

Report

Internationalisation in a post-Brexit Europe

ELIA Regional Seminar

21 September 2018

14:00–18:00

Royal College of Art, Battersea Campus
London



ELIA – European League of Institutes of the Arts

Introduction

“This is a critical moment in a post-Brexit world”

ELIA organised the Regional Seminar *Internationalisation in a post-Brexit Europe* at the Royal College of Art in London, UK, to discuss the future of internationalisation in post-Brexit Europe. The target group of this regional event was primarily the ELIA UK membership, however, the event also attracted members from mainland Europe, notably France. In total, there were 48 delegates, of which 38 from the UK and 10 from other European countries.

The seminar aimed to provide knowledge to ELIA members about the current status of Brexit negotiations, student mobility and fees, and how to collaborate between higher arts education institutions in Europe. The day featured three expert speakers on Brexit and Higher Education: L. Alan Winters, Director of the UK Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex; Rebecca Walton, British Council EU Regional Director; and Thomas Jørgensen, Senior Policy Coordinator at the European Universities Association in Brussels. The panel discussion was moderated by Linda Drew, Vice Chancellor of Ravensbourne University London. The seminar continued with three round table discussions and concluded in a plenary session with all delegates.

ELIA President Thomas D. Meier, from the Zurich University of the Arts, opened the seminar by acknowledging ELIA’s commitment to the success of Higher Education collaboration across Europe. Meier turned attention to the currently rising concern and insecurity regarding Brexit and its potential impact on British universities in terms of access to funding through the EU framework program for research and innovation including the European Research Council, and to other EU funded programs like Erasmus+ or Creative Europe. A change in the UK student fee structure would have a major impact on Higher Education. Meier pointed out the four European freedoms, i.e. the free movement of capital, goods, services and people. His own country, Switzerland, has managed to buy into these freedoms without being part of the union. The freedom of the movement of people seems most contested and that is already apparent in these pre-Brexit days. The mobility of academic staff to positions on the continent has dramatically increased, European arts universities are now seeing at least one third of candidates originating from the UK. Meier ended by stressing that the UK is an important region within ELIA, which has always been strong and influential within the organization. In that context it is important to note that ELIA is not defined by the EU membership – the case of Switzerland and Norway certainly shows that there is life ‘outside of the EU’ and as far as ELIA is concerned, the strong involvement and partnership with the UK members will continue.

An important aspect Paul Thomson, Vice Chancellor of Royal College of Art identified in his welcome word was collaboration, as ‘this is will be critical in a post-Brexit world’.

The global level of uncertainty on the political scene (China, US and Brexit) requires supportive collaboration in the Higher Education sector as well as sharing experiences. As the RCA is going through a transformation itself, introducing new programs, research centres, bringing together science, art and design, and creating new buildings for shared interdisciplinary workspaces, collaboration is key.

Maria Hansen, ELIA Executive Director, explained why ELIA had chosen this topic for the Regional Seminar. With the speakers, experts on Brexit each in their own right, and participants sharing ideas and experiences, the discussions and critical approaches will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the impact of Brexit on Higher Education. Another goal of the afternoon was to provide members with an opportunity to connect to each other as well as to ELIA.

The Story so Far

The story so far – L. Alan Winters

It has been 819 days since the referendum of Brexit and there is no deal. L. Alan Winters, Director of the UK Trade Policy Observatory, discussed ‘the story so far’, explaining technical details and possible future scenario’s.

With no deal in sight, ideas about free trade and integration are becoming conflated. Some are wondering whether maybe Brexit will not happen and this has clearly become one possible outcome now. However, in order to support economic activity, there must be clarity about the conditions under which UK firms will be able to export and import. Economically speaking, all the current political options are unattractive.

The proposed ‘Chequers’ agreement¹ aims to create an open border for goods with the EU, while the UK has its own independent trade border with the rest of the world. This would introduce a very worrying degree of bureaucracy on the UK border. In addition, the ‘weak statement’ about non-border regulations on labour standards and environmental issues (e.g. waste and pollution), and the plan restrict the mobility of labour imply significant changes relative to pre-Brexit.

Chequers is the only ‘plan’ the British government is proposing right now. The Salzburg talks just preceding this Seminar made clear that the EU will not accept it, although there seems likely to be some movement in this position on details such as harmonising border procedures and also some compromise over the nature of the long-term relationship for UK-EU trade. We can expect a withdrawal agreement accompanied by a weak political statement about the future of the relationship going forward, perhaps by November.

Alan Winters showed that Brexit is already starting to hurt the economy. UK GDP is already 2% less than it would have been under ‘no referendum and no Brexit’, and even if the growth rate is restored, these 2% will be lost. However, GDP growth will probably not recover quickly so that losses relative to ‘no referendum’ could be larger than this.

Higher Education programs are also affected by Brexit, as access to the European Research Council and Horizon 2020 will become difficult or non-existent. Horizon 2020, currently with a budget of €3 billion, will no longer allow the UK to take more than it pays in (as it currently does) and the continuation of the Erasmus programme still needs to be negotiated.

One of the consequences of Brexit will be the loss of labour mobility. The attraction of obtaining an education in Britain will be lessened because permanent employment in the UK will no longer be an option, because UK qualifications may not be fully recognised and because creative workers in the UK will have limited access to the EU. Visas might be required in either direction. There is a question of whether EU students will have to pay international student fees and they will very probably lose access to the student loans system.



¹ ‘Chequers’ refers to a proposal by the British government for a ‘soft’ Brexit, devised in the summer of 2018. Chequers is the summer residence of the British Prime Minister and it was here that the proposal was devised.

Voice of the future – Rebecca Walton

Rebecca Walton, British Council EU Regional Director, stated a significant concern that ‘the credibility of Britain is dropping across Europe’. She thanked ELIA for their work in bringing together the UK members and connecting art universities from around the world.

The British Council’s main task is to build and retain relationships on which the UK can build trust around the world. She explained that the British Council is a non-political organisation which had never in the past taken a political position until the referendum on the Brexit. It felt contradictory to the British Council to remain neutral, therefore the Council took an openly ‘remain’ position. Following the referendum, Rebecca Walton remarked on her main focus: ‘How could we best serve education and culture sectors to inform the UK about what was happening?’

The British Council needed to understand the European perspective on Brexit. Immediately after the referendum, they initiated meetings with every Ministry of Education and every Ministry of Culture across the EU, heads of significant non-governmental institutions and young people across Europe. The discussions focused on the implications of Brexit and the best ways of maintaining the connection of the UK to the professional areas of arts, education and science within the whole of Europe. These partners, working together, published this [document](#). This lays out the actions recommended to diminish the risks posed by Brexit. One recommendation was that young people should become the ‘voice of the future’. As the months of negotiation have dragged on, the British Council recognizes that Brexit is not now a priority for other countries

across Europe, where they have their own concerns.

It was pointed out that the language in superlatives that is often adopted by British institutions about being the ‘best’ or ‘biggest’ in a political and economic space aggravates Europe and creates discordance in the relationship.

Finally, Rebecca Walton assured those present that the British Council will continue to represent the interests of Higher Arts Education institutions in the European and international space. A concrete example was the British Council joining those British institutions which argue to take student numbers out of immigration numbers and striving to create easier access to visas for artists. The public sector mantra in this day and age is to introduce competition to areas of social good and to encourage competition between associated institutions. In contrast to this, the British Council will continue to bring together and share experience, conversation and co-operation on an international level.

Looking ahead – a realist’s view – Thomas Jørgensen

Thomas Jørgensen, Senior Policy Coordinator at the European Universities Association in Brussels, argued that Brexit in Brussels has always been about the ‘process’.

Britain refers to Brexit in terms of issues such as trade, borders and migration, but for the EU, Brexit is not a political issue but rather an administration challenge. The EU top decided early in the process to solve this challenge using a highly structured step-by-step process deriving from the French tradition and delegating the work to administrators. This means that issues that must be dealt with in order to

have an orderly exit are dealt with first in a legally binding agreement, while four key issues will be addressed after the UK has become a third country: trade, foreign policy, internal security, and finally thematic co-operation, which would include co-operation in culture and education. To the EU, regulatory coherence and integrity of the single market will always be the top priority that will govern all decision making in this negotiation as they are non-negotiable.

The European Universities Association is actively engaged, on behalf of their members, in trying to influence the legislative framework governing collaborative EU programs that benefit universities. Thomas Jørgensen pointed out that if access to funding programs such as Erasmus is to continue, this will need a legal basis. The details of these frameworks still need to be negotiated which presents an opportunity for ELIA and other networks to act on behalf of their members. It is good to note, though, that in any such new deal, Britain will be considered ‘just another’ third country and that there will not be a separate ‘Britain’ law.

Where does Europe fit into the Brexit process and what can associations do? European politics are increasingly fragmented, and Brexit is part of that, but this is not the whole picture. Identity overrides economics and the ‘Europeanness’ of individuals is important to associations. Do Europeans still have a common purpose? What are European Values? Have we lost them? The European Universities Association recognises a fragmented landscape where Europeans are going into different directions. While examining if there is still a shared Europeanness, networking with European colleagues through an



organisation like the EUA or ELIA is key to sharing cultural values.

Looking ahead, however, the immediate future of negotiations will not involve academic co-operation, but instead will predominantly concern the borders and migration.

A call to participation, networking, communicating and togetherness – Panel Discussion

Moderator Linda Drew, the Vice Chancellor of Ravensbourne University London, discussed the following questions with the speakers in a panel discussion.

One of the key questions: what is the best of the worst case scenario's for universities if Brexit is going ahead? This was discussed by the panel members. There is fear for a division

between the UK and EU. Labour mobility, retaining standards in Britain and retaining recognition equal to continental Europe will be difficult. This suggests that institutions should start preparing for what to do with fee structures, when students pay and what kind of residence permit students need. Preparedness is crucial in order to know what to do in any best or worst case scenario of Brexit. What can I do at my Institution? How can we mobilise our knowledge? Again, preparedness is key and awareness of the time frame is significant. Investigating what institutions need and how to collaborate is an opportunity for sharing knowledge between institutions.

Will British education be seen as less attractive and less esteemed? The UK benefitted by setting themselves up as the gold standard. Higher Education institutions recognise that the reality

of Brexit may be very different from the expectations attached to it. Issues around Brexit will likely indent the research quality of British standards of education. Also, value comes in different ways, such as getting a job or trading skills.

Europe is Fragmenting Politically

The afternoon part of the seminar contained three discussion groups, participants (ELIA members) and one speaker, focusing on a question posed by Thomas Jørgensen: In a situation where Europe is fragmenting politically, what can and should associations and civil society (including artists) do to promote European civic engagement? This topic was discussed specifically or more broadly in three table talks, which culminated in a plenary conclusion of all groups relating their discussion points to each other.

In Group 1, participants and speaker L. Alan Winters referred to the book *No culture, no Europe* by Pascal Gielen. The group discussed the failure of the 'European project' in creating European cultural identity. Europe focused first on economic alignment, not on the cultural elements. In addition to the main question, Thomas Jørgensen's question draws attention to the need for a better understanding of a politically fragmented Europe. Does European spirit of cooperation still exist? What does the 'European' in the question mean – individuals or governments? The group found that it is difficult to conflate associations and civil society, as associations promote civic dialogue and engagement with

individuals on an informed level. Is there such a thing as 'European values'? Outcomes of the discussion suggest that the interpretation of values across Europe is very different.

Participants discussed the fact that Switzerland had managed to develop ways of working with countries in the European Union and suggested that following Brexit universities should try to find out from Swiss universities how to collaborate and maintain positive relationships and exchanges between the UK and the countries within the European Union. Participants also discussed the notion of how associations can facilitate fruitful collaborations and exchange under the pressure of Brexit, which requires active effort. Perhaps ELIA can provide a platform.

The key concepts discussed in Group 2 with participants and speaker Thomas Jørgensen were: freedom, agency, criticality and looking outward. The focus of the conversation was on the role of the university in this question and whether it is the responsibility of the university to question cultural value and economic value. Universities protect their practices and their freedom (economically and intellectually), but what is their agency? The core values of universities are academic rigour and criticality. The role of Higher Education in art and design is to provide a platform for students and to encourage their criticality. The participants also noted the position and involvement of Higher Education in creative industries in recognising the value of young people.

Participants of group 3 focused on the importance and methods of collaboration. Higher Education institutions across Europe have to work together, not only in the arts and

humanities, but across science and technology as well, to make alliances and learn from each other across disciplines and faculties. The discussion raised new questions. How can organisations from the UK and EU work together when they are competing for European funding? There is a concern the competition will increase as numbers fall after Brexit. With a fragmented political landscape, but also a fragmented Higher Education landscape, how do we create a common umbrella? How do students have an impact on the social realm with their work? Discussion also focussed on a perceived fragmentation of arts institutions across the sector, and whether it is feasible for an umbrella organisation to pull that fragmentation together; what can ELIA do to support institutions by 'being the umbrella' but in a proactive way other than a facilitator. A suggested outcome by the participants could be ELIA's role (among others) to create a platform to create critical mass for the debate.

Criticality and Collaboration

The ELIA Regional Seminar provided an insightful day of knowledge, experiences, discussions and questions. The table discussions provoked participants to reflect and share their individual ideas on the topic of Brexit and Higher Education in the Arts into more depth.

What is next?

The ELIA Regional Seminar has highlighted the importance of collaboration between HE institutions in the UK and EU. Preparedness, exchange of ideas on an international and interdisciplinary level and awareness of current affairs are crucial in coping with Brexit outcome.

What could ELIA do in order to help Higher Education in arts and design in both the UK and EU? A suggestion was to organise a symposium to engage non-EU members to gain knowledge of how EU members have overcome the challenges they are now facing. ELIA already established relationships with European partners, perhaps ELIA could facilitate retaining those relationships through a forum.

Few months further, the Brexit situation is still not clearer. Ever more it feels like remaining connected is crucial. This year ELIA will be actively present in the UK to follow up on collaborations.

Acknowledgements

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