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EU librarians on the move?
An exploration of potential impacts of Brexit on workforce diversity

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Abstract

This study investigated whether the academic library sector in the UK could be in danger of experiencing a decline in workforce diversity following the Brexit vote. A web survey was distributed to academic libraries and LIS departments across the UK. Follow up email interviews were conducted with twelve individuals. Participants were very worried about effects of Brexit on their right to reside in the UK. Two years after the referendum they still felt a high degree of uncertainty about their future. Most participants wanted to stay in the UK. Whilst about a third considered leaving due to Brexit; 21% were undecided and 14% had made concrete plans to leave. However, reasons to leave ultimately lay mostly outside of the place of work or study. The findings suggest that the UK academic library sector could be in danger of experiencing a decline in workforce diversity as a result of Brexit.

Introduction

The 23rd of June 2016 has been marked in European history as the day on which a narrow majority of UK citizens (51.9%) voted in favour of leaving the European Union (EU). During the negotiations one of the main interest of EU negotiators now lies in securing the rights of approximately 3 million EU nationals living and working in the UK (McClean, 2017). The call to restrict immigration was a major concern in the campaign of Brexit proponents and among the drivers of the referendum result (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Hobolt, 2016; Portes, 2016; Vargas-Silva, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, for many EU nationals living and working in the UK, the Brexit vote has created a high degree of uncertainty (Remigi et al., 2017) with an effect on migration flows (Lessard-Phillips

& Sigona, 2018). Fewer EU nationals are immigrating to the UK whilst an increased number have decided to leave (ONS, 2018). These trends could have severe effects on workforce diversity in a number of sectors including Higher Education (HE) (Esmail, Panagioti, & Kontopantelis, 2017; Kirkland, 2017; Mohamed, Pärn, & Edwards, 2017; Rolfe, 2017). Academic libraries, which have traditionally been "at the heart of the university" (Pinfield, Cox, & Rutter, 2017), have so far received less attention regarding the potential effects of Brexit on their workforces. However, examining this sector is of increased importance, considering that it is already known for being a "painfully homogenous profession" (Morales, Knowles, & Bourg, 2014). The need for workforce diversity is an important theme in the librarianship literature, but it is most usually seen as relating to ethnicity (Honma, 2005; Peterson, 1999; Riley-Reid, 2017). Brexit poses an issue of loss of national diversity. This is a potentially significant problem in itself because non UK European staff members have a particularly valuable skillset in terms of language and cultural skills, as well as sharing backgrounds with many students and academic staff.

This research therefore undertook to investigate whether the academic library sector in the UK could be in danger of experiencing a decline in workforce diversity, in the face of a current period of uncertainty, following the Brexit vote. Specific research questions were:

- Are there academic librarians and LIS students with non-UK EU origin, working or studying in the UK, who are considering or planning to leave the UK because of reasons related to Brexit?
- How do academic librarians and LIS students with EU nationality feel about the referendum directly after the vote, and how do they feel about two years later?
- How well are staff from a non-UK EU background being supported through the uncertainty of Brexit?
- How can academic libraries, LIS departments and schools improve recruitment and retention of EU nationals?

Literature Review

The Brexit vote, as a recent event in European history, is a relatively novel topic in research literature and especially that of LIS. At present there are only a small number of LIS publications stemming Brexit (McLeod & Lomas, 2017, 2018; Morris, 2016; Pinfield et al., 2017). Thus, the following reviewed literature has also drawn from other scientific disciplines, mainly politics.

Diversity in Academic Librarianship

The definition of diversity in the academic librarianship literature, which often comes from an American context, incorporates a number of different attributes. Nationality and geographic background have, among others, been recognised as dimensions of diversity (Hanna et al., 2011; Kreitz, 2008). Kreitz (2008) reviewed different definitions and recognised four groups to which diversity attributes can belong: "personality (e.g., traits, skills, and abilities), internal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity […]), external characteristics (e.g., culture, nationality, religion […]), and organizational characteristics (e.g., position, department […])." Despite the widespread recognition of these various dimensions, the concept of diversity has previously predominantly focused on ethnicity in the academic librarianship literature (Honma, 2005; Peterson, 1999; Riley-Reid, 2017).

The issue of ethnic diversity is particularly current with increasing recognition of the BAME achievement gap and the need to "decolonise" the University (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019; Bhambra, Nisancioglu & Gebrial, 2018). The social concern to remove stigma attached to different forms of sexuality is also an increasing concern (Schneider, 2016). Brexit poses a further threat to diversity. European employees' personal experience of mobility enables them to relate strongly to students and academic staff who are also undertaking such transitions. For UK universities with their very large numbers of international students such empathy is highly relevant. The academic staff body also includes many non UK Europeans. Non UK European staff also have particularly valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge relevant to maintaining the diversity of library collections, which contain many works written from across Europe, often in

As professionals charged with making accessible and preserving diverse forms of knowledge, librarians need to embody that diversity.

Diversity in LIS is often treated as an organisational goal from a managerial point of view; literature regularly includes best practices on managing diversity and implementing diversity initiatives (Hanna et al., 2011; Kreitz, 2008). This goal has been presented as a necessary response to increased user diversity, in the light of globalisation and internationalisation (Gulati, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Kreitz, 2008). Literature on recruitment stresses the value of diverse staff to better service provision through their cultural and language knowledge (Dewey & Keally, 2008; Kim, Chiu, Sin, & Robbins, 2007).

Recruitment and retention are major themes in academic librarianship literature on diversity (Acree, Epps, Gilmore, & Henriques, 2001; Musser, 2001; Neely & Peterson, 2007). Several authors highlight the importance of developing specific strategies for the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce (Dewey & Keally, 2008; Howland, 1999; Neely & Peterson, 2007). Neely and Peterson (2007) stress that a diversity agenda needs to be placed within sector-wide strategic aims. The authors further formulated goals for recruitment, retention and career advancement. Howland (1999) emphasises the importance of equality focused strategies whilst Dewey and Keally (2008) discuss strategies for the development of recruitment programmes.

Retention is another important theme within diversity literature (Acree et al., 2001; Howland, 1999; Musser, 2001). Musser (2001) suggests that more needs to be discovered about the reasons making employees want to stay in their organisations. The authors therefore discuss models to investigate those factors and retention tools such as mentoring, networking, professional development and work climate. An article by Acree et al. (2001) also recommends professional development to retain minority staff, especially at an early career stage. Howland (1999) views a supportive work climate as fostering retention, where management and every member of the profession openly commits to diversity.

Diversity can be addressed by celebrating difference and multiculturalism and through tackling racism and discrimination (Balderrama, 2000). Alabi (2015a) detected a lack of literature on the latter within academic librarianship. The author sought to investigate minority academic librarians' experiences of racial microaggression through an online survey. Microaggression is a form of degradation through subtle verbal and non-verbal messages towards the member of a race, often sent unconsciously. The author found evidence of microaggressions in academic librarianship, which can impact work climate (Alabi, 2015a). Other experiences depicted in the study reported discrimination based on geographical origin (Alabi, 2015b).

Brexit and its impacts on immigration

Immigration has been and continues to be a major topic in the Brexit discourse (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Portes, 2016; Vargas-Silva, 2016). Literature in this area tends to be speculative in nature, mirroring the constantly changing negotiations between the UK and EU at the time of writing. It also depicts a general uncertainty towards UK migration policy (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Vargas-Silva, 2016) and varied reasons for the voting result, such as the financial crisis and austerity; the wish to restrict immigration; but also Euroscepticism, xenophobia and racism (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Gough, 2017).

However, the debate to restrict immigration did not have a focus on those EU nationals already in the UK (Vargas-Silva, 2016), a group who will be greatly affected by changes to immigration law and restrictions on free movement. Future scenarios for this group have been discussed. One predicts a return from EU nationals to "mobile workers" instead of "fellow European citizens" (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018). Another scenario is concerned with the alignment of the rights of EU and non-EU nationals, imposing much stricter regulations on the latter in relation to entry, settlement, employment and entitlement to social benefits (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Vargas-Silva, 2016).

Generally, there is agreement that the UK could become a much less popular location to settle with the new regulations in place (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Vargas-Silva, 2016). However,

immigration law is not treated as the only cause for potential changes in immigration flows. Vargas-Silva (2016) speculated that a negative economic development, triggered by Brexit, might have a bigger impact. Research has emphasised long-term impacts on immigration (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Vargas-Silva, 2016), neglecting the possibility that the Brexit vote alone might have short-term implications for immigration flows. Portes (2016) argued that the perception of an unwelcoming climate, amplified through individual racist motivated incidents and a lack of certainty, could lead EU nationals to leave the UK.

Impacts on Different Sectors

The threat of EU nationals leaving the UK, and decreased immigration from the EU, is discussed across a variety of sectors: including health (Esmail et al., 2017; Fahy et al., 2017; Gulland, 2016); construction (Mohamed et al., 2017); the low-skilled-sector (Rolfe, 2017); HE (Kirkland, 2017; Mayhew, 2017); and science (Galsworthy & McKee, 2017; Aitchison, 2017; Wooldridge, 2017).

HE faces challenges in the recruitment and retention of academic staff, as well as in the ongoing attraction of EU students, with the potential to settle after graduation (Kirkland, 2017; Mayhew, 2017). As of 2017 there were 125,000 EU students studying and an estimated 43,000 EU nationals working in UK universities (Kirkland, 2017), comprising about 16% of all UK university staff (Galsworthy & McKee, 2017). Galsworthy and McKee (2017) proposed recommendations to mitigate the effects of Brexit-related migration in the science sector as a whole, while Aitchison (2017) and Wooldridge (2017) provided a perspective on a disciplinary level; however, the actual impacts for HE and science are still unclear (Kirkland, 2017).

Brexit and the information profession

To date there has been relatively little LIS literature on the impact of Brexit. Some literature has discussed the information professions collectively (McLeod & Lomas, 2017, 2018) while others focus on academic libraries (Morris, 2016; Pinfield, et al., 2017).

McLeod and Lomas (2017) capture the perspective of information and communication technology (ICT) professionals and academics on the potential opportunities and threats posed by Brexit, shortly after the referendum. Participants included UK, EU and international ICT professionals at all levels of employment, including librarians at private and public institutions. Results were analysed using STEEPLE to evaluate socio-cultural, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal and ethical factors. The study revealed a high level of uncertainty in terms of the vote's direct implications: slightly over a quarter of participants were not aware of their organisation's immediate response to Brexit or what future responses might entail. A clear majority held negative views on the referendum result and most openly recognised the value of non-UK workers for their businesses; these were generally within the HE and Further Education sectors. It was generally felt that threats posed by Brexit clearly outweighed potential opportunities. The research population was surveyed again on the same topics one year later and a briefing produced (McLeod & Lomas, 2018). The authors urged the UK government and EU to provide a clear roadmap to guide future strategies, and to continue to recruit international students to the UK, although benefit here was presented in terms of their contributions to the UK economy through university fees and expenditure.

Another study (Pinfield et al., 2017) aimed to identify future key topics for academic libraries in the UK, finding Brexit to be perceived as highly significant for the future of academic libraries. Morris (2016) provided the personal perspective of an academic librarian in this area, discussing aspects she perceived as being potentially affected by Brexit, including budgets, funding, acquisition, collection building, and workplace rights. She further called for more discussions to take place around Brexit from the perspective of academic libraries.

The review reveals a neglect of diversity based on nationality in librarianship literature, as well as a gap in the literature on the impacts of Brexit on UK academic libraries. This paper addresses both, acknowledging that Brexit is not only a political or professional topic but also a personal one, and demonstrating the relations between these aspects. It is too early to evaluate long-term

impacts of Brexit without speculation. However, insights gathered during this uncertain transition period are still valuable.

Methodology

This study took an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) with the main body of data an online survey, followed up by a number of qualitative email interviews, which sought to explain the survey results in greater depth and aid interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Johnson et al., 2007). Sequential triangulation also increased the validity, reliability and depth of research results (Johnson et al., 2007). The inductive, data-driven approach was underpinned by a pragmatic worldview, assuming that the combination of different data types leads to a more holistic understanding of the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research population consisted of staff in UK academic libraries with EU origin, and EU nationals among LIS students in the UK with aspirations to progress into a career in academic librarianship. Precise statistics for these populations were not available and hence non-probability sampling was the only feasible sampling technique; the generated sample is therefore not necessarily representative of the research population (Pickard, 2013d). The sample for the survey was voluntary and self-selected in the first instance (Vehovar et al., 2016), with further use of snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016).

The questionnaire combined mostly closed as well as some open-ended questions. This allowed for a high number of easy to process and comparable responses (Pickard, 2013c), while providing the opportunity to gather personal views and topics to inform follow-up interviews. Data was collected on participants' residential history and status in the UK; their vote in, and experience of, the referendum; and their views on immigration law, migration considerations, experiences

of discrimination and levels of perceived support. This final section was mainly composed of 24 Likert-type scale items for attitude and frequency measures (Pickard, 2013c).

In Summer 2018, invitations to participate were sent via email to LIS schools and university departments, and academic libraries across the UK. Social media platforms were used for further distribution, including professional channels in the LIS field. Eighty-eight usable responses were received. Academic librarians (81) and LIS students (7) from 18 out of 27 non-UK EU countries participated. 76 (86%) of participants held a single non-UK EU citizenship, 1% a single UK citizenship, and 7 (8%) both. Data were analysed, using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS through descriptive statistics for frequency distributions; univariate and bivariate analysis was conducted (Bryman & Cramer, 2011). Qualitative data was analysed thematically, following Braun & Clarke's (2006) process and using NVivo.

The second phase of the study involved interviews to develop further explanations and more detail on the quantitative data. Themes selected for further exploration were job searching, recruitment and retention. These themes were chosen to examine how the retention of academic librarians and the chances for LIS students to progress in a career in academic librarianship in the UK could be positively influenced. The sample comprised a purposeful selection of students and staff at different career levels from the pool of volunteers from the first phase. Data was collected via asynchronous email interviews (Pickard, 2013b), allowing access to a large number of participants across the UK, "increasing self-disclosure" through a greater perception of anonymity (Meho, 2006), and encouraging deeper reflection (Fritz & Vandermause, 2017; Hawkins, 2018; Meho, 2006). To compensate for the lack of visual and non verbal cues that can be interpreted from face to face interviews, participants were encouraged to use emoticons and formatting such as capital letters, bold words, italics, underlining and capitalization to emphasise points and express feelings (Golding, 2011; Meho, 2006). A minimum of two complete email exchanges was deemed necessary to ensure adequate probing and follow-up questions.

In total 12 email interviews were conducted, involving three student participants, four interviewees in supporting roles, one in a middle management position and four in senior positions. New participants were invited until saturation was reached (Saunders et al., 2018) and sufficient meaningful themes emerged to make sense of the data from the first data collection stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011b). Data was again analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach.

Findings

Participants feelings' about Brexit following the referendum were predominantly negative. Positive emotions such as hope, optimism, security, confidence and calm were mentioned only in very small numbers. Negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration, insecurity, pessimism and nervousness were felt by a high number immediately following the vote, and an increased number of participants felt disappointed, sad, rejected, afraid, vulnerable, angry and shocked two years after the vote. A majority of 47 (55%) of respondents indicated that their uncertainty had not decreased within the two years following the vote.

Figure 1 – *Word cloud feelings of questionnaire participants about Brexit 2 years after the referendum (created with TagCrowd)*

A majority of 67 (76%) of participants did not feel well informed about the changes to UK immigration law, and 48 (60%) felt uninformed about the steps they needed to undertake before

June 2021 to legally remain in the UK. Consequently 68 (77%) of respondents were worried about the changes to UK immigration law and its effects on their residency rights. A potentially worse educational or professional situation was feared by 32 (36%) of participants, with students being most inclined to believe that their professional situation would worsen (Figure 1).

Levels of agreement to statement "I don't think that my educational or professional situation in the UK will worsen once the UK leaves the EU." by career levels
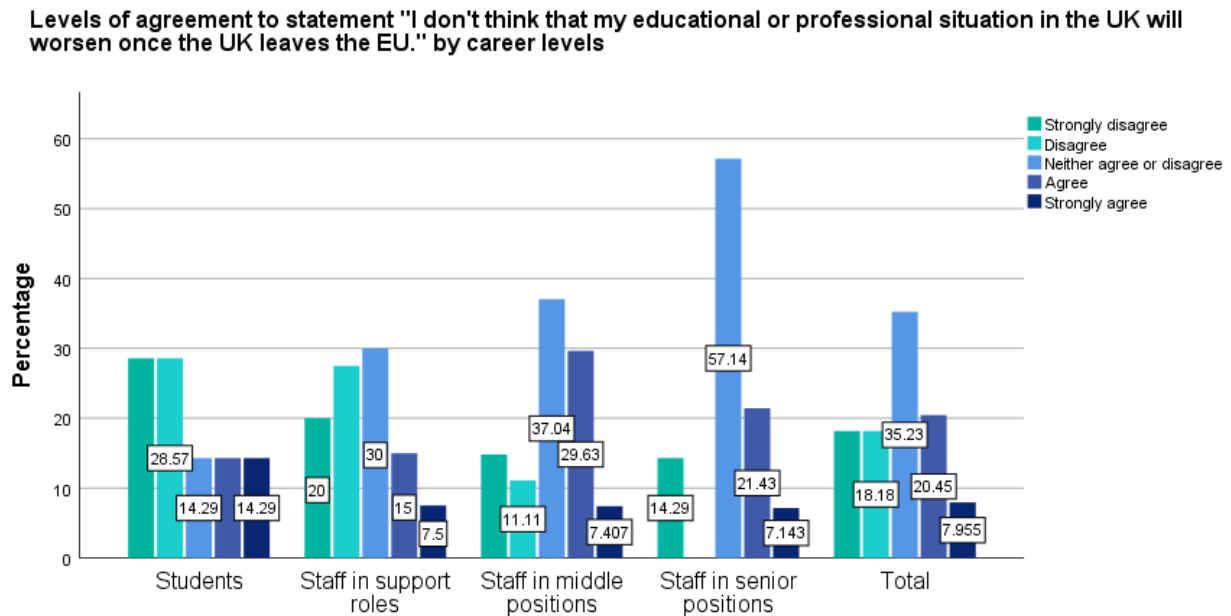

Figure 2 – Degree to which participants believed that their educational or professional situation would not worsen post-Brexit by career levels in percentage, n = 88

Of all participants, 34 (39%) had considered leaving, and 12 (14%) had made concrete plans. A further 18 (21%) were undecided. Interestingly, 17 (19%) of participants indicated plans to leave the UK for reasons unrelated to Brexit. Reasons for leaving were not always exclusively Brexit related nor purely unrelated; for four participants (4%), both applied.

Many participants responded that they were unable to predict ("neither agree or disagree") if they would still be in the UK in the next 5 years (24 or 28%) or the next 10 years (32 or 37%). A majority of 52 (60%) of participants were confident they would remain in the UK for the next 5 years, but after 10 years this share decreased to 34 (39%). Participating students felt they were

least likely to stay in the UK long-term (75 or 86%); the higher the career level, the more likely were participants to picture their future in the UK (Figure 2).
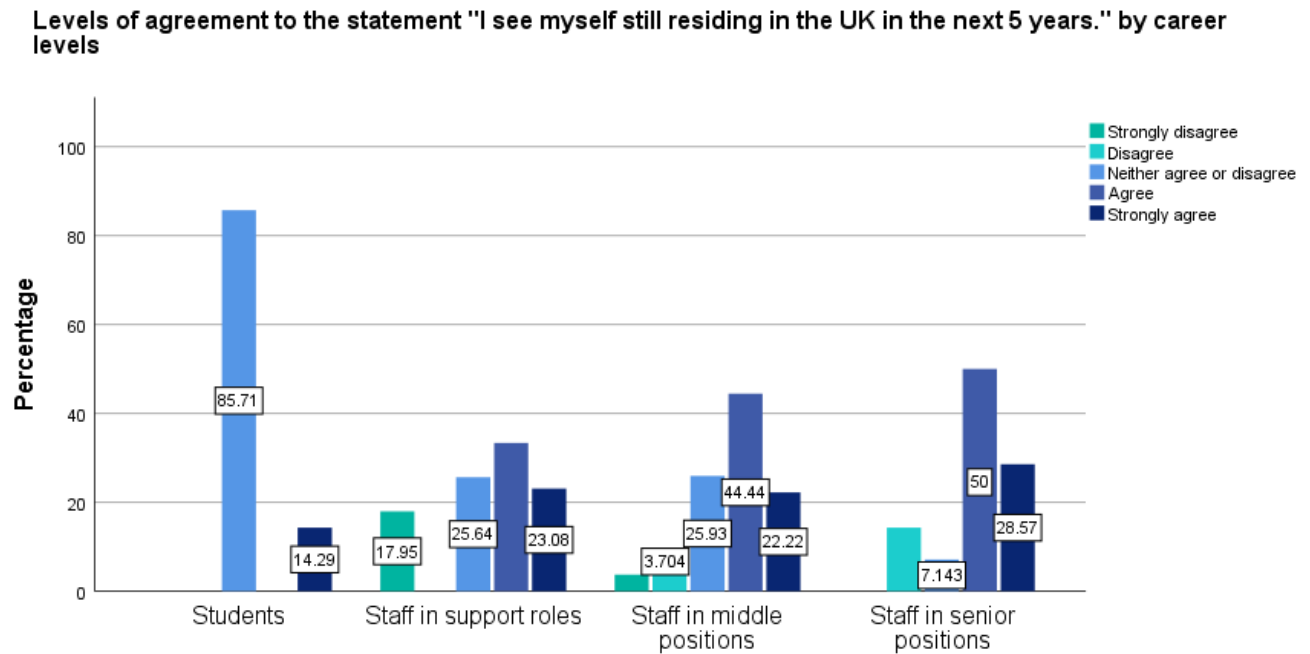
Levels of agreement to the statement "I see myself still residing in the UK in the next 5 years." by career levels

Figure 3 – Degree to which participants see themselves still residing in the UK within the next 5 years by career levels in percentage, n = 87

Several demographics and characteristics of the research sample were analysed for their effect on migration considerations, though given the amount of data available differences were not statistically significant. Career level was one factor that did appear to shape responses: 14/26 (54%) of staff in middle positions and 7/14 (50%) of senior staff were not considering leaving the UK because of reasons relating to Brexit. However, 4/7 (57%) of participating students and 16/40 (40%) of supporting staff were considering leaving. Therefore, the higher the career level, the less likely participants were to consider leaving the UK because of reasons related to Brexit.

Participants mentioned practical as well as emotional reasons for staying in the UK. Practical reasons included having an excellent employer or a sense of security regarding status and

rights. One participant, who decided to leave the UK after 21 years, stated that the insecurity felt since the referendum had hugely impacted the decision to leave, and that the Windrush scandal[1] had left them distrusting the UK government. Barriers to leaving included partners, working opportunities abroad, anticipated difficulties in finding a job from abroad, the transferability of qualifications, or the need for additional examinations. Participants who had spent many years residing and building careers in the UK were especially reluctant to leave. Interviews supplied more detail about decisions about whether to leave or stay. Those who had already decided to leave were set in their decision, but flexible regarding the timeframe. Feelings about leaving were mixed.

A major reason for working in academic libraries and to study LIS at UK universities was the quality of UK academic librarianship: "In the UK […] you get to have state of the art libraries. It is like a fairy tale if someone wants to learn." Furthermore, academic libraries and their parent institutions were perceived as safe environments by a number of interviewees:

"I think academic libraries are a good place to be at the moment as you are unlikely to encounter any Brexit supporters. This feeling of safety is very important to me at the moment."

Work related factors for leaving the UK included better opportunities for professional development abroad, EU citizens being passed by for promotion, the end of funding for training for EU staff, being made redundant, or difficulties in finding a job. One participant felt especially ambivalent about leaving for reasons of career progression:

"I feel like going back to work in Spain is like going a step backwards in my career progress so far, as what I have achieved here would probably not guarantee getting a job in the same level in Spain."

Yet the statement of one participant pointedly summarises what applied to most interviewees:

"The reasons for leaving lie entirely outside my job, career, team, employer."

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[1] A recent political scandal in which migrants who had moved from the Caribbean to the UK were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation, or deported from the UK by the Home Office. Many had been born British subjects and had arrived in the UK before 1973 (Craggs, 2018).

Experiences of discrimination

As context for the decision making around Brexit, part of the questionnaire explored whether respondents had experienced discrimination. Most respondents to the questionnaire reported that they had never, or only rarely, experienced any form of discrimination, overt or covert, in private or at their place of study or work, due to their nationality. If discrimination occurred in the workplace or place of study, this was perceived as covert rather than overt. Workplace climates were generally seen as welcoming towards EU nationals, with 68 (78%) feeling this to be the case. Seniority of position appeared to be a factor: senior staff indicated the lowest, and support staff the highest, levels of exposure to both kinds of discrimination. Overt discrimination in the work or study context was still the exception. More often, participants across career levels felt covertly discriminated against. Covert discrimination was also perceived when applying for jobs. At the job search level, some participants felt that employers preferred to appoint UK applicants; one participant only received replies on applications once the participant started listing a UK residence. Once in work, some non-professional staff members reported covert discrimination originating from co-workers, in the form of jokes, assumptions, choice of words and stereotypes. For example, one questionnaire participant felt that one must adopt British culture in the workplace to avoid being discriminated against.

Support for EU nationals

Receiving support from their university was important for participants across all career levels. Student participants who felt unsupported were the biggest proportion (2/7 or 29%), followed by (7/40 or 18%) of support staff, 4/14 (14%) of senior staff and 2/27 (7%) of staff in middle positions. Over half of participants felt informed by their universities; again students felt least informed followed by staff in senior positions, staff in support roles and staff in middle positions. In directly comparing the importance of supervisor support with the degree to which participants were approached and their concerns addressed by supervisors, a large gap becomes apparent: while 61 (69%) of participants valued supervisor support, only 26 (30%) actually experienced this.

More detail was revealed in the interviews. Support offered by UK universities included reassuring emails and talks, information sessions with Human Resources (HR) representatives and hired immigration lawyers, dedicated websites providing up-to-date information, and mailing lists. Several interview participants positively acknowledged the support they received through their HR departments, as the main contact for posing questions and in helping to apply for PR or British citizenship. Financial support was also offered, to fund successful applications for settled status and pay fees for PR applications. However, some employees reported a lack of support from their universities: "It is more like a marketing thing. We say we support you but there is nothing more." At one university support and statements were only provided after being demanded by EU staff. Several participants reported that initial support had been discontinued.

Participants also reported informal support from UK colleagues and managers, as well as fellow EU nationals. Many reported of empathetic UK colleagues: *"They try to convey that I am much appreciated at my workplace and make valuable contributions to this country."* On the other hand, some co-workers were perceived to not acknowledge the implications of Brexit for their EU colleagues. One participant felt that this stemmed from academic librarianship being a "sector with qualified staff" that might be less obviously affected than other sectors. Several participants found UK colleagues reluctant to talk about Brexit, possibly due to the topic being divisive, or colleagues being afraid, ashamed, or not caring enough.

Interview participants provided various examples of how support could be improved (Table 1).

LIS departments and schools		University employers	Work supervisors	Colleagues
Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	Informal
Round tables and meetings across student body	Dialogues with professors	More proactive approach	More personal approach	Peer support
		General financial advice	Acknowledgement of situation	
		Pension information	Offers to talk	
		Better information		
		Support office		

		Paying and managing application process for settled status		

Table 1 – *Summary of examples of desired support by interview participants*

Discussion

Impacts of Brexit on diversity through migration

Changes to immigration law and effects on the residency rights of participants were a great concern to participants in the study. Literature in this area is still speculative, and similarly participants could not yet fully judge what their future in the UK might look like. A fear that future rights of EU nationals could be aligned to the rights of any foreign national has been established as one potential scenario (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Vargas-Silva, 2016). Furthermore, Vargas-Silva (2016) speculated that a negative economic development, triggered by Brexit, might have an even bigger impact on immigration flows. This mirrors another big fear of participants, many of whom were concerned about the effect on their wages and pensions. In this regard the literature shows that EU nationals in the UK share the same concerns, irrespective of the sector.

This finding is also in line with McLeod and Lomas' (2017, 2018) research on threats and opportunities resulting from the Brexit vote in the ICT sector. Perceived threats mostly related to areas outside participants' control. Many overlapped with factors that participants in this study named as factors which would encourage them to leave, such as xenophobia, uncertainty, hostility, lower salaries, and loss of human rights on a mainly socio-cultural as well as economic level. McLeod and Lomas' (2017) first survey detected high levels of uncertainty among participants directly after the Brexit vote, but their follow-up survey failed to reassess the levels of uncertainty two years following the vote (McLeod & Lomas, 2018). This study, however, has shown that participants were still highly uncertain about what Brexit would entail for them two years after the vote. Whilst the participants in both earlier studies (McLeod & Lomas, 2017, 2018) identified opportunities as well as threats for their profession, participants in this study were

almost exclusively concerned with threats; these focused less on what Brexit meant for the sector, and more on the effect on them personally.

Portes (2016) rightly assumed, as this study has shown, that the uncertainty created by the Brexit vote could alone impact migration flows. The author also listed perceptions of an unwelcoming climate, individual racist motivated incidents, and a lack of certainty as factors that could lead individuals to leave the UK. This study confirms all these factors as crucial in the migration considerations shown by participants. Therefore, the study comprehensively added to Portes' (2016) list and identified a whole range of emotions and reasons, actual or potential, leading participants to leave.

Researchers have discussed potential workforce losses through migration in different sectors, low-skilled and high-skilled, in the face of the Brexit vote (e.g. Mohamed et al., 2017; Rolfe, 2017). Much work has focused on HE and science (Galsworthy & McKee, 2017; Kirkland, 2017; Mayhew, 2017). However, less discussion has emerged about high-skilled non-academic staff from the EU; this study has addressed this gap**.**

Workforce diversity in UK academic librarianship

The importance of mirroring user diversity in the workforce (Gulati, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Kreitz, 2008), was echoed by senior staff participants, who recognised diversity as an important organisational goal and asset to a library. Academic librarians from the EU have been recognised for their potential to enrich UK academic librarianship and its services through their language and cultural skills (Dewey & Keally, 2008; Kim et al., 2007).

In line with this expressed commitment to diversity, many interview participants perceived the job application process as very transparent in terms of equal opportunities for UK and EU applicants. However, not all participants were sure how this data was being used and if it influenced selection processes. Kreitz (2008) emphasised that "senior managers and HR directors

must define the motive(s) behind their interest in diversity" (p. 102). This equally applies to LIS students, who need to be assured that they are not only valued economically for the duration of their stay, but as a potential workforce.

Retention of a diverse workforce has been regarded as more important than the recruitment of diverse staff, reducing open discrimination in the workplace (Howland, 1999). This view is supported by the findings of this study. Only a minority of participants experienced open discrimination in the place of work or study. However, covert discrimination and microaggressions (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b; Balderrama, 2000) were apparent in several examples given by participants. Whilst several questionnaire participants perceived a preference for UK applicants among recruiters, as a form of covert discrimination, most interview participants did not feel that nationality impacted their job search. Overt discrimination and microaggressions were seen to emerge occasionally from co-workers through jokes and comments. While thankfully less extreme, there are echoes here of the experience of BAME library staff (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019).

Whilst EU nationals in the UK currently do not yet seem to face substantial barriers to entering the profession, nationality has seemed to influence job progression by individuals (Acree et al., 2001; Howland, 1999). Several participants indicated that better opportunities for professional development abroad, being passed over for promotion, or being made redundant would be potential factors for leaving, confirming the stance of Acree et al. (2001) that professional development could be used as a retention tool. The authors specifically warned that "feeling marginalised and unable to move ahead" could cause minorities to leave (Acree et al., 2001, p. 46).

Musser (2001) argued that more research was needed on factors making employees want to stay in an organisation. This study has found factors, inside and outside of academic librarianship, that could influence the desire to stay, and could prove useful for the recommendation of retention tools. Among the variety of traditional retention tools discussed in the literature, professional

development and work climate emerged as most appropriate for the research population. Howland (1999) emphasised the importance of a supportive work climate for retention. The author stressed that institutions, management and every member of the profession should contribute to building and maintaining this climate. This need was echoed in participants' desire for further support. Whilst this desire focused especially on university support, overall work climate was highly important to participants, and therefore support for EU nationals can be improved by all parties involved.

Support to non UK EU nationals during the Brexti process

Another contribution of this study was to collect evidence of the responses of academic libraries and their parent organisations to Brexit, in terms of the kinds of support provided to EU nationals. Whilst almost a quarter of participants in the study by McLeod and Lomas (2017) were not aware of their organisation's response on Brexit directly after the referendum, participants in this survey were well aware of the services offered by their universities. Two years after the referendum, most participants had at least received emails or messages acknowledging their value for their institutions. Even before the vote several participants positively acknowledged their universities lobbying against Brexit. Furthermore, after the referendum the sector was praised by participants for offering an EU friendly environment.

Some, however, perceived only low levels of support; students especially felt a total lack of support regarding Brexit from their universities. On that basis examples of best practice and suggestions for additional support from university and supervisor level have been collected. Nevertheless, several interview participants acknowledged that their universities could not have supported them any better considering that they were similarly unsure what might lie ahead for the sector. McLeod and Lomas (2018) urged the UK government to produce a clear roadmap to prepare and plan strategies for the time post-Brexit.

Conclusions

This study has addressed the lack of research on the impacts of Brexit on workforce diversity from an academic library point of view. It discovered that 39% of the research sample had considered leaving the UK due to Brexit, of which 14% had concrete plans to leave the UK. The sector could therefore indeed be in danger of experiencing a decline in workforce diversity through migration if, post-Brexit, thoughts of leaving turn into plans, also taking into account the 21% who were still undecided whether to leave or stay. However, the actual scale of librarians and LIS students leaving, and the impact this might have on workforce diversity in UK academic libraries, remains unknown. It became apparent that the sentiment among the study population was even more negative two years after the referendum that directly following it. Participants had a high degree of uncertainty towards their future in the UK. Although most reasons for leaving the UK were found to not be embedded in the academic librarianship environment, the sector should facilitate recruitment and retention tools to respond to the challenge of a potential loss of EU staff and ultimately diversity, particularly by creating and maintaining a welcoming environment and supporting professional development. Whilst many universities already provided various kinds of support, participants made numerous suggestions about how to improve this. Ultimately, every member of the profession, on every career level, can contribute to making current and future academic librarians in the UK feel not only welcome, but valued and safe.

Recommendations for universities

Many participants felt that support for EU nationals among staff and students had become less important to universities. Best practices for high level support have been summarised and can serve as inspiration to set up new support formats. Considering that a majority of questionnaire participants valued their university's support as very important, there needs to be increased awareness that Brexit is still as relevant and concerning for them as it was at the time of the vote. Universities should be proactive in demonstrating their continuous support and not ceasing support after the withdrawal. The establishment of a support office, with clear responsibility for

EU citizens among staff and students, could be one way of providing help post-Brexit. Participants desired more help and advice in financial matters; for instance, regarding pensions, or in paying for and managing the application process for settled status. More effort should be made to support students especially; for example, by including them in email communication regarding Brexit. Efforts also should be made to convey that they are welcomed as future workers in the UK. This could be facilitated for instance through job fairs directed at EU students.

Recommendations for Academic Libraries

Academic library leaders and managers must aim to protect the perception of the academic library as a safe environment by upholding a welcoming climate and openly appreciating staff diversity. Library leaders should develop strategies to detect and address covert discrimination in the working place. Additionally, recruiters should understand how to avoid perceptions of discrimination in recruiting and keep the job application process transparent. When publishing job advertisements, they should ensure that requirements are not limited to UK qualifications. Advertisements could include a list of accepted qualifications from EU countries, potentially in cooperation with CILIP. Ultimately, library managers and supervisors should use professional development as a retention tool across their workforces. It is also recommended to take a personal approach towards supporting staff with EU nationality, by not avoiding the topic and offering to talk and acknowledge the anxieties of EU staff. UK academic librarians with non-UK EU nationals in their immediate teams are also advised to start or maintain dialogues with their colleagues, show an interest in their situation, and acknowledge the implications of Brexit for them. Every member of staff needs to be aware that some comments, even if intended as a joke, might have wider implications for the recipient.

Recommendations for LIS departments and schools

LIS schools and departments could play a major part in helping EU students into academic librarianship work in the UK and preparing them for the UK job market. The job application process should be part of any curriculum, including advice on the equivalency of EU and UK qualifications and legal steps necessary to work in the UK. Additionally, LIS departments and

schools are also in a good position to enable dialogue. One student expressed the wish for round tables and meetings between EU and UK students. Professors and teaching staff are also encouraged to engage in dialogues with their EU students.

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