recognise the world around me and my perception has shifted and I've become more weary of telling people my last name which is definitely not British. I came here full of enthusiasm 11 years ago and that disappeared overnight. I despair at the shallowness of the arguments against the EU and how poorly informed the debate was up to the referendum.

On a professional level, I feel trapped as I could not find a similar post in another country I think, or it would be difficult to move. I am also weary of the effect a hard Brexit will have on the HE sector, and on the future of science and innovation in Scotland and the UK.

Manager in Research Support Organization, EU national

C9. I would like to work in Europe at some point post-PhD, but the 'harsh' nature that the Brexit negotiations have taken to date make any future work outside of the UK appear more challenging.

The Brexit vote has, to date, had a largely negative impact on me and the people I work with. Part of the joy of working in research is the opportunity to meet, work with, and socialise with people from all around the world.

Brexit has cast huge doubts over the futures of many friends and co-workers I have met through academia. Many of whom are now looking for work elsewhere or are worried about the uncertain times ahead.

With no guarantees for EU citizens these are uncertain and worrying times for them.

Thinking of my own future, I would like to work in Europe at some point post-PhD, but the 'harsh' nature that the Brexit negotiations have taken to date make any future work outside of the UK appear more challenging.

Most of the uncertainty and animosity caused by Brexit feels very unnecessary and at this point in time only appears to be detrimental to British research and science in general.

PhD student, UK national

C10. Though Scotland is a great place, as a result of losing my job, I would probably leave with my family to find a better opportunity elsewhere in the EU.

At University the environment is very international and my colleagues appreciate the multi-cultural nature. Currently it has not affected my work yet. My funding is internal to our facility so as long as we have sufficient income, my position can be paid for. One worry is that if the facility is not used due to cuts in funding of our clients then also our income will decrease and this might lead to my position being obsolete. Though Scotland is a great place, as a result of losing my job, I would probably leave with my family to find a better opportunity elsewhere in the EU.

Emotionally however it is disappointing to see that the majority of the British population disagrees with the free movement of EU citizens. It gives it a bitter taste. Though overall Scotland voted against Brexit, there was still a high proportion of voters for Brexit but strangely I have not been confronted with anybody openly supporting Brexit. The pro-Brexit vote is very confusing as it is very difficult to understand why EU citizens with a very high standard of living in their own country are rejected. Highly educated people are needed and so are fruit pickers. I came here as there was an adequate job opportunity for which special skills are required. This is not a job that anyone could do, so I believe that GB is not making the best choice if the fittest applicant for a given job cannot be selected from a wide pool due to potentially new immigration rules.

It is a very interesting process and I am curious to see its outcome. As there are many more options within the EU then as a consequence, we would move to somewhere else.

Post-doctoral researcher, EU national

C11. My personal life has been filled with doubt and feelings of insecurity.

My work so far hasn't been affected. My supervisor has secured the funding and luckily kept it. My personal life on the other hand has been filled with doubt and feelings of insecurity. I am in process of applying for jobs and this has become harder as I am an European citizen. Benefits became nonexistent. I keep listening about how we are stealing jobs from the British people and taking advantage of their taxes. I don't know if in a couple of years I'll have to leave the home I've built here. To summarise, Brexit vote has negatively affected me and my family.

PhD student, EU national

C12. A lot of EU colleagues are worried about the implications for them, some have already decided that the UK is not the place for them.

Created a lot of uncertainty, a lot of EU colleagues are worried about the implications for them, some have already decided that the UK is not the place for them. No one can predict the future, but at the moment the majority think Brexit is a bad thing.

Research facility manager, UK national

C13. Its shocks me that myself and many of my colleagues who should be doing research and teaching are losing time desperately trying to sort this mess out (and filling out forms likes) just to maintain their right to a family life.

My wife is an EU citizen. Currently we are in a no-man's land where we don't know whether she will have the right to live and work here after BREXIT. On a day-to-day level that brings huge amounts of stress and anxiety. That is further deepened by the xenophobic rhetoric that borders on the racist that is spouted by our politicians. The RSE was founded and was guided the values of the Scottish enlightenment. Unfortunately, that candle has gone out in these isles and I don't expect it to be relighted in my lifetime. It saddens me deeply and I no longer consider myself British, rather trapped in an identity by misfortune of where I was born.

The Universities where both my wife and work are doing their best to help me and other staff via information providing workshops and legal advice. They are doing the best they can but it is clear they have no real power or influence. Its shocks me that myself and many of my colleagues who should be doing research and teaching are losing time desperately trying to sort this mess out (and filling out forms likes) just to maintain their right to a family life.

I particularly hate the prejudice that is spread by the press that remoaners are talking the country down. Since the vote I have worked harder than ever as I see this is the only way to survive the coming storm which threatens to drown us all. I applied or supported several grant applications (some EU related). All failed. For the EU applications I don't think this was BREXIT related. For the UK scheme maybe indirectly (the fall in the pound coursing holes in research council budgets to appear).The flat cash for research in the UK was already hurting us before BREXIT. The fall in value of the pound has hurt us more. The strong possibility of not being able to apply for EU funding will hurt even more as the EU schemes provided an orthogonal sources.

The research group I work in is very international and has always attracted good postdocs from the EU. I worry that we end now. On the flip side many of our PhD students have started their careers with postdocs in the EU. I worry they will no longer have that option. Given the limited options in the UK they will most likely leave the field. I did my first postdocs in the EU before returning here. That was beneficial to my career. It is sad young people will not have that option.

Lecturer, UK national

C14. I am not actually sure anymore, whether I really do want to remain here

The Brexit vote has caused immense anxiety about my future. It has impacted on every area of my life, with uncertainty about my residence status, employment, taxes, health care provision etc. More unexpected dilemmas have been - should I adopt a cat, since I don't know if I will continue to live in the country I have called my home for the past 35 years? Should I buy a car and commit to a short-term loan? Should I take voluntary severance from a local authority job, which would change my employment status and could, therefore affect my chances of being granted residency?

My concerns have often been met by a complete lack of comprehension from UK citizens. The normal response is "but surely, after all these years, you'll be alright!" Well, how do I know? How do they know? Nobody has given any guarantees. The alternative response is "Why don't you just apply for UK citizenship?" The answer is complex. It is a huge step to give up your nationality and one I would not take lightly. I initially retained my EU nationality in case I had a family, so my children could have a choice about which nationality to adopt. However, since then, the UK

Government has introduced measures which make it impossible for me to apply. I strongly object to the knowledge test, which is required as part of the application process, with many questions being totally irrelevant to the concept of being a “good citizen”. A test, which many well-educated UK citizens would fail, seems a poor measure of suitability for citizenship. Furthermore, I would be required to swear an oath of allegiance which, again, many UK citizens would not swear. Why should I?

In my 35 years in this country, I have obeyed the law. I have worked or studied throughout this time and paid taxes and NI contributions. I have decades of volunteering for various charities. I have worked in a “hard to recruit” professions and have contributed to child protection services for approximately 20 years. Now, as I approach retirement, I am finding myself in a country that is hostile towards the many people who, like me, have contributed to its growth. I am not actually sure anymore, whether I really do want to remain here.

Lecturer, EU national

C15. I might need a visa to finish my PhD, which will be expensive and I risk not being able to finish my PhD.

Brexit is planned to happen while I am working on my PhD. This means I might need a visa to finish my PhD, which will be expensive and I risk not being able to finish my PhD. It also might be harder to find funding for PostDoc positions once I finish.

PhD student, EU national

C16. Scotland is my home but I feel like this could change at any time.

I have been employed full-time in an Administrative Role at a Scottish University. In order to pursue my interests and a possible change of career, I have applied for and been offered a 4-year studentship to start a doctoral position at a Scottish University starting in September 2017.

In the course of last year, there has been much debate over Brexit and what this would mean for EU citizens like me, currently living and settled in the UK. For this reason, and for peace of mind, I applied for and obtained a permanent residence permit.

At the moment, I understand that these permits will become redundant when the UK leaves the EU and we will have to apply for 'settled status'. Although promises are made that the process will be smooth and not too costly, there is little information about which groups of people will be eligible for this new status.

I obtained the permanent residence permit because I have been employed for many years and could prove that I have been in the UK over many years. What happens when I have to apply for 'settled status' and I am no longer employed but full-time student?

Moreover, if I was to then take work outside the UK for over 2 years, I would not be eligible for settled status any longer. Naturalisation is an option but only for those who can afford the high costs.

Brexit and the Government's handling of the negotiations with the EU is making the future very unclear and creates insecurities and worries. Scotland is my home but I feel like this could change at

any time. I have family here: my daughter and her 2 sons. My daughter will apply for British Nationality as her dad is British and her sons are British as they were born in Scotland.

I couldn't envisage having to leave. Go where? In the meantime, there are threatening stories about NHS staff shortages, etc and Universities rely on freedom of movement in order to attract bright researchers. None of this bodes well for the future.

PhD Student, EU national

C17. What sort of country are we becoming?

Brexit has created four challenges.

First, at the most general level, Brexit creates the perception - and potentially will create the reality - of a country that is looking inwards, and that is either ambivalent or actively unfriendly towards non-UK nationals living and working here. That means that recruiting high-quality staff, and both undergraduates and postgraduates, from outside the UK is already becoming more difficult, a difficulty that could become acute, both for my own research group, but also for my institution and the sector more broadly. UK universities have made tremendous contributions to the UK, economically, intellectually and socially, contributions borne from our wonderfully diverse faculties, student bodies and global research collaborations. But be in no doubt that these are at grave risk, not least the latter, as all the evidence suggests that scientific collaborations are strongly correlated with geographic distance - mainland Europe is crucially important to us, as we are currently to them. But the harder it is for EU nationals to study and work here, the less likely we are to build those collaborations, and the more likely it is that EU nationals look elsewhere. And it is not just a matter of staying within a "European Research Area". Whilst that might help maintain funding, it the ease with which non-UK nationals can live and work here that will be crucial, and a country that is unwelcoming will suffer. Furthermore, as someone with a non-UK and non-EU partner, antipathy towards non-UK nationals places much uncertainty and strain on us, even though she is white and a native English speaker; to put it bluntly, what sort of country are we becoming?

Second, Brexit risks major funding changes and shortfalls. My science - avowedly discovery science - is already under pressure thanks to the growing, short-sighted focus on "impact", a focus that threatens to send UK science spiralling out of the top tier. It is no accident that most countries only basically fund applied science, and that those countries are not in the top tier. The ERC therefore represents a shining light to many of us, couched as it is so decidedly in discovery or blue-skies sciences (and it is also perhaps no surprise that UK-based researchers have been so successful thus far in winning ERC funding). Threats to EU funding are a clear and present danger to my own research, and to the sector more generally.

Third, Brexit risks engendering yet more uncertainty over the position of Scotland in the UK. Whilst born in England, I consider myself British, yet the rise of nationalist politics has cast a shadow over my own residence in Scotland, and of course an independent Scotland would be in no-way able to fund the research and university system we currently have (this should be not be forgotten or downplayed - very few countries have the research-base we do, and certainly not countries like New Zealand - our universities would be very different in an independent Scotland, and I doubt I would be part of them). Whether we like it or not, Brexit cannot progress independently of renewed uncertainty over an independent Scotland, bringing economic and social concerns that again risk recruitment and retention.

Finally, and while it is easy to forget or ignore this, while we focus on funding, recruitment, student numbers and so forth, Brexit brings psychological costs. I am not alone in being profoundly influenced by the Brexit vote, effects that go beyond the short-term risks and uncertainties over my research or my institution. The Brexit campaign and the Brexit vote outcome - and in particular the government's response, including the ill-conceived election - have been anti-intellectual and have challenged the fundamental basis of what we, as academics, base our world-view on. We have seen, and continue to see, a denigration of expertise, a wilful misuse of data, a disinclination to accept uncomfortable facts, a trivialisation of debate, and a lack of rigorous, rational thinking. These challenge what we academics stand for and what we value.

Brexit is more than just a major shift in the UK's relationship with the world, it is a challenge to Enlightenment values. Whatever the final shape of Brexit, and whatever the economic and social problems that we will face as a result, it is those Enlightenment values that we need to keep fighting for, or perhaps to start fighting for again. If we do not, then the period of UK academe being world-leading will slowly come to an end, influencing us all.

Senior Lecturer, UK national

C18. The Brexit vote has made the participation in project applications far more difficult.

The Brexit vote has made the participation in project applications far more difficult. Consortia have become more critical in inviting UK partners. EC project funding typically stretches over 18-36 months, which means that the majority of proposals from consortia including UK entities would have to provide mitigation strategies for the time after 01.04.2019. This increases the complexity of and the uncertainty associated with proposals and increases their risk.

There have been promises during the Brexit campaign, that UK funding would be increased in order to compensate for reduced EC funding. I cannot see this at this stage. UK funding has certainly not increased in my professional domain.

I am personally affected as I cannot assume that I will be able to work in the UK after 01.04.2017 and I have to consider alternative professional options outside the UK for the time after Brexit.

After 17 years in this country I am also concerned on the impact of the Brexit on my pension in case I will have to leave.

Professor, EU national

C19. While I have always felt proud to live in the UK and I have never considered moving, after Brexit the thought of leaving has crossed my mind.

Even if it is still not clear what will actually happen with Brexit, the vote outcome has already had some effects. The very uncertainty has generated, at personal level, a constant anxiety which has not left me since June.

More at the practical level, I keep thinking that the majority of my current and past group members are from the EU and I am wondering how easy it will be to keep recruit EU researchers. Barriers are not simply represented by possible restrictions on people movements, but also on how attractive the UK will look like. First of all, the dropping of the pounds will result in less competitive salaries and second the UK might be perceived as a non EU citizen friendly place. The latter issue is less

quantifiable but I have experienced it myself. While I have always felt proud to live in the UK and I have never considered moving, after Brexit the thought of leaving has crossed my mind. This being a Scotland-specific survey, it has to be said that it has been very reassuring to know that the majority of people in Scotland rejected Brexit and I have never felt less welcome than I was before Brexit.

Principal Investigator, EU national

C20. I worry about future funding as well as collaborations with EU nationals.

So far it hasn't affected me and am not immediately concerned about myself. However, I worry about future funding as well as collaborations with EU nationals.

Research Fellow, UK national

C21. If I stay in academia and want to apply for funding none of the European [grants] will be available

I started last September and my PhD is supposed to finish April 2020, but to be able to continue working I would have to pay for a working visa after Brexit. Furthermore, if I will stay in academia and want to apply for funding none of the European ones will be available and I would have to rely only on what the UK would have to offer.

PhD student, EU national

C22. I am currently taking German classes so I have better chances of finding an academic position in Europe.

Until the Brexit vote, I always considered UK simply as another country in Europe. It was among the many possible places to work. Every country has their pros and cons.

Some negative things about the UK. From a Nordic or Central European perspective the UK is in some regards a not fully developed country. For example, the overall quality of living is clearly of lower standard than, say Finland or Germany (e.g. housing and building quality, public transport, infrastructure like traffic arrangements). Also, British politics currently seems to emphasise the class structure, widening the gap between the rich and the poor which makes the society overall less appealing. (Increases crime, negatively affects overall mood, and so on.) Also the UK bureaucracy is completely baffling. (E.g. the Home Office holding my passport for 6 months and effectively imprisoning me just so that they can do their paperwork.)

On the other hand, the university sector in the UK is blooming and especially in my field offers good opportunities. Also, the English language was not a problem for me.

I did my masters and doctoral degrees in England. And I was fully prepared to build my career in the UK higher education sector.

I accepted a position as a lecturer at a Scottish University in 2016. By the time the vote happened, I had already signed my contract and acquired an apartment in Scotland.

Now, the scales have tipped dramatically. This is because of Brexit but also the way Theresa May is running things. I never liked Cameron either, but at least I respected him and thought he was a capable leader. May seems to be some sort of idiot Dalek, who has no grasp of reality.

For me, UK is no longer a “quaint slightly antiquated country which nevertheless offers good possibilities”. Now it has simply turned into a “shitty developing country with delusions of past grandeur”. The university network is still good, but this is not a society where I want to live anymore.

I agree 100% with the sentiment expressed yesterday in Angela Merkel’s speech. She talked about how Europeans must take their fate into their own hands, without outside help. With Brexit this seems to apply also to our individual lives. I also completely agree how Merkel painted a vision where “Europe” was juxtaposed by “those around us”: US, Russia, but ALSO UK. Whatever the geography books say, UK is no longer mentally part of Europe.

I am currently taking German classes so I have better chances of finding an academic position in Europe. My priorities at work have shifted to things which emphasise my personal career development (e.g. publishing), which I can take with me when I leave.

Lecturer, EU national

C23. The best way to [change the world] is by staying together, sharing knowledge and learning new cultures. Well, Brexit drives the UK in the opposite direction and I am very sad about this.

Having started my PhD degree at the University of St Andrews in September 2014, Brexit didn't affect my work. However, I was literally shocked to discover that "YES, we want to leave the EU" was the outcome of the Brexit referendum. I feel lucky to live in St Andrews which is a very small but gorgeous town on the east coast of Scotland. Because of its World class university, St Andrews is the most international place I have ever lived. This is a small community where Europeans, British and overseas students share a common interest. Make the world a better place! Unfortunately, the best way to do so, in my opinion, is by staying together, sharing knowledge and learning new cultures. Well, Brexit drives the UK in the opposite direction and I am very sad about this. I feel sorry for all of the European people who wanted to stay and work in the UK, but I fell even sorrier for the UK as a country because it is going to lose all of the diversity, enthusiasm and knowledge that European people could bring to this beautiful island.

PhD student, EU national