

Brexit in the classroom: Glass half full or half empty?

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Abstract

Teaching European Studies has long been an exercise in teaching crises - from the 'No' votes to the Constitutional Treaty, to the Eurozone crisis, to the ongoing refugee crisis - and in discussing how the EU is, or is not, dealing with them. Is Brexit yet another crisis to incorporate into our teaching, or will it redefine how European Studies is taught, at least in the UK?

This paper showcases results of an online survey of academics teaching university EU modules. It investigates how teaching practices are evolving after the UK 2016 referendum, in terms of module content (reading lists, assessment format, teaching innovations), collaboration across disciplines, student participation in the classroom, module enrolment numbers and institutional support.

As UACES celebrates its 50th anniversary, this paper contributes to reflections on the future of European Studies in the UK - is Brexit a boon or a bane? - and to a broader literature in teaching political science and International Relations with suddenly newsworthy topics.

Introduction

*“it’s a hard topic to teach because nothing has really happened,
and we have no idea what the outcome is going to be”*

Interviewee England 18.05

The UK vote on 23 June 2016 to leave the European Union has triggered the unravelling of over forty years of UK membership of the EU. This impacts every sector of society – from banking and manufacturing to agri-food. It also affects UK universities, faced with falling EU student numbers¹ and the risk of losing access to EU research funding.²

For some disciplines, Brexit is not only a challenge to student numbers and funding but to the core of the curriculum. The UK’s long-standing scepticism of European integration has not prevented – even arguably fostered (Drake 2017) – a long tradition in European Studies³ in the UK leading to the development of dedicated undergraduates and postgraduates programmes and accompanying resources from the late 1980s onwards (Kennedy 2015). But can European Studies in the UK survive, even flourish, as the UK leaves the EU? And beyond the UK – is Brexit changing how we teach European Studies?

Brexit studies is a booming area of research (“one of the most researched and data rich topics available” (Oliver & Boyle 2017)). There is a growing literature aiming at developing the theoretical tools – be they differentiated integration or disintegration – to make sense of on-going changes in the EU more generally (see e.g. Jones 2018; Rosamond 2016; Webber 2014). Yet, if this is a “time of reckoning (...)for us as EU scholars reflecting upon the premises and prospects of our field of study” (Rittberger & Blauberger 2018, p.437) we need to look beyond our research agenda to consider the evolution of teaching as well. In this paper we argue that a discipline such as European studies is shaped by how we teach it as much as by how we research it.

On-going discussions among teachers show very mixed messages between teachers seeing Brexit as a boon to make EU studies more relevant (e.g. Moules 2017; Busby & Zahn 2017; Daddow 2017) and those

¹ BBC News (12.07.2017) ‘UK university applications fall by 4%, Ucas figures show’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-40581643>

² The Royal Society (24.05.2017) ‘Report lists UK universities and disciplines most dependent on EU research and innovation funding’ <https://royalsociety.org/news/2017/05/report-lists-UK-universities-and-disciplines-most-dependent-on-EU-research-and-innovation-funding/>

³ an ‘interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on current developments in European integration’ UACES (n.d.) ‘What is European Studies?’ http://www.uaces.org/about/about_European_studies/

that see Brexit as a bane (Drake 2017) – especially if it means undermining the rationale for having compulsory EU modules (Trybus 2017).

This paper contributes to these discussions by investigating the impacts of Brexit in European studies classrooms in the UK and in the rest of the EU. Brexit is occurring at a time where European studies as a taught discipline is already struggling across Europe, as evidenced by a fall in programmes dedicated to European studies over the last fifteen years (Murphy 2014) and a growing disquiet with the manners in which European integration is taught in the wake of repeated EU crises (Parker 2016). Building on a survey of academics teaching European Studies supplemented by follow-up interviews, this paper analyses how teachers are coping and responding to Brexit in the classroom, how they are planning to (or already have) changed their practices and their perception of the future of the discipline in the UK.

Beyond Brexit, this paper contributes to broader discussions about what happens to an academic discipline when its object of study radically shifts (as for Economics in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Hodgson 2009)), becomes profoundly politicised (Muedini 2012) – or even, as with Soviet studies, suddenly disappears (Zwick & Marcos 1991). It does so by focusing on the role of teaching in redrawing the boundaries of a discipline and on the agency of teachers in responding to challenges to their discipline of choice.

The paper proceeds first, with a review of the existing literature on (1) extant challenges facing European studies pre-Brexit and the manners in which they were addressed in the classroom (2) how different disciplines, IR, Soviet Studies and Economics responded to profound shocks in the early 1990s and late 2000s respectively. Second, it presents the results of our survey (73 respondents, March-September 2017) on teachers' perceptions and responses to Brexit in their classroom stressing the difference between short term positive outcomes and long term feared consequences. [Third, it presents the results of follow-up interviews...still ongoing] before it concludes.

Literature review

Brexit is only one of many crises the EU is currently facing – what Falkner describes as a “conglomerate of crises” (2016). Yet it is already written about as not ‘yet another’ crisis but instead as a landmark in EU history “signalling not a step towards further integration, but a turn towards disintegration” (Houghton 2017, p.1) and “the most significant” of all “twists and turns and ups and downs in the history of European integration” (Stockemer et al. 2016, p.813).

The exact impacts of Brexit are still very uncertain – the process, which is likely to be very long, is still ongoing. But while changes to the EU and to the UK-EU relationships may take, Brexit questions more than the EU as a political and economic system. It also raises questions for the EU as an object of study and to the broader field of European Studies.

The disintegrative aspects of Brexit is particularly problematic as while EU scholars have long theorised integration, research in European disintegration has been much more limited (but see Vollaard 2014; Zielonka 2012). Mainstream European Studies have been described as engaging in a “implicitly progressive teleology” to teach European integration (Parker 2016, p.38) and of supporting the “normative complacency of conventionalist approaches that tend to convey the picture of business-as-usual politics in the EU” (Joerges & Kreuder-Sonnen 2017, p.122). Consequently, “scholars working on the EU have been accused of being very poorly prepared to grasp analytically the mechanics of disintegration that Brexit has unleashed” (Rosamond 2016, p.865).

These criticisms are eerily similar to scholarship on two earlier ‘post crises’ disciplines: Soviet Studies after the fall of the USSR in the early 1990s and Macroeconomics after the Great Recession of the late 2000s. In the 1990s, Soviet Studies had struggled to explain both Gorbachev’s reforms -- “none of the models of Soviet politics that we have employed in the past adequately explain the Gorbachev phenomenon” (Zwick & Marcos 1991, p.461) – or the USSR subsequent downfall (Ruble 1996). The Soviet Studies case is key of course in what it tells about disintegration of an entity and subsequently of the scholarly community which studied it – writing in 1996 Ruble argued that “the very existence of a discernible community of scholars focusing on the societies, cultures and political and economic systems of the various states and territories that were under the control of the Soviet regime is in question at the moment”(Ruble 1996, p.ix). Indeed, former Soviet Studies scholars went their own separate ways to become experts of different post-soviet States; and different disciplines within Soviet Studies moving in different directions.

Writing about the limits of Soviet Studies, Zwick and Marcos (1991) argued two distinct questions needed to be addressed: “why” was communism faltering, and “why now”. Their answer was to step away from idiosyncratic theories and methods and to embrace in both teaching and research a broader comparative politics perspective, stepping away from what made Soviet Studies distinct. Similarly, Joerges and Kreuder-Sonnen argue that while European studies response to the EU crises has shown that “a political crisis does not need to provoke a crisis in political science” or legal studies, European Studies as a discipline need to ask itself how “laudable” is this “convenient accommodation” (2017, p.126).

While Brexit is not (hopefully) a portend for wholesale European disintegration, this process questions the sustainability of European studies in the United Kingdom after Brexit, a country which had long been both a bastion for the study of the EU... and for Euroscepticism (Kennedy 2015). If the “common enterprise” or “discernible community of scholars” (Ruble 1996, p.ix) of European Studies in the UK is to falter, which way is it likely to go? Towards the EU being subsumed into International Relation courses... or towards a reinforcement of comparative politics and specialism in different European States, some of whom are members of the EU? Writing about what would happen to EU scholars if the EU were to fall, Hodson & Puetter (2018, p.472) argue that “EU scholars would need thick skins and new objects of study if the Union were to dissolve” – but that the problems facing the EU today would not disappear overnight, making Europe after the EU and the disintegration of the EU fertile fields of studies.

The Soviet Studies example shows us that scholarly communities can abruptly disappear, its members finding new disciplinary abodes. Conversely, considering Macroeconomics after the crash of 2007 stresses the resilience of a discipline and how it is taught. After the crash, Blinder, amongst others, criticised the state of macroeconomics arguing that “the current curriculum fails to give students even imperfect answers” and that “recent events should force everyone who teaches macroeconomics (...) to reconsider their curriculums” (Blinder 2010, p.385). Writing about the EU and its potential fall, Hudson & Puetter argued that it would “evidently generate demand for EU expertise, but it would equally trigger accusations that the supply of expertise is tainted” (Hodson & Puetter 2018, p.468). This ‘taint’ could clearly be seen when Economics Students’ Associations across the globe produced a common call for profound change in their discipline stressing that “the real world should be brought back into the classroom, as well as debate and a pluralism of theories and methods” (ISIPE 2014). Yet since the start of the crisis, have major changes taken place? Analysing a survey of teachers and undergraduate students, Gärtner et al. (2013) show that the models which were taught before the crisis are still taught after the crisis, and that the changes that did take place occurred in the “finer fabric” of undergraduate modules, with a renewed attention to e.g. more diverse case studies and economic history.

These finer changes in the content of modules encompass what new subjects/cases to teach, but also the much tougher choices of what old subjects to move away from (to give room to new topics in the face of a stable number of hours teaching) (Blinder 2015) and “how much additional complexity must be and can be introduced in a principles course in which the students are relatively unsophisticated” (Blinder 2010, p.385).

From this review of two different literatures we can expect Brexit to raise questions as to the (1) models or theories of European integration used in the classroom, (2) the issues and case studies covered – especially the ones newly covered/newly omitted and (3) the very existence of European Studies as a (coherent) field.

Interestingly, if we consider that as teachers we can shape both curriculum (content, what theories and models should be included (Pilling 2016)) and methods (how) of teaching (Cameron et al. 2013), both literatures appear to focus on the former to the detriment of the later. This is particularly surprising considering the attention to innovative teaching in scholarly teaching & learning publications (Craig 2014). Furthermore, discussions on changing the economics curriculum revolves around, in great part, the need for students to engage with real economic problems -- and innovative teaching methods (such as active learning, problem based learning, simulations) have repeatedly been used to familiarise students with ‘real world’ problems (Schneider 2009; Schnurr et al. 2014). Finally, the way we teach our students does not only influence what they learn but how they engage with our disciplines in future years – Innovative teaching and a variety of methods may save disciplines from being branded “dull, difficult, and uninteresting” (Fox & Ronkowski 1997, p.736). Analysing the effect of running European Union studies simulations, Clark et al. (2017, p.164) have thus shown that “simulation experience enhances participants’ interest in the subject matter of their experience”. Hence this paper covers not only questions of content of curriculum and status of the discipline but also the methods used.

Beyond curriculum content and methods, Brexit raises questions regarding student engagement in the classroom. Engagement covers two distinct concepts: engagement in the classroom (participation etc.) and broader civic engagement. There is, on the one hand, a growing effort on the other side of the Atlantic to raise civic engagement through teaching (Galston 2007; Kedrowski & Moyon 2017). On the other hand, EU studies (in particular in the UK), have to grapple with students pre-conceptions of the topic (Parker 2016) which may range from negative, adversarial view of the EU, or, due to the complexity of the EU, to the EU as boring, as the “one module [-...] viewed as too difficult, or not even seen as relevant.” (Clark & Jones 2017, p.224). Brexit may offer a way to reconnect these two faces of engagement: what happens in the classroom when your subject of study becomes suddenly more relevant and divisive? Can politicisation outside the classroom provide a “motivational hook” (Freitas 2006, p.350) inside? Based on our literature review, this paper therefore investigates four research questions:

1. Is Brexit changing the curriculum, and if so how and when where changes put in place?
2. Is Brexit changing methods, and if so how and when where changes put in place?

3. Are students engaging differently in light of Brexit?
4. How is Brexit impacting European studies as a discipline in the UK?

Methods

This paper uses a mixed method approach, combining an anonymous survey with interviews, conducted with survey respondents who indicated their willingness for a follow-up in the questionnaires (interviews on-going 7/24 by 22 May). Using anonymous online questionnaires, we collected responses from university educators who are involved in teaching the EU. The survey was conducted between May and September 2017. We emailed the link to our networks, for example through mailing lists specialised in EU Studies and to personal contacts who we asked to distribute to interested contacts. Overall, 73 instructors from the UK and beyond filled in the questionnaire so far. While this number is too small to make sweeping generalisations about the state of EU studies after Brexit, the survey results provide a useful guide for interviews and gives an indication of interesting developments in the field.

As most online questionnaires, this survey relied on voluntary participation. We therefore have to assume a selection bias with instructors, who are particularly interested in the topic and possibly more keen on adapting their teaching to the current situation, more likely to complete it (Gärtner et al. 2013). While this selection bias will be a problem for the qualitative interviews as well, a mixed-methods approach counters other limitations of quantitative surveys (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004⁴). For example, in case we missed important aspects in the survey, these may emerge from the interviews. On the other hand, we were able to collect a wide range of opinions through our survey, while in the more time-consuming interviews we will have to focus on a smaller number of individuals.

The survey investigated four areas: firstly, some characteristics of the respondents were collected (discipline, role, number of modules involved, UK based or not, etc.). Secondly, we asked about changes to teaching practices after Brexit. Thirdly, we investigated student participation after Brexit. Finally, we were interested in instructors' expectations with regard to the future of EU Studies.

Sample

As mentioned above, we recruited 73 respondents for our survey. Of these, 34 (46.6%) were based in the UK, 39 (53.4%) were based outside the UK. The UK-based respondents were distributed relatively evenly

⁴ Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come Author(s): R. Burke Johnson and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie Source: Educational Researcher, Vol. 33, No. 7 (Oct., 2004), pp. 14-26

across the UK. Most respondents were based at universities in Scotland (9), followed by London, the South East outside of London and Yorkshire and the Humber (6 each). Only one respondent each participated from the North East of England or Wales.

Of the 73 participants, 34 were convenors of one or more modules in European/EU studies, 40 reported to give lectures in one or more module on European/EU studies, and 10 participants reported to be teaching assistants. See Table 1 for an overview of respondents with regard to their teaching involvement and discipline.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents across discipline and teaching role

		What is your involvement in teaching European/EU Studies in your university? (multiple response set)			
		I am a convenor of one or more modules on European/EU Studies	I give lectures in one or more modules on European/EU Studies	I am a teaching assistant in one or more modules on European/EU studies	Other
What discipline are you teaching in? (multiple response set)	Law	9	12	8	0
	Politics	19	25	6	1
	History	3	4	1	0
	Economics	2	7	1	1
	Other	0	0	1	0

Results

Changing practices? Short-term changes in teaching the EU

Our first research question is concerned with changes to curriculum and teaching methods as adaptation to Brexit. We assumed that such a pivotal event would reflect in teaching practices. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: The majority of instructors will change elements of their teaching in light of Brexit.

Results show that out of 73 respondents, only 16 (21.9%) reported not to have changed their teaching due to Brexit, while 57 respondents (78.1%) said they implemented changes to teaching. This confirms

our hypothesis that the majority of instructors changed elements of their teaching in light of Brexit. However, due to the relatively small number of participants and selection bias, we cannot be sure if this is generalizable to all instructors working on European/EU Studies.

Although all of the European Union will be affected by the British exit from the bloc, we assumed that UK-based instructors would react to it more frequently and more intensely. Therefore, we worked with three further hypotheses to investigate any potential differences.

H1a: UK-based instructors will be more likely to adapt their teaching.

H1b: UK-based instructors will change their teaching more substantially.

H1c: UK-based instructors will change their teaching more quickly.

A Chi Square test comparing UK and non-UK based respondents shows that there is no significant differences between the groups. However, UK-based educators appear to be slightly more likely to change adapt their teaching in light of Brexit (82.4% compared to 74.4%).

To test whether UK-based instructors put in place more dramatic changes to their teaching (scale from 1=no change to 5=complete module redesign), we ran an independent sample t-Test. The two groups only differ minimally, with UK based instructors implementing slightly more substantial changes (mean of 2.55) in comparison to their non-UK-based colleagues (mean of 2.47). However, these differences are not significant.

A further Chi Square test shows no significant differences between the groups with regard to implementation of changes. While non-UK based respondents picked up on the topic as early as 2014-2015 (7 respondents, in comparison to one UK-based instructor), the two groups are similar, with most of them having implemented changes in 2016/17, the academic year after the referendum vote. UK-based instructors are more likely to planning implementation of changes in the future. This suggests that UK-based teachers are slightly slower in reacting to current affairs in their teaching compared to non-UK based instructors. Therefore, H1a, H1b and H1c need to be rejected based on our sample. Furthermore, these changes were more likely to be implemented by convenors of modules or those instructors giving lectures rather than teaching assistants, who are not normally responsible for module changes.

In our questionnaire we also collected information about the type of changes implemented. Table 2 shows the distribution of types of changes across disciplines. While there are no significant differences between disciplines, there are particular types of changes which were more popular among the respondents.

Changes to topics and readings were the most frequently implemented change. Responses to open questions show that these changes often involve inclusion of Brexit, Euroscepticism, populism and disintegration into the topics and readings, and in some cases also in the assessments. Current news developments appear to have served as additional material to engage students. Brexit-focused case studies and fact-checking exercises were named as changes to teaching delivery. Some respondents also mentioned their increased efforts to convince students of the importance of EU Studies post-Brexit, which poses the question whether student engagement has changed during and after the referendum campaign.

Table 2 Distribution of types of changes across discipline

		Have you changed how you teach EU Studies, and if so what type of changes have you implemented? (multiple response set)						
		Changes to readings	Changes to topics covered	Changes to theoretical approaches taught	Changes to assessment questions	Changes to assessment structure	Changes to teaching delivery	Other
What discipline are you teaching in? (multiple response set)	Law	8	9	4	4	1	5	1
	Politics	22	28	7	10	2	11	2
	History	3	2	1	1	0	2	0
	Economics	3	3	1	2	0	1	2
	Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	36	43	13	17	3	19	5

Brexit in the classroom? Student engagement before and after Brexit

The referendum campaign and subsequent vote to leave the EU did not only impact on the instructors, who in majority changed at least small elements of their EU-related courses. We hypothesised that Brexit would have an impact on student engagement, too, possibly even a positive impact in the short term due to the salience of Brexit in the public debate. We also assumed that students at UK universities are more engaged than their colleagues outside the UK.

H2: Brexit has a positive impact on student engagement.

H2a: Brexit will be more likely to have a positive impact on student engagement at UK universities.

Table 3 shows the distribution of perceived changes in student engagement depending on geography. Although differences between the groups are not significant due to the small number of respondents, a pattern emerges which contradicts H2a and H2b. Most UK-based respondents did not notice a change in engagement, whereas non-UK respondents felt in the majority that their students were more engaged. There were no striking differences between the disciplines. Most of this change appears to have happened after the referendum result was announced. However, answers to these questions were given by instructors rather than students. Therefore, differences here may not only be characteristic for the students but also for the instructors and dependent on their perception of student engagement.

Table 3 Changes to student engagement in UK and outside of UK (column percentage)

		Where are you based?		Total
		UK	Non-UK	
Do you feel overall student engagement has changed?	No change	14 (41.2%)	11 (29.7%)	25 (35.2%)
	Yes, reduced engagement	1 (2.9%)	4 (10.8%)	5 (7.0%)
	Yes, increased engagement	13 (38.2%)	20 (54.1%)	28 (46.5%)
	Other	6 (17.6%)	2 (5.4%)	5 (11.2%)

Respondent gave different examples of how this changed engagement manifested in the classroom. Students appeared more politically aware, critical and more interested in the subject matter beyond the media headlines. Respondents linked this to the higher relevance. However, participants also reported more heated debates and emotional reactions to the subjects covered. These developments and the rather mixed picture regarding student engagement poses the question how respondents judged the future of the discipline more broadly, an issue which will be addressed in the next section.

[The future of EU studies? Impact of Brexit on the discipline](#)

In the short-term our respondents reported a variety of creative changes to their teaching and an invigorated debate in the classroom with overall more engaged students. However, we wondered whether participants felt this was only a temporary phenomenon, a kind of Indian summer for European Studies, especially in the UK. Considering the falling number of dedicated EU Studies programmes and modules, we hypothesised that despite increased student engagement in the short term, educators in the field expect a negative impact of Brexit on EU Studies, particularly in the UK.

H3a: The majority of respondents believe Brexit will have an impact on the discipline.

H3b: UK-based respondents are more pessimistic about the future of EU Studies after Brexit.

As

Table 4 shows, the majority of respondents did expect Brexit to have an impact on EU Studies in the UK: 53 participants expected some effect, with the majority anticipating a negative impact. While these findings are not statistically significant, non-UK respondents are more likely to regard Brexit as irrelevant for the discipline overall. The groups did not differ significantly regarding their optimism for European Studies. It is interesting that while, overall, the respondents appear rather pessimistic about the future of European Studies, there are still 19 (30%) who believe that Brexit will reinvigorate European Studies.

Table 4 Perception of EU Studies' future in UK according to geography

		Where are you based?		Total
		UK	Non-UK	
European Studies modules and programmes have been reduced over the years in the UK. Do you think Brexit...	Is going to hasten the demise of European Studies	17	18	35
	Is going to reinvigorate European Studies in the UK	9	10	19
	Is irrelevant to the future of European Studies in the UK	3	7	10

From the data, we can also observe some differences regarding disciplines. While respondents teaching in Politics are more likely to see Brexit as a chance to reinvigorate EU Studies, respondents from Law are more pessimistic (see

Table 5). Only one in 16 respondents thought Brexit may help to reinvigorate EU Studies, while 11 of them thought it will hasten the demise of EU Studies in the UK. This may be due to the fact that EU law is mostly a compulsory element of Law degrees. Answers to open questions suggest that respondents from Law expect these modules to become optional again. Another concern voiced by participants are issues like scholars leaving the UK, diminishing the standing of EU Studies. Despite the widespread pessimism among respondents, they do acknowledge the continued importance of EU Studies and believe that the discipline needs to make a case in its favour, especially in the aftermath of Brexit.

Table 5 Perception of EU Studies' future in UK across disciplines

		What discipline are you teaching in? (multiple response set)				
		Law	Politics	History	Economics	Other
European Studies modules and programmes have been reduced over the years in the UK. Do you think Brexit...	Is going to hasten the demise of European Studies	11	22	4	2	0
	Is going to reinvigorate European Studies in the UK	1	12	2	4	1
	Is irrelevant to the future of European Studies in the UK	4	4	1	1	0

Discussion

Results from the survey have uncovered interesting patterns with regard to teaching the EU after Brexit. It becomes clear that this event does not only affect UK universities but instead appears to influence teaching at non-UK universities as well. The results suggest that non-UK universities have even reacted more quickly and with more substantial changes to their teaching. Students based at these universities have become more engaged, too, compared with students at UK universities, whose engagement was more likely to remain the same. While we assumed Brexit would mainly affect UK-based teaching, our data suggests quite the opposite. After all, Brexit itself will not only impact on the UK but on the EU more widely, but in different ways. Far from leading to a sudden decline of support for the EU across the EU27, new Eurobarometer data suggests that 68% of Europeans now feel they are citizens of the EU – the highest percentage since Eurobarometer recordings began (European Commission 2017). The increased engagement at non-UK EU universities fits into this pattern, proving that Brexit is a European issue, not exclusively a British issue. While UK respondents highlighted the emotional nature of the debates surrounding the topic, this was not evident for non-UK respondents, for whom this seems to constitute a fascinating, but less emotionally charged topic to liven up the classroom.

Another interesting pattern we found in the data is the tension between short-term and long-term impacts. While respondents reported generally an increased engagement from students as well as creative incorporation of Brexit into their teaching in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote, their perception of the future of EU Studies in the UK appears bleak. The vast majority expects that Brexit will hasten the demise of EU Studies in the UK, despite the short-term peak in interest from students. This was echoed in our interviews, with one interviewee (England.15.05) arguing that in the UK “the next few years will be brilliant, it will be amazing but then it [European Studies] will go out in a big bang”.

Respondents thus appear to expect an Indian Summer of EU Studies before students lose interest in the subject. UK lawyers lead a parallel and corresponding discussion. While EU law in the next years is regarded as crucially important, especially while the UK disentangles itself from the EU, it may arguably lose in significance for UK lawyers in the long term, once the process of exiting has been completed. This also explains why respondents teaching EU Law are particularly pessimistic about the future of EU Studies in their field: Once Brexit is complete, EU law modules may become optional, not compulsory. Whether students would take up these optional modules is questionable, considering that Law respondents reported the lowest engagement among their students and highlighted the necessity to explain why EU Law still is crucial to the UK.

The pessimism about EU Studies’ long-term outlook poses many questions. First, whether it is sufficient to tinker with the content -- to include Brexit as a topic in lectures, reading lists and assessment to keep students engaged, particularly in the UK, or whether it is worth considering trying teaching innovations regarding teaching methods. While some participants reported they tried new teaching formats, the majority seems to incorporate Brexit and Euroscepticism into the existing teaching framework. One of the strengths of EU studies has been the field’s long-standing involvement with teaching innovations and active learning (Lightfoot & Maurer 2013). If EU Studies’ future is really that bleak in the UK, it is maybe worth considering how a more creative approach to teaching may sustain our field over time (Clark et al. 2017).

Second, we need to step back from Brexit and address what Joerges and Kreuder-Sonnen have argued is the “complacency” of both mainstream EU Law and EU Politics research, and how research has helped normalise recent developments in European affairs (concerning the management of the Eurozone crisis notably) (Joerges & Kreuder-Sonnen 2017). The turn to critical approaches to European studies definitely needs to encompass how we teach (Parker 2016) – whether our students then become the next generation

of EU scholars or not. Critically this does not only matter in the UK but in the rest of the EU as well, where concerns about what the EU does are still rife.

But we also, thirdly, need to make a distinction between the future of teaching and of research. While our survey was focused on teaching, the implications of Brexit on researching the European Union need to be considered in order to understand its full impact on the discipline. This is more of a concern to UK-based scholars, since they are worried about exclusion from EU funding schemes. While students may still be interested in the EU and the UK's relationship with the EU, research of the EU, especially if it is not concerned with the UK's exit and future relationship, may not attract the necessary funding anymore. This poses the question whether in a few years the EU could still be taught at UK universities if research were to move primarily to the EU 27. But for now EU studies in the UK appear to be in a period of ebullition – with interviewees (England 15.05 and 15.05b) describing a situation of colleagues beyond European studies engaging with Brexit, much improved student and staff attendance at EU themed seminars (15.05b) and growing engagement with the local community (15.05).

Conclusions

In this paper we tried to map some of the challenges and opportunities Brexit poses to teaching European studies as well as some of the ways academics in the UK and across the EU are meeting them. We conducted an online survey with instructors from different disciplines which in the near future will be supplemented with semi-structured interviews to investigate in more detail the patterns found and strategies implemented.

In relation to our research questions we found that changes to the curriculum were frequent. Most commonly, Brexit was included into modules, with relevant literature but also by inclusion of media materials and current affairs into teaching. Changes in teaching methods were less frequent. Overall, student engagement was increasing as the events unfolded, giving evidence to the assumption that Brexit sparked their interest in the subject more widely. However, this pattern was less clear cut in the UK, where students still appeared less engaged than their continental peers.

While it seems that teaching of the EU received a boost after the referendum, with increased student engagement and many new materials to incorporate into teaching, respondents were pessimistic about the future of EU Studies in the UK more generally, with the majority reporting the perception that Brexit will hasten the demise of EU Studies. Scholars working in Law were the most pessimistic, which may be

due to the fact that currently EU Law is compulsory for their students. This may change once the UK has left the European Union.

Overall, this paper already gives answer to our research questions. However, it also poses new ones, for example concerning the relationship between teaching and researching the EU at UK universities or the opportunities opened by teaching innovation. Therefore, in a next step, we will complement this survey with semi-structured interviews to go into more detail regarding our initial research questions and these new research questions arising, to determine whether the glass is indeed half empty.

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