

Dincă, Violeta Mihaela; Ingram, Richard; Herriot, Christopher; Pelău, Corina

## Article

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## CHALLENGES REGARDING THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF UNIVERSITIES FROM SCOTLAND, WITHIN THE BREXIT LANDSCAPE

Violeta Mihaela Dincă<sup>1\*</sup>, Richard Ingram<sup>2</sup>, Christopher Herriot<sup>3</sup>  
and Corina Pelău<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1)4)</sup> *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*

<sup>2)</sup> *University of Dundee, Dundee, United Kingdom*

<sup>3)</sup> *De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom*

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### Abstract

The international labour market of 2018 can be characterized as very competition driven and for anyone who aspires at a professional evolution, international knowledge and skills have become required and indispensable for success. Universities emerged as the essential centre of the internationalisation strategies of governments in many countries of the world because they represent key providers of the afore-mentioned knowledge and skills. The process of internationalisation of higher education clearly has certain advantages for the students and academic staff of the undergraduate and graduate schools, but also for the national economy, and the international community. Yet in each country there is a different degree of importance given to each of these multiple benefits. The objectives of this research had two principal focuses: 1) to identify the benefits of the internationalisation process of higher education in Scotland and 2) to investigate which measures are most effective for accomplishing these benefits given the background of an uncertain climate influenced by Brexit. A questionnaire was used to obtain the views of representatives of all 19 Scottish universities of Scotland, as to the current situation in their country. The results reveal the range of approaches taken by these universities when advocating the process of establishing an international basis to higher education, but, also in their respective internationalisation strategies. Securing the respondents was possible within the Erasmus+ project developed in 2017, titled "University Study Visit: Youth and Community Work in Scotland". During this project academics and experts were consulted regarding their views on ways to improve the cooperation between Scottish universities and those of the European Union having as a background an economic, social and political context permeated with Brexit concerns. Their suggestions were included in the study as recommendations for strengthening the ties between the EU and Scottish universities.

**Keywords:** Higher education, internationalisation process, Scotland, strategy.

**JEL Classification:** I23; F53

\* Corresponding author, Violeta Mihaela Dinca – [violetamihaeladinca@yahoo.fr](mailto:violetamihaeladinca@yahoo.fr)

## Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education is to some extent a new phenomenon (Chan, 2016) but one that has unfolded into an ample spectrum of valences and approaches. In recent decades, globalization has become a dominant factor influencing higher education (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). It is now commonplace for Higher Education Institutions to explore different ways to seek to create foreign partnerships and to frame multicultural capabilities for their students, faculty and administrative sections. These activities are growing in complexity and can be seen across a range of spheres of the higher education internationalisation phenomenon (Dewey and Duff, 2009).

The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What are the major goals of internationalisation for universities of Scotland?
- What are the biggest fears for the internationalisation process in Scotland for the upcoming period?
- What strategy changes do you think could be the most effective for the future given the economic, social and political challenges surrounding Scotland and the UK?

Because they often serve as the facilitators of internationalisation, a deeper understanding of university/ faculty leaders' and members' views on the goals, strategies, and achievements of internationalisation is crucial for successful internationalisation (Dewey and Duff, 2009). Therefore, university representatives were identified as the research participants in this study.

## 1. Literature review

In 21st century societies, interest in pursuing higher education is being driven by expectations of its capacity to increase the economic and social condition of the graduate (Chan, 2016). Insufficient or restricted access to education in less developed countries has contributed to a notable growth in the number of international students pursuing their academic programmes abroad and this phenomenon was possible due to the world becoming more and more integrated, interconnected, conquering time, space and distance – a global world (Sallah, 2011).

Knight (2008) clearly articulates a helpful definition of internationalisation: "Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education". In order to fulfil the internationalisation commitments, universities make use of a diversity of approaches, such as: advising students to study overseas; enrolling non-native students; reinforcing collaborations with universities from abroad; creating international education communities; incorporating an international dimension into the content of the curriculum and encouraging and making efforts for the publication of scientific research articles in reputed international journals (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007).

When deciding the appropriate strategy for the higher education internationalisation for a certain country, it is essential to initially establish the state's rationale for encouraging this process. Internationalisation of higher education is considered both an "inevitable fact" and a "necessary value", and the objectives should be set up at the very beginning of the

internationalisation process so as to enable the assessment of the value and the selection of strategic alternatives (Ma, 2002).

A fact which stimulated this present research is that the internationalisation of higher education is not a unitary process developing identically in all countries. It unfolds with different focuses, at different intensities and in distinctive manners in all sorts of institutions, regions and countries. This study reviews the state of internationalisation efforts across Scotland's university campuses. According to the Scottish Funding Council the Scottish higher education sector is successful and internationally renowned. Universities play an important role in Scotland's development, both economically and socially. Overall, the Scottish higher education sector was in good financial health in 2017/18. However, the strong overall financial position masks underlying risks within the sector. Surpluses and reserves are concentrated in a small number of universities and some are heavily reliant on Scottish Government funding at a time when cuts are being made. Universities need to continue generating surpluses and reserves and making efficiency savings to fund capital costs and subsidise some of their activities. They are placing increasing reliance on generating income from fee-paying students from the rest of the UK and outside the European Union (EU) (SFC, 2017).

In 2017, there were 232,570 students studying at the 19 Scottish higher education institutions, 66 per cent of whom were Scottish. In Scotland, a university holds a title granted by the Privy Council that allows the body to award degrees. There are 17 universities in Scotland and two higher education institutions whose degrees are conferred by other universities. In this study, we use the terms "universities" and "HE sector" to refer to all 19 institutions (Audit Scotland, 2018). Four categories are used by scholars when referring to the Scottish universities:

- the "Ancient" universities – Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews;
- the "Chartered" (1960s) universities – Dundee, Heriot-Watt, Stirling, Strathclyde;
- the "Modern" universities – Abertay, Edinburgh Napier, Glasgow Caledonian, Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret, Robert Gordon, West of Scotland;
- the Small Specialist Institutions (the "SSIs") and Other – Glasgow School of Art, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland's Rural College, the Open University in Scotland.

The Scottish higher education sector is successful and internationally renowned and its characteristics can be observed in Figure no. 1. Overall student numbers have increased by five per cent over the last ten years and the student population is becoming increasingly international with international students making up almost a quarter of all students at Scottish universities. The most recent accessible data (for 2017) hints that international students account for 22% of students at Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) counterposed to 19% of students from all UK HEIs. As it can be observed in table no. 1, international students stand for 19% of all students in England, 16% in Wales, and 10% in Northern Ireland (HESA, 2017). Their input to the Scottish universities is not only of a financial and academic nature. According to a report elaborated by the Scottish Government in 2018, they convey considerable social, cultural and economic advantages, enrich the heterogeneity of the Scottish communities, enhancing experiences of gaining information and reinforcing local businesses and jobs. The graduates that decide and succeed in establishing themselves in Scotland provide worthy skills to the workforce and

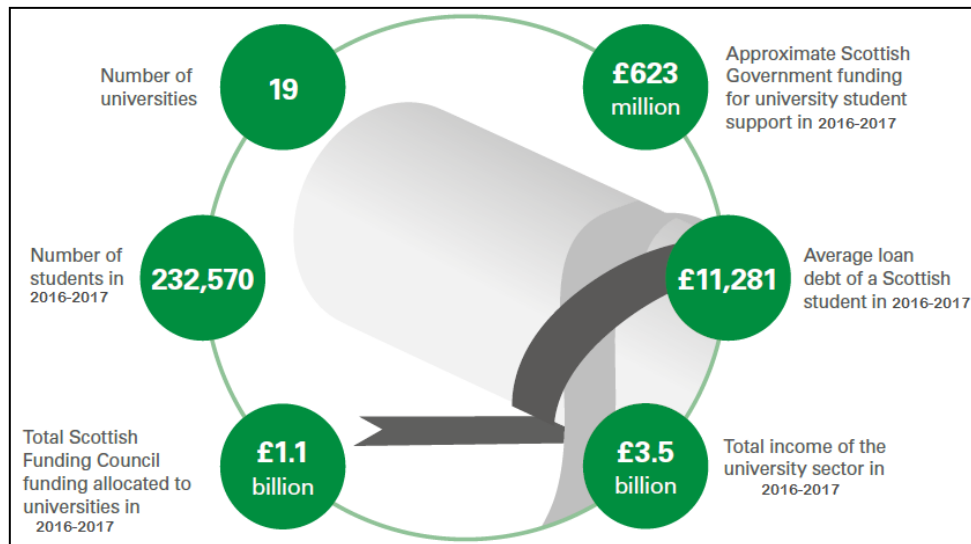
assist the sustainable development of the Scottish economy. The others who set up in other parts of the world become friends and ambassadors of Scotland (Scottish Government, 2018).

**Table no. 1. Student enrolments on HE courses in UK HEIs by domicile, 2016-17**

	UK Students		International Students	
	Number	% of total number of students	Number	% of total number of students
Scotland	189.630	78%	52.290	22%
England	1.528.030	81%	363.585	19%
Wales	108.190	84%	21.205	16%
Northern Ireland	49.275	90%	5.295	10%
UK	1.875.125	81%	442.375	19%

*Source: Scottish Government, 2018*

Besides that, international students are a hidden source of immigration for long term, which is a subject of interest for 2017 when Scotland finds itself in a moment of meaningful demographic challenges. It is estimated that there will be more deaths compared to births every year for the next 25 years and as a consequence the composition of Scotland's population is growing older at a quicker pace than that of the UK as a whole. The projected outcome will be that migration will account for all of Scotland's population growth between 2016 and 2041, therefore engaging competent and prepared individuals in order to live and work in Scotland is essential for the state's financial, commercial and social wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2018).



**Figure no. 1. Key facts on the higher education system in Scotland for 2016-2017**

*Source: Audit Scotland, 2018*

Between the time intervals of 2005-06 and 2016-17, respectively, the total amount of students enlisted in Scottish HEIs raised appreciably, up 9%. Over this duration, whilst the number of UK residing students has stayed nearly invariable, the number of international (both other EU and non-EU) students at Scottish HEIs has augmented by 80%. This growth of international students (particularly non-EU international students) is mirrored by the dynamic financial state of Scottish HEIs. Between 2005-06 and 2015-16 overall income in the university sector grew by 38% in real terms. The largest percentage increase in income in that time was in non-EU tuition fees, which increased from £140 million to £438 million in cash terms, a real-terms increase of 154%. By comparison, income from research grants and contracts increased from £381 million to £748 million in cash terms, and increase of 60% in real terms (Audit Scotland, 2018).

In the same time, in 2017 Scotland had more universities (five) ranked in the top 200 in the world per head of population than any other country except Luxembourg according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2017-2018 (SFC, 2017). Nevertheless, the system faces challenges after the recent EU referendum and the resulting vote to leave the European Union. The main strategy employed until now in Scotland was to improve the quality of higher education, in hopes of enhancing the international rankings of its universities and strengthen in this way its global position. However, at this moment, given uncertainties over the UK's future relationship with the European Union, the implications for Scottish Higher Education institutions remain unclear (Macpherson, 2016).

Regarding the internationalisation process of British higher education, Trahar and Hyland provided a study in 2011, which was based on a focus group study of staff and students in UK higher education institutions, and "internationalisation" was the topic for debate. A very important theme that emerged in this research was that, many British students targeted within this study considered that the internationalisation of their university does not concern them directly and that, as a word, they associated it with international students (Trahar, Hyland, 2011). The study emphasised in this case the importance of the concept IaH (Internationalisation at Home) – a concept that acknowledges that the majority of students (and staff) are not mobile and thus the opportunities for developing cultural capability will not be gained only by travelling to other countries for study or work, but also through academic learning that blends the concepts of self, strange and otherness (Teekens, 2006). The research therefore described the need for students and staff to be more aware of the potential richness of twenty-first century higher education given the diversity of the people within it and the need to work together to effect this process so that intercultural student interaction occurs and thus IaH could begin.

De Wit stated that the UK has been a forerunner of higher education internationalisation in all three main directions: international student recruitment, transnational education (HE taking place with learners being located in a different country), distance learning and international research collaboration, and the reasons for this prestigious accolade are various: the English language has become the bridge language of the academic communities, UK universities have cultivated a strong reputation, the Commonwealth ties are still strong and the financial necessities to recruit full fee paying students cannot be denied (De Wit, 2011).

A study carried out by Thompson in 2017 ascertained that even though, in theory, the presence of international students in UK (and implicitly in Scotland as well) provides opportunities for all students to unfold new horizons and improve their intercultural skills, in

practice, little interaction is occurring on campuses. The challenges of transnational education were formulated around the English language standards and the quality of teaching and assessment. The most significant problem encountered was around the profitability of transnational operations and the 2017 levels not being sustainable. The authors of this study triggered the signal that both the UK and devolved governments and higher education institutions need to devise further plans and strategies for what could happen if the demand for UK higher educational services goes into decline (Thompson, 2017).

The Scottish Government addressed the issue of the impact of international students in 2018 and stated that the implications of Brexit triggered many concerns, with the potentially damaging impact of reduced freedom of movement of people from EU Member States. This could significantly weaken Scotland's capacity to draw skilled students from across Europe, decreasing the economic advantages that they offer and intensifying the aforementioned demographic difficulties that the nation confronts. Various analyses developed at national level concluded that the economic benefit of international students to Scotland is higher per capita than it is for the UK as a whole and that the presence of international students at Scottish educational institutions generates a significant monetary gain for the tourism, hospitality and associated sectors. Therefore, it is important to consider the measures which could be taken and enforced in order to attract and keep international students within Scotland in the long run (Scottish Government, 2018).

## 2. Research methodology

The objectives of this research followed two directions: 1) to identify the benefits of the internationalisation of higher education in Scotland and 2) to investigate which measures are most effective for accomplishing these benefits given the background of an uncertain climate influenced by Brexit.

The two goals of this study were completed by carrying out a qualitative research, the most suitable approach for this topic as it is more fitting to investigate the issues of the contemporary world, characterized by evolution and transformation, and by a plethora of perspectives and interpretations (Jodelet, 2003). The application of the qualitative investigation method for this specific inquiry rests also on the fact that the prearranged research aims need further clarification and explanation regarding various changes of events or experiences (Cocorada, 2014).

From the particular procedures of qualitative research, the use of semi-structured interviews was identified for this research. We settled upon this investigation strategy because it provides depth and complexity to emerge from the data collected in comparison to a survey and understandings and differing perspectives can be examined more closely and within the context of participants (Robson, 2016). The approach allowed the researchers to engage with social knowledge, meaning, reality, and truth. The emphasis was less focused in quantifiable objective data but more concerned with social science research, the main task to be proceeded no longer consisting in quantifying objective data, but rather unraveling meaningful relations (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews afford greater flexibility, whatever their configuration, spanning from "listening in" and searching questions in a real-life scenario to the conventional recording sessions applied by the market researchers. The relationship between the interviewer and the

interviewee is interactive, granting a certain measure of correction and refinement. Likewise, the information obtained following the interviews are in most cases meaningful and in some cases even illuminating (Gillham, 2005). The key aspect of the interview as a research method is in its capacity to render a myriad of angles and aspects on an analyzed subject (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). Moreover, it diminishes the risk of non-answers.

Given the fact that we intended to understand how the background of higher education from Scotland had changed, we concluded that the interview method was more advantageous. We opted for interviews with representatives of all 19 Scottish universities, in order to capture their perceptions, experiences and knowledge of the current situation of their university, in particular and of the country, in general. We adopted semi-structured interviews for the reason that they favor wider flexibility when it comes to tackling supplementary issues beyond the core interview schedule, and in turn facilitates the illumination of the bespoke perspectives of interviewees. Even the most inflexible interview plan may be adapted during the process, the researcher not having the restrictions to tag along certain directions and develop questions imposed by other research approaches (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991).

Qualitative research adopts research questions and at times hypotheses to shape the framework and the perspectives of the study. The qualitative research questions revolve around the link between the investigated variables, while the hypotheses are foresights that the researcher makes regarding the relationship which is anticipated between the variables (Creswell, 2009). The hypotheses rely on a numerical assessment of the values of the researched variables and need to be analyzed depending on the data amassed using statistical methods. Considering the particularities of the picked research strategy, but also because our study consists of interviews with representatives of each Scottish university with relatively limited amount of entries (19), we decided on drawing up research questions and not hypotheses. They substitute the hypotheses (specific for quantitative analysis) when deploying the research, and by acknowledging them and the results, hypotheses can be conceived for forthcoming research directions. Assenting to the goals set, we developed the research questions regarding the major goals of internationalisation for Scottish universities, the greatest fears for the internationalisation process in Scotland for the upcoming period and the potential strategy changes that could be the most effective for the future given the background of economic, social and political challenges surrounding Scotland and the UK.

Taking into account our research questions and the aims of our qualitative research, we developed an interview schedule that focused on changes within the higher education sector in Scotland and its future challenges (Table no.2). For this study, four open questions were formulated for the interviews in order to give shape to the problem investigated: the development and the provocation within the higher education sector from Scotland. These interviews with experts from the Scottish higher education sector (from each university) are appropriate because they can provide a multidimensional, rich understanding and insight into the occurrences in the Scottish higher education field.

Thus, the guide was developed around a few important themes: the identification of the reasons why the internationalisation process is still an important direction for each of the 19 universities, the geographic priorities for internationalisation of all universities, the aspects of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) that could



negatively influence the internationalisation process of universities in Scotland and the measures to be taken in order to surpass the potential difficulties of the Brexit.

The participants in our study comprise a valuable group of nineteen experts from each Scottish university with different positions within the leadership and administration of the universities' international cooperation and regarding also the shaping and implementation of the international strategy within the respective institution.

**Table no. 2. Interview guide used in the research**

No.	Question
1.	If internationalisation is a pivotal direction in your university, please point out for what reasons. Mention the three most relevant motives.
2.	Does the internationalisation policy/strategy of your university incorporate geographic priorities? If yes, please indicate the top three.
3.	Mention three aspects of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (the Brexit) that could influence negatively the internationalisation process of universities in Scotland.
4.	Describe three measures to be taken at national and/ or institutional level in order to surpass the difficulties that could appear for the process of internationalisation of universities in Scotland during and after the Brexit.

Even though theoretically and generally speaking, the sample is small, there are arguments which justify this size. Specifically, for this study is the fact that it addresses 19 universities and the sample covers all of them. Also, all specialists who were consulted have an experience in overlooking and assisting the university's international activities and collaborations, ranging between twenty and thirty years and they are part of a network of persons capable of making decisions or influencing processes in the Scottish academic community, which are at their turn influential for many other people involved in these processes and for the society as a whole, which is ultimately but heavily impacted by the changes in the university field. Concluding regarding the sample's size, it includes only people with experience in the development, recruitment and marketing in the higher education sector, which makes it very strong for the purposes of this paper.

Addressing the respondents was possible within the Erasmus+ project developed in 2017 "University Study Visit: Youth and Community Work in Scotland", during which universities' visits allowed the consultation with these experts regarding their view on ways to improve the cooperation between Scottish universities and those of the European Union having as a background an economic, social and political context connected to concerns and uncertainties relating to Brexit. Their suggestions were included in the study as recommendations for strengthening the ties between EU and Scottish universities. The visits which took place within the program and therefore where the specialists were consulted directly were: University of the West of Scotland, University of Edinburgh and University of Dundee. Through the facilitators of the program, contacts were established with the other 16 universities and subsequently the respondents were consulted online via email. Representatives from each remaining 16 universities were kind to fill in the questionnaire and therefore participate within the study. All data was collected between May and July 2017.

### 3. Findings and discussions

The results reveal the similarities and the differences between the approaches taken by the 19 Scottish universities when advocating the process of establishing an international basis to higher education, but also in their respective internationalisation strategies. It is important to mention that the process of internationalisation of higher education for the Scottish universities covers the whole spectrum of activities mentioned in the definition given by Knight within the literature review section of this paper.

In the beginning (with the first question), our aim was to determine the motivation for keeping internationalisation as a core strategic priority of the university. The answers were various covering a wide spectrum of perspectives and can be categorised as follows: historical/ identity reasons, growth of prestige and recognition at institutional level, institution enhancement, development of research quality (joint international projects and/ or publications), experience and knowledge exchange. However, several points were touched by more than 70% of the respondents and from these the most important is: the recruitment of international students (mentioned by all respondents) which can enrich the diversity of the student population and can make a substantial direct economic contribution to the university (a second motive related to the first and invoked by 18 from the 19 respondents). A third reason for continuing the internationalisation process of the Scottish universities, specified by 15 from the all 19 interviewees was represented by the exchange and mobility schemes which can provide an exciting international experience to the students, academic and professional staff. The international academic collaboration and excellence in research (through joint international partnerships) was a priority for 13 subjects of the sample.

Regarding the second question addressed, which highlighted the geographical areas which are prioritised within the internationalisation strategies and processes of Scottish universities, it was evident that there is an increasingly delivery of higher education in other countries, either through their own overseas campuses, in partnership with overseas organisations or through distance learning. South-East Asia is an area where ten of the 19 Scottish universities already established connections and all ten cited this zone as one of high priority for the future (along with four other universities wishing to start partnerships in this area) – for example: in Tianjin, China, the University of Glasgow-Nankai University Joint Graduate School opened in 2015; in Putrajaya, Heriot-Watt University's Malaysia campus opened in 2014; Queen Margaret University has been operating in India since 1999 while Strathclyde Business School (under the umbrella of the university of Strathclyde) offers a number of postgraduate programmes via a network of overseas teaching centres, such as those from Singapore or Malaysia. In conclusion fourteen respondents highlighted South-East Asia as a base to strengthen relationships and partnerships. The next locations (in order) chosen as preferences for expansion for the Scottish universities were: The Middle-East (eleven out of the 19 universities mentioned this area as preference for growth, with two universities already doing that: The University of Glasgow already partnered (in 2011) with Majan University College in Muscat, Oman while the Heriot-Watt University's Dubai campus opened in 2005, Australia (specified by ten respondents), Canada (mentioned by eight interviewees) and Sweden (named by seven repliers).

When respondents were asked about aspects of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) that could influence negatively the internationalisation process of universities in Scotland (aspects which stand for the third question of the interview guide),

fourteen of the respondents mentioned the same word when evaluating the state for Scotland-EU academic/ university collaboration: "uncertainty". This word was expressed by respondents when they referred to different concerns:

- "Uncertainty involving the amount of students coming from European Union states" represented an aspect mentioned by seventeen respondents. The main problems covered were: EU students could be deterred by uncertainty and by perceptions of a hostile climate and of course by the possibility of being required to pay the full international students' fee. All answers can be gathered around the following phrase expressed by one of the representatives: "There is nothing constituent aimed to block Scottish universities carrying on charging the domestic fee to EU citizens. However, EU students would no longer be suitable to apply for loans (to finance their fees) provided by the Student Loan Company. Simultaneously, they would represent a subject to the multifaceted and high-priced visa conditions currently applied to non-EU foreign citizens".

- "Uncertainty regarding the coordination within the bilateral agreements for the topics related to higher education and research" and "uncertainty related to research funding from EU sources" were two related concerns invoked by fifteen respondents. One particular answer was very revealing: "The loss of this source of funding would appear to imply serious consequences for Scottish universities as Times Higher Education claimed that almost three-quarters of the increase in higher education institution science funding for Scotland between 2007 and 2014 came from EU sources (Jones and Bickerton, 2016)"; another idea mentioned by thirteen interviewees revolved around the idea that "fifteen non-EU countries are at the moment part of the major EU research funding program called Horizon 2020, including those which are part of the single market, in the European Economic Area (EEA) or the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), however there is uncertainty regarding the financial contribution as a member and that this future contribution could be higher than the one currently paid by the UK, which will affect the Scottish research system as well".

- "Uncertainty regarding the future possibilities of the Scottish higher education sector to employ and engage academic personnel from European Union states" was an aspect specified by twelve people from the sample of 19. The main worry here relating to the general immigration policy background, was expressed in different forms by the Scottish academics: "potential work force from EU could be discouraged from apprehending an unfriendly climate"; "EU citizens who are employees of Scottish universities would more plausibly leave and search for employment in continental Europe or in the United States" or "affiliates of the Scottish academic personnel, dissuaded by research funding incertitude and uneasy by latent obstacles in achieving or sustaining European collaborations, could seek for employment in other countries".

- "Uncertainty when it comes to the repercussions of Brexit on the ability of Scottish students to go and study overseas" was a viewpoint called upon by ten respondents all of them mentioning the Erasmus Plus programmes which offer the chance to students to study in other countries. This time the points of view of the respondents were more optimistic than for the other topics mentioned before within this third question of the interview. One example of a representative answer can be given here: "The students of the UK and Scotland implicitly have benefited from possibilities advanced by the Erasmus Plus programmes to study in other European countries and there appears to exist a minimal motive why the UK, and Scotland subsequently could not maintain its involvement within

these programs. In the present time there are programme countries and partner countries, with the latter (23 states totally) being granted limited membership. Programme members cover Macedonia, Iceland, Turkey, Liechtenstein, and Norway, as well as EU member countries". Another respondent noted: "It is also determining to underline that many Scottish students are involved in exchange studies outside the country autonomously of EU settlements, however after Brexit, just like continental students in the UK (and Scotland), they could be put in the situation to handle fees that refer to non-EU students".

In terms of the measures to be taken at national/ institutional level, in Scotland, in order to surpass the difficulties that could appear for the process of internationalisation of universities during and after Brexit (the focus of the fourth research question), the themes emerging from the respondents were rich in complexity and creativity (table no. 3).

**Table no. 3. Synthesis of the answers of the four questions addressed to the interviewed university representatives**

Questions	Answers
1. If internationalisation is a pivotal direction in your institution, please point out for what reasons. Mention the most relevant motives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enrichment of the diversity of the student population</li> <li>• substantial direct economic contribution to the university</li> <li>• experience/ knowledge exchange for students/ professors</li> <li>• historical/ identity reasons</li> <li>• growth of prestige and recognition at institutional level</li> <li>• development of research quality</li> </ul>
2. Does the internationalisation policy incorporate geographic priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South-East Asia (China, Malaysia, India, Singapore)</li> <li>• The Middle-East: Dubai, Oman</li> <li>• Australia, Canada</li> <li>• Sweden, Germany</li> </ul>
3. Mention the aspects of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (the Brexit) that could influence negatively the internationalisation process of universities in Scotland:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uncertainty about the amount of students from EU: (perceptions of a hostile climate, requirement to pay the full international students' fee, potential ineligibility to apply for loans)</li> <li>• uncertainty related to research funding from EU sources (loss of major EU research funding programs, raise of the financial contribution as a member in EU research projects/ programs)</li> <li>• uncertainty about the future possibilities of the Scottish higher education sector to employ academic personnel from EU → immigration issues</li> <li>• uncertainty for the repercussions of Brexit on the ability of Scottish students to study abroad → Erasmus+</li> </ul>
4. Describe the measures to be taken at national/ institutional level (in Scotland) in order to surpass the difficulties that could appear for the process of internationalisation of universities in Scotland during and after the Brexit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requirement for the students enrolled pre-Brexit to pay only EU fees</li> <li>• facilitations for students to compete for financing schemes and loan assistance plans</li> <li>• autonomy for universities to establish fees and to facilitate the complicated and costly visa protocol currently applied to non-EU foreigners</li> <li>• the re-insertion of an important post study work route (closed in April 2012)</li> <li>• a model of an adapted immigration arrangement that serves Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs</li> <li>• a settlement regarding the freedom of movement for university staff</li> </ul>

Source: arrangement of data obtained within the interviews with specialists from Scottish universities

Many respondents noted that institutional and governmental strategies suggest that the focus is not to lower the number of foreign students and on clarifying immigration issues,

for example: “The universities have confirmed in several stages to EU students already on course that they will be required to pay only EU fees for the time span of their studies and have given analogous guarantees to candidates enrolling in 2017. The government has also stated that EU students currently on course in UK universities and those beginning in 2017 will carry on to compete for current financing schemes and loan assistance plans” or “One big measure should imply the complicated and costly visa protocol currently applied to non-EU foreigners. Naturally this topic is not under the direction of universities and represents one of government policy”.

Another set of answers pointed towards the relationship with the immigration problems: “The UK Government’s turndown to take into account the re-insertion of an important post study work route (closed in April 2012) are contradictory for the future productiveness of Scotland. Nowadays, there is an extended acknowledging among stakeholders in Scotland on the necessity for the re-introduction of a post-study work route to be more comprehensive in preserving international students in the workforce after getting their degree, and for a model of an adapted immigration arrangement that serves Scotland’s distinct demographic and economic needs”. This reinforces the idea mentioned by Ma within the literature review section that the internationalisation of higher education should go hand in hand with the country’s necessities.

At the same time, ten respondents specified precisely that some measures, most importantly the establishment of fees, are under the umbrella of the universities themselves while others are influenced by the UK’s negotiators: “The UK government has endorsed research contracts conferred under EU funding, up until the moment the UK withdraws from the EU. Adequate settlement about access to funding should be approached and accomplished by the UK’s negotiators, for Scotland’s benefit. Possibly an optimum outline is one where a sectoral agreement can be achieved for universities. This would grant permission for freedom of movement within the sector, with the reward of suitable path to European funding. For Scotland special arrangements are necessary for EU staff, enforcing no visa conditions or resident labour market assessments at the recruitment phase, and for students, both in terms of fees and reaching loan assistance. Scottish universities’ horizon involves the idea that such arrangements for staff and students would hopefully invite mutuality from EU member states”.

Several respondents revolve around the conception that: “an ideal solution for the Scottish academic environment would be a compromise that preserved freedom of movement for university staff. Otherwise an overall consolidation of the immigration policy could generate drastic outcomes”. One particular measure suggested was: “new immigration rules for foreign students. However, it is likely that the severity of these rules will be related to the discerned quality of institutions and of course content”.

## **Conclusions**

The profile of Scottish higher education institutions is not identical to that of rest of the UK, with distinct aspects regarding the direct economic, social and cultural influence that shapes the local communities and the Scottish society as a whole. The contribution that they put forth to Scotland with regard to economic and social value on one hand, and longer term migration on the other hand gets even more profound when analysed in the light of

Scotland's specific demographic and economic demands which take a different shape given the background of Brexit.

In order to shed a light on the ongoing problems faced by the Scottish academic system in terms of internationalisation of its nineteen universities, a qualitative study has been carried out involving interviews (direct or per email) on the basis of a questionnaire with the universities' representatives on internationalisation issues. The research was possible due to the Erasmus+ program developed in 2017 "University Study Visit: Youth and Community Work in Scotland", which allowed the authors of this research to establish direct contacts.

When it comes to the first research question of the study, regarding the major goals of internationalisation for universities of Scotland, based on the interviews with the Scottish representatives of the nineteen universities operating in Scotland, we found that the internationalisation process is still a high priority for all Scottish universities due to the economic, financial, cultural and societal impact the process has on the institutions and that the areas in which the expansion will continue are South-East Asia, the Middle-East, Australia and Canada.

Regarding the second research question of the study, the biggest fears for the internationalisation process in Scotland for the upcoming period, in the view of representatives of the nineteen universities, are related to: uncertainty about the future number of international students (which as anticipated by the authors is predicted by the representatives to become lower); a potential decrease of research funding from EU sources; dilemmas regarding the possibility for Scottish institutions to hire staff from EU states and the opportunities for Scottish students to study abroad. A recommendation in this sense, is to emphasise the Internationalisation at Home (IaH) phenomenon (described within the literature review section), and become more aware of the advantages of the diversity and intercultural interaction within the academic environment.

The third question explored the changes/ measures the representatives thought as the most effective for the future of Scottish universities in terms of their internationalisation, on the background of economic, social and political challenges surrounding Scotland. There was a focus on safeguarding the arrangements of the international students already enrolled (pre-Brexit), seeking autonomy for universities to establish fees and to clarify the visa protocol for students/ professors/ administrative workers. Additionally, it was suggested a re-introduction of the post study work route and the associated adaptation of distinct immigration clauses as Scotland presents different needs from demographical and economical point of view face to the rest of the UK. They also recommended an arrangement that allows easier freedom of movement for academic staff.

This made us conclude that in Scotland, there appears to be high level of consensus between academia, industry and political parties for the need of an on going and future international higher education system as internationalisation is a very important factor to keep Scotland as a modern and dynamic society. This re-affirms that Scotland's response to the possible ramifications of Brexit are distinct from other parts of the UK and require a similarly bespoke higher education internationalisation strategy that delivers on the aspirations of Scottish universities and the wider political and societal context.

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