

## **Hopes, beliefs, and concerns:**

### **Narratives in German and Portuguese universities regarding Brexit**

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## **Abstract**

This article contributes to the understanding of how different actors in the academic field perceive the challenges that Brexit poses for European higher education. Based on a narrative analysis of 28 interviews this paper highlights how actors' narratives convene discursive elements stemming from struggling discourses on cooperation and competition. In doing so, the exploratory study focuses on two countries, Portugal and Germany, which correspond to distinct cases regarding their performance in the European research and higher education landscape.

The analysis highlights that there are national differences between the perceptions of Brexit and allows identifying commonalities in the narratives in both countries. In addition, we identify the presence of a pragmatic managerial attitude in response to Brexit. The three overarching narratives are the narrative of concerns, the narrative of hopes, and the narrative of beliefs. These narratives reflect the struggle of the cooperation and the competition discourses in ascribing meaning to Brexit. The competition discourse has assumed a dominant role in the perceptions of Brexit and cooperation is mainly fueled through the academics and their professional ethos.

## **Keywords**

Brexit, higher education, Portugal, Germany, narratives

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## **1. Introduction**

Beliefs in the value of international cooperation in universities are a part of a discursive struggle between market, political, and professional drivers, linked to research and education (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). They include strong interpretative patterns in terms of cooperation and competition in academia as an internationalized field (Luijten-Lub et al., 2005; Werron 2015). The debates about Brexit in European higher education raise the question how actors representing different groups within academia, including political agents in the field (e.g. university leaderships, academics, and administrative staff) are dealing with challenges to their cooperative structures and their beliefs in the enhancement of international academic collaboration in Europe.

Based on the idea that discourses and their interpretative patterns determine what is taken-for-granted in an institutional field, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of how different actors in the academic field perceive the challenges presented by Brexit. In line with Foucault, discourse "is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence

can be defined” (Foucault 1972, p. 117). While some literature has been critically addressing this conception as it represents a quasitranscendental perspective of discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), other perspectives have been underlining that

“[...] as we pass through the three generations of discourse theory we clearly see a gradual development towards a more inclusive and quasitranscendental notion of discourse and towards a broader constructivist notion of power. This development [...] is a result of contingent intellectual articulations that open a variety of future paths of development.” (Torfing, 2005, p. 9).

To analyse the discourse one needs to break through its quasitranscendental nature to operationalize it. In line with what Shapiro (2002) calls problem-driven research, this can be served by what we have come to call the narrative approach (Magalhães and Stoer, 2007; Magalhães and Veiga, 2015). Discourses only come to an empirical evidence when actors reproduce their elements of meaning, symbols, and interpretative patterns, i.e. in narratives. They are made up of discursive elements that actors convene to ascribe meaning to what they say, think and do.

Research based on narratives has focused mainly on individual narratives, life histories, or biographical research (Araújo and Silva, 2014; Bansel, 2014; Barkhuizen, 2014; Hohti and Karlsson, 2014; Joseph, 2014; McAlpine, Amundsen, & Turner, 2014; Morinã, Díez, López, and Molina, 2014; Wöhrer, 2014). Some authors call these first-order narratives (Abbott, 1988; Elliot, 2013). Second-order narratives are those that do not necessarily focus on individuals but also on institutions and/or organizations. Regarding organizations, Czarniawska (1997, 18) argues that narratives are characterized by a plot, which “is the basic means by which specific events, otherwise represented as lists or chronicles, are brought into one meaningful whole” and enact discourses that are taken for granted. Equally, Franzosi (1998, 520) describes how narratives connect different events in order to give them meaning in the sense of a broader interpretative pattern. Hence, narratives are “complex social artefacts” (Dalpiaz et al. 2014, 1376) that include a lot of information on how individuals make sense of different aspects of organizational life in terms of shared broader discourses. This branch of literature highlights the function of narratives for the operational processes of organizations (Downing 2005). Furthermore, in education, narrativity has in fact been mobilized as a method for listening to the voices of actors on the transformations of political environments, changes in governance and management of institutions, and on teaching and learning activities (Delamont and Atkinson, 2014). Overall, the narrative approach allows challenging the transcendental and abstraction of discourse by bringing it to social and political action beyond, more individual storytelling. The narrative approach thereby challenges the power of hegemonic narratives in the transformation of practices, since “they are not necessarily the only ones and research must identify their constitution of social, political and economic relations” (Matus & Talburt, 2013: 242).

In this sense, the analysis of discourses in this paper relies on the narrative approach (Magalhães and Veiga, 2015) as a privileged mean to grasp the empirical actuality of discourses. This approach is convened to identify discourses and their elements highlighting how discursive elements justify and legitimate the perceptions about the challenges posed by Brexit. Thereby, Brexit is a point of crystallization. Narratives are told to make sense of Brexit at which competing discourses can be located. Following from Magalhães and Veiga (2015) the narrative approach is based on the assumption that social reality is construed by discourses that actors located at various levels convene to legitimize and justify courses of action and their decisions (Burr 2003). In this sense, the concept of

narrative used in this paper goes beyond the biographical conception of narrative as institutional and political actors in their interpretation of events bring together different types of narratives (e.g. conceptual, public, ontological) and these narratives reproduce discourses, to ascribe meaning to the arguments supporting their action.

While discourses construe the social world, its subjects and objects (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2004) by providing “repertoires of elements that narratives put together to provide meaning to social and political action” (Magalhães and Veiga, 2015, p. 312) in specific situations, narratives are shaped by them in a struggle to fix meaning of core concepts and challenging events. Therefore, the analysis of how narratives convene elements from dominant, resilient and resisting discourses in their struggle to invest and assign meaning, contributes to grasp the empirical evidence of discourses on cooperation and competition in European higher education.

This article aims at understanding how discourses struggle to invest meaning to cooperation and competition and, on the other hand, how cooperation and competition become central on narratives on the consequences of Brexit. More specifically, this study analyses how actors carried discursive elements in articulating managerial approaches to Brexit. In doing so, the study focuses on Portugal and Germany as they can be seen to illustrate different positions in the European landscape with regard to their higher education’s size, research productivity, and prestige.

Based on the analysis of 28 interviews, we analyze the discursive elements present in the individual narratives as displayed by the interviewees. By convening discursive elements of cooperation and competition, the analysis of the interviews allowed us to address the question of how the crystallization of the meaning of internationalization of higher education as cooperation and/or competition strategies is enacted in Germany and Portugal. Bringing together these two countries the analysis highlights how (dis)similar narratives construe the meaning of internationalization strategies *à propos* Brexit.

We start by introducing the narrative approach as a theoretical-methodological perspective underlining the importance of the discursive struggle to fix the meaning of internationalization based on cooperation and competition in higher education. We, then, elaborate on our data collection and conduct the analysis to argue that the struggle between discursive elements of cooperation and competition are feeding actors’ narratives on internationalization reflecting ‘concerns’, ‘hopes’, ‘beliefs’, and ‘quiet opportunism’. Finally, we conclude by identifying the mechanisms through which discourses of cooperation and competition trigger actors’ narratives.

## **2. The narrative approach to the internationalization of higher education**

Following from Magalhães and Veiga (2015) discourses only come to social action by means of narratives. In this sense, the discourses on the nature and purpose of internationalization in higher education are dynamically construed in an interaction between the narrator, the audience and the context they share (Wagenaar 2011). As such, narratives “are constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space” (Somers and Gibson 1996, p. 59), and discourses construe the social world, its subjects and objects (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2004) by providing “repertoires of elements that narratives put together to provide meaning to social and political action” (Magalhães and Veiga, 2015, p. 312). Narratives provide the narrator room for selections and interpretations without giving up the claim that the narrator is reporting on what is really going on and not only on fiction (Kreiwirth 2000, p. 302). By bringing together discursive elements from other

discourses, interviewees are influenced and shaped by the discourses they convene to deal with the challenges to internationalization of higher education brought about by Brexit.

The narrative approach challenges the taken-for-granted(ness) of grand concepts (e.g. internationalization as a strategy to cope with global challenges of competitiveness), as they are contingent and construed on the basis of social and political assumptions whose self-evidence can be put into question (Magalhães and Veiga, 2015). Actually, discourses on 'internationalization' of higher education articulate discursive elements of NPM legitimating competition for students. In line with this, the EU's Framework Programs for Research (FPs), which provide important legitimating arenas for European higher education institutions, have also contributed to justify competition as well as cooperation among European universities. In addition to the FPs also institutions, such as the European Research Council (ERC), and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), have contributed to enhance the prominence of discursive elements of narratives on European research as a key driver for Europe's economic growth and innovation strategies (Chou and Gornitzka 2014).

In turn, discourses on 'internationalization' of higher education as a cooperation strategy build on discursive elements of a network governance narrative focusing on the establishment of collaboration networks. Networks have been developed between and within institutions, and they make universities and colleges part of a broader organizational and transnational field of higher education (Drori et al. 2003; Frank and Meyer 2007). These discourses, on the one hand, deal with the tension between transnational competition and cooperation and, on the other hand, with national diversity. European higher education is an interesting puzzle because, despite persistent differentiation, continuous frictions and contestation, it is also an area where European coordination seemingly maintains relatively high legitimacy and institutional cooperation commitment by higher education institutions (Chou and Gornitzka 2014). European higher education policies have been stimulating both cooperation and competition among the member states, higher education systems and institutions. When it comes to understanding institutional internationalization strategies in this arena, it is important to acknowledge that the ongoing European integration in higher education takes place in a highly competitive environment, for example, the competition for European research funding creates potential winners and losers challenging European cooperation (Gideon 2017).

This puts cooperation values under pressure. On the one hand, these values have been generated through long-standing activities institutionalizing transnational cooperation at the institutional level (Drori et al. 2003; Frank and Meyer 2007). Successful cooperation projects have been based on a common understanding and on shared academic values based on the interest of joining forces. Over time, organizational structures and common beliefs have pervaded the field. Consequently, cultural scripts and organizational rules in the field of higher education are strong connectors linking institutions across boundaries. On the other hand, competition emerges as a way of providing status signals (Podolny 2005, p.11) and legitimacy with regard to their peers and/or with regard to negotiations of their own appropriateness in the eyes of national interest groups or governments (Gornitzka et al. 2007). However, competition implies good performance in differentiation as it is based on the assumption that institutions must compete to better perform, an observation that has also been made in the field of higher education (Luijten-Lub et al. 2005).

The Bologna Process has been described as the most far-reaching and comprehensive international coordination effort in the area of higher education serving also as an example for comparable cooperation efforts in other parts of the world (Kehm et al. 2009). In the Bologna Process, discourses

convening increased international cooperation stimulated the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), while simultaneously competition arguments, forged at the European level were also relevant.

However, there were attempts by the European Ministers of Education “to define European cooperation as a cultural project”, emphasizing that “the need to increase global economic competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the EHEA” (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p.8). This highlights that discourses on ‘internationalization’ of higher education introduce discursive elements convened by narratives feeding the struggle between competition and cooperation.

### **2.1 Key drivers of discourses on higher education policy in Germany**

The perceptions of the future of the European Research and Higher Education Areas from the perspectives of Germany and Portugal are shaped by the ongoing dynamics of collaboration and competition in European higher education in general, and the concerns brought about by Brexit underline these very dynamics. In the German context, the discourse on competition increased in prominence during the last decades. This has a lot to do with the transformation of German universities into organizational actors. This transformation based on organizational identity, leadership, administrative expansion, and the introduction of management techniques created a new relation among universities. This has triggered new opportunities as university leaderships perceive their organization in competition with other universities (Krücken 2017, p. 20) and this perspective contributes to the growing power of the discourse on competition in German higher education in general. The literature identifies five important aspects for this development, which strengthen the discourse on competition: first, standardized evaluation systems introduced opportunities to compare organizations (Krücken 2017, p. 18); second, universities strengthened their institutional identity through branding processes (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015); third, politicians tried to strengthen the positions of and give more power to the university leadership (Bielecki 2017); fourth, universities gained additional responsibilities, for example, for technology transfer (Krücken 2017, p. 19); and fifth, general tendencies to professionalize the management of education and science are evident throughout the system (Krücken et al. 2010).

Nevertheless, German universities remain loosely coupled systems (Weick 1995) and organized anarchies (Cohen et al. 1972). They include professors who still form an especially strong profession in Germany (Clark 1983) and who guarantee that academic departments remain powerful units, as they are able to resist top-down management (Serrano-Velarde, 2010), and still refer to their academic freedom to argue in favor of the types of cooperation that they want to. Additionally, academics still identify more strongly with their own scientific community while their identification with the university is comparably weak (Boyer et al. 1994). These elements explain why the discourse on cooperation remains present and powerful in Germany even with the growing power of the discourse on competition.

### **2.2 Key drivers of discourses on higher education policy in Portugal**

In the Portuguese context, the discursive elements of internationalization are also contributing to crystalize its meaning as a competition strategy rather than a cooperation endeavor. Until 2011, the economic rationale hardly underpinned the internationalization approaches of Portuguese public higher education institutions (Rosa et al. 2004). However, the economic rationale became important

for both public and private institutions due to the economic crisis (Teixeira 2012). At the same time, there has been a declining trend in the number of students applying to higher education due to the decline in birth rates (Fonseca 2012). This has created a new interest in the recruitment of foreign students by both public and private institutions and there is an increasing pressure on the government to create more attractive conditions for the internationalization of higher education. In 2014, the government passed legislation allowing public institutions to increase fees for foreign students, signaling the importance of the economic concerns linked to internationalization. In this legal framework, the status of the international student links functional imperatives of attractiveness and regulation mechanisms with regard to international students. The decree-law stated in its preamble (Decree-law number 36/2014 of March 10, 2014) that Portuguese higher education institutions have been attracting increasing numbers of foreign students and that this has strengthened both their capacity and the rationalization of their resources with a positive impact on the Portuguese economy. Charging higher tuition and attracting more foreign students, as they count in the funding formula for public higher education institutions, have become strategies for these institutions to supplement their revenues. Furthermore, discursive elements of competition, strengthening of R&D and innovation capacity stemming from the governance narrative of NPM are visible in the discourse of internationalization of science, technology and higher education in Portugal.

### **3. Research methods and data**

This study uses the cases of Germany and Portugal to investigate the drivers of discourses on higher education policy with regard to Brexit. The two higher education systems can be seen as most-different cases with regard to the position in the European higher education landscape. Both countries differ with regard to their social and economic characteristics, the relationship between the state and the universities, the attractiveness of universities for exchange students as well as the (economic) role exchange students play. Germany has a higher education system that is among the largest in Europe and it is among the top performers in the competition for European research funds, for which the UK is the number one collaborator in Horizon 2020 projects (Courtois 2018). Germany is also among those countries that potentially can gain from Brexit-related changes in competition in European higher education (Jungblut and Seidenschur, 2018). In turn, Portugal is a medium-sized higher education system, which has a mid-level performance in European research funding, and is the third highest ranked UK-collaborator in Horizon 2020 (Courtois 2018). Thus, the shifts in the European higher education environment following Brexit are expected to entail less direct benefits for Portugal (Magalhães et al., 2018) as the chance for profiting from it are smaller than in the German case. Therefore, under the framework of this contextual diversity, it is likely that the drivers of the narratives on internationalization of higher education in times of uncertainty raised by Brexit, convene different discursive elements in the two countries.

Concerning the data, this article relies on 28 interviews with different types of actors within higher education institutions in Germany and Portugal. The interview guide was developed to capture the sensibilities of higher education's actors in each country in the period from April to November 2017. Thus, the study also provides insights about higher education operating under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity. At a time when rules are unclear and the future is impossible to forecast, assumptions and values rise to the surface (Courtois, 2018). The discourses on cooperation and competition that feed into narrative on concerns, hopes, and beliefs are the result of the analysis and were not in the focus of the interview guide. Rather the interviews prompted a descriptive analysis of international activities and partnerships, an evaluation of those with the UK, and perspectives on the

future developments of international partnerships and activities following Brexit. In this, the interviews followed a semi-structured approach and had a duration from about 45-90 minutes. The guidelines allowed us to conduct a comparative approach between countries, while the number of questions was limited so that enough time was left to the interviewees to elaborate on the issues at stake. The interview guide can be found in the appendix.

The interviewees included members of the leadership of universities, professors, non-tenured academics, and key administrators and in the Portuguese case policy-makers. The article relies on 15 interviews in Germany that have been conducted in three different universities as well as 11 interviews in two Portuguese higher education institutions. In addition, two actors playing a role at the national higher education policy environment in Portugal have been interviewed. Higher education institutions in each country have been sampled to represent different types of institutions at the system level to ensure that the main strata of the national higher education sectors are represented in the study.

Table 1: Overview of German interviewees

Interview partners in Germany		
Institution	Professional role	Number of interviews
Comprehensive research university	Leadership	1
	Central administration	2
	Professors	2
	Non-tenured academics	1
Medium-sized regional university	Leadership	1
	Central administration	2
	Professors	2
	Non-tenured academics	1
Technical university	Leadership	1
	Central administration	1
	Professors	1
	Non-tenured academics	0
Total number of interviews		15

Table 2: Overview of Portuguese interviewees

Interview partners in Portugal		
Institution	Professional role	Number of interviews
National	Representative of the National Funding Agency	1
National	Representative of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science	1
University A	Leadership	2
	Professors / non-tenured academics	5
University B	Leadership	1
	Professors / non-tenured academics	3
Total number of interviews		13



We use the interviews in the two cases to create new understanding of a more general phenomenon, namely the perceived consequences of Brexit on European higher education. This is an exploratory approach to investigate how Brexit is perceived in European higher education. We acknowledge that the external validity of our findings might be limited given that this paper only explores two cases. Another limitation of our results is that the study is linked to its temporal bound, i.e. the Brexit process as it appeared in 2017. Research was conducted in a period that was relatively early in relation to the political, economic and cultural changes associated with Brexit and the different concrete ways in which it could materialize. This allows us to identify how discourses are convened on timely artefacts to make-sense of Brexit.

#### 4. Narratives on Brexit in German and Portuguese universities

We start by identifying the three main narratives where discursive elements stemming from the discourses on cooperation and competition in European higher education combine and assume different weights. The narratives on ‘concerns’, ‘hopes’, and ‘beliefs’ are also taken up in managerial approaches carried out by the interviewees, and after identifying those narratives we show how managerial pragmatism becomes manifest.

##### 4.1 Narrative on concerns

The narrative on concerns traverses the interview data and emerges in Germany, particularly with regard to student mobility. To a lesser extent, there are also concerns about the research collaborations underway. In Portugal the hard version of Brexit, i.e., no agreement at all, comes to the forefront with concerns on a large number of issues as it can endanger graduates’ and undergraduates’ mobility, the continuation of internships, the number of partnerships established in specific areas, and the Portuguese science system. In general, the UK is an important cooperation partner for German and Portuguese higher education institutions regarding student exchanges and staff mobility. In both countries, there is an imbalance, in favor of outgoing staff and student mobility towards the UK (Magalhães et al., 2018, Jungblut and Seidenschnur, 2018).

In terms of mobility, the UK ranks third concerning ERASMUS student exchange numbers with 3327 German students spending time at UK universities in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Considering this large number of outgoing students, it becomes clear that the interview partners consider this exchange program to be very important: *“Especially with regard to student mobility the anglophone countries are a very important destination” (Germany, admin)*. These concerns become even bigger because, partly due to language issues, there is an imbalance of student exchanges between Germany and the UK, as there are much more German outgoing students than incoming students from the UK. At the same time, German interviewees consider the exchange with other Anglophone countries like the USA, Canada, or Australia, or exchange programs with countries with a large number of English-language programs like Norway, Sweden, or the Netherlands, as a way to potentially compensate for Brexit in order to stay competitive. However, these alternatives cannot eliminate their concerns: *“our main worry, here in the International Office, is that the cooperation, meaning the ERASMUS partnerships with British universities, will completely disappear” (Germany, admin)*, and that it will be very difficult to provide alternatives for students but also for staff which would be regarded similarly attractive: *“[...] our students might not be so flexible to shift to newly generated cooperation partners” (Germany, admin)*.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://eu.daad.de/die-nationale-agentur/30-jahre-erasmus/zahlen-und-fakten-zu-erasmus/de/51651-austausch-von-studierenden-und-hochschulmitarbeitern/> (13.08.2018)

When justifying the significance of this concern for the university, competition issues with regard to the university profile come up “[...] *this is something that would be a serious loss and it would hit us harder than others since we have a focus on courses that rely on it such as teacher training programs.*” (Germany, admin). Besides viewing themselves in competition for students with universities at the national level, the interview partners also convened discursive elements feeding the narrative on concerns at an international level. Another concern refers to the attractiveness of Europe as an academic lighthouse. Here, German interviewees argue that less overall European cohesion and cooperation could have a negative impact on the image of all European countries. They highlight that they fear that the competitiveness of Europe will in the long run decline: “*a friend of mine is working at a German embassy in [country in Africa] and she is saying that the people there have changed their view of Europe [...] they see it as a disintegration [...] meaning it makes it less attractive to come to Europe*” (Germany, admin). This decline will not happen in relation to the UK but rather in relation to other world regions. With regard to incoming researchers and students the USA and Canada might profit from Brexit as they become more attractive, while at the same time, the attractiveness of Europe might decline: “*All in all, I think it is a threatening scenario, especially in the long-run, because we will be less attractive*” (Germany, admin).

Hence, in Germany the discourse of competition is convened by the narrative on concerns with regard to two issues: staying competitive for national students and staff by offering attractive opportunities for exchange, and staying attractive for foreign students in the context of international competition.

In Portugal, we also find concerns with regard to staff exchange focusing on the competitiveness of certain research areas. To cope with a hard version of Brexit, a Portuguese academic, from a research-intensive institution, recognized that it:

*“will be difficult, in the future it will create difficulties [...] that will limit us [...] the very strong contacts that have existed for many years with the UK and which we will not be able to leverage as we have in the past to train students and researchers, who were sent to the UK to take their doctorates and which we eventually contracted to strengthen certain areas, are at risk”* (Portugal, academic).

In this quote, the competitiveness of Portuguese universities partly depends on sending young researchers to the UK for their academic training.

However, in the Portuguese interviews the narrative on concerns does not only convene discursive elements of competition discourses but also of cooperation.

*“the free movement of people, the mobility of academics, students and researchers could be severely hampered. The issue of undergraduates could be further problematic if the UK decides to apply higher tuition fees to European Union’s students wishing to study in the UK”* (Portugal, national level).

In this, the perception of Brexit and its consequences for student mobility is different. The risk that the potential results of a hard Brexit limit the free movement of people, the mobility of academics, students and researchers is linked to concerns related to liberal political values. Therefore, the argument is put forward that more cooperation is needed to uphold these values. Hence, in Portugal, the narrative on concerns while convening discursive elements of competition discourses also convenes discursive elements on cooperation. These discursive elements are driven by liberal values, which are seen as part of the core of academia when the issue of student exchange is addressed. In this, the threat of increased problems related to the mobility of undergraduates if the UK decides to apply higher tuition fees to students from the EU emerges as a key concern (Magalhães et al., 2018, p.139).

Another very interesting finding is that there are not many concerns about declining research cooperation with UK researchers. In this regard, German and Portuguese interviewees showed a more relaxed attitude and are confident that research cooperation with the UK will continue. In Germany, if there are concerns at all they are reduced to procedural consequences in times of Brexit: *"we are supposed to coordinate everything, and I mean really everything with the university leadership, when we want to publish our joint research with UK partners but also when we present and promote what we do in our projects"* (Germany, academic). However, even the interviewees who express these concerns do not doubt that research cooperation with UK researchers will continue. In Portugal, the interviewees also do not refer to major changes in their research activities following Brexit. Actually, a Portuguese academic perceived Brexit more as a political issue, rather than an academic concern. The interviewee did not see major changes in their teaching and research activities with or without Brexit. Hence, in both countries the narrative on concerns convene discursive elements of the competition discourse, while a cooperation discourse also becomes visible at times, however more so in the Portuguese case.

#### 4.2 Narrative on beliefs

In Germany and Portugal, interviewees express confidence about maintaining cooperation and networking based on transnational networks, consolidated friendships, and a reactionary "move together" in academia as an answer to the unwanted political decision of Brexit. In both countries, there are stories of confidence reflecting the belief in ongoing research cooperation and strong ties between researchers.

In Germany, an interviewee stated that *"I believe that we will find ways how to cooperate with UK researchers"* (Germany, admin). This belief is also based on strong ties in terms of personal relationships and networks: *"I am confident concerning research because I have very strong networks with the UK. And I won't draw back now because of Brexit"* (Germany, academic). In Portugal, similar perceptions were identified expressing confidence in the strong and well-established roots of bilateral cooperation. The Portuguese strategic positioning of its science and technology system has been historically rooted in strong ties with the UK and presently *"in some thematic areas, the UK is even the most preferred for collaboration by the national community[...] it has consistently ranked first in almost all thematic areas over the last two decades"* (Portugal, national level). This perspective is also visible at the institutional level and with several of the interviewed academics (Magalhães et al., 2018).

This narrative on beliefs also comprehends traits of resistance to political decisions. Cooperation will not only remain stable but academics are also ready to increase it, as one of the German interviewees put it: *"If politicians decide to limit internationalization in academia, academics will resist and do the opposite"* (Germany, leadership). Hence, the interviewees expect that in the end the intense research cooperation with the UK will continue. Until a final decision on Brexit takes full effect, academics try to establish as many new programs as possible. Actually one German interviewee stated that *"I try to start as many programs as I can until 2019 and if we go into a transition phase, then we will have a better starting position"* (Germany, academic). Once Brexit takes effect, the German interviewees refer to strategies of resistance: *"One has to help and support each other and then we will manage to weather out the storm and maybe even grow together even more"* (Germany, academic). These quotes demonstrate how the interviewees convene discursive elements of cooperation. When the narrative on beliefs is enacted, academia appears as an institutionalized field in which international cooperation is taken-for-granted. Consequently, friendships developed within higher education and offenses

towards these ties are not accepted in the narrative on beliefs: *“We don’t let them separate us. This is may be also part of my family story. My family has been separated by the Berlin Wall and we have always believed that we will be reunified”* (Germany, academic).

Likewise, Portuguese interviewees underline the importance of the UK’s higher education system for cooperation: *“These links do not really depend on policy makers, and there are bonds that exist and have been strengthened for many years; [...] I think that from the operational point of view there may be some difficulty in reinforcing them, but they will not be lost because this will not depend on these discussions. This is a parallel thing; it does not depend on the politicians. The ties that we have with universities in the UK have been established through what is our activity as academics”* (Portugal, academic). The UK’s higher education system plays a big role in the European research system, and it is important that there is a possibility to keep tight collaborations between the EU and the UK, as the UK needs both the academic systems and qualified human resources in the EU and the EU needs the UK.

With regard to the narrative on beliefs in Germany and Portugal, the interviewees seem to have a strong trust in existing ties and in the strength of the ethos of academics to maintain their durable networks. Notwithstanding, in both countries, interviewees expressed their will to oppose political movements and decisions that might endanger academic cooperation. Hence, discursive elements of the cooperation discourse are relevant in building the narratives on beliefs.

In both countries, the narrative on beliefs convene discursive elements of cooperation discourse, even though it is not clear the future of ongoing funding schemes. This aspect is particularly relevant in the case of Portugal.

#### **4.3 Narrative on hopes**

The narrative on hopes refers to the policy-making processes and to strategic attempts on the national and institutional level to continue cooperation. Here, the demand for alternative funding structures is addressed, but the narratives’ plot frames this demand by illustrating the difficulties Brexit may cause in such alternative funding structures.

German interviewees are skeptical about the outcome of a hard version of Brexit as they think that the EU has a preferences for such an outcome to signal the seriousness of consequences of exiting the EU: *“I think that is something, that I think from the side of Brussels is non-negotiable “* (Germany, admin). This difficulty for further cooperation is elaborated in the narrative on hopes, while having in the background a hard Brexit and its consequences for the search for alternative structures. Accordingly, also interviewees from Portugal highlight that there are already tangible effects caused by the fear of the consequences of a hard Brexit:

*“[...] in these times of uncertainty over the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, there has already been a significant reduction in the number of proposed partnerships involving UK partners, given the implicit risks that such partnerships might end by the end of March 2019, compromising all the work and the viability of the projects”* (Portugal, national level).

Nevertheless, in the perception of the representative of the Portuguese national research funding agency, a hard Brexit still needs to be softened through bilateral agreements: *“In this case, most of the partnerships under way will be foreclosed, at least on the same terms as they are today (a reciprocal*

*agreement will always be necessary)*" (Portugal, national level). This illustrates a situation that is applicable to both cases.

German and Portuguese interviewees hope that political alternatives and policy instruments will be developed regarding, for instance, funding to keep up cooperation, either through the establishment of association treaties, or by national agencies, or single national and/or institutional efforts. Interestingly, in the narrative on hopes, Brexit ultimately appears as a political issue, rather than an academic concern. Hence, since academics do not see major changes in their core activities with or without Brexit, it is more about expectations and hopes towards political actors to negotiate alternative structures and instruments.

The narrative on hopes expresses expectations that the EU will negotiate association agreements with the aim to guarantee funding for cooperation in academia feeding the hope that alternative structures and processes of cooperation will emerge. German interviewees hope that these kind of agreements with the UK will be possible, thus including the UK in cooperation programmes in higher education: *"countries like Switzerland, or Norway are also in the cooperation without any problem, and [...] because this is simply in the mutual interest [...] that the UK has some form of associated status"* (Germany, academic). In Portugal, the narrative on hopes for alternative solutions to maintain cooperation focuses on national strategies and initiatives namely with regard to funding of research projects by national agencies. The perception is that Brexit will not have major implications as *"collaboration with UK higher education institutions and research centres will continue to apply under the same conditions applicable to a non-EU country"* (Magalhães et al., 2018, p.139). Also in Germany interviewees voiced stories of hope for political support from the national government: *"I could imagine that at some point there will be bilateral treaties with Great Britain which make cooperation in research and staff exchange possible"* (Germany, academic). The meaning attributed to such alternative funding structures convene elements of discourses of cooperation and competition. A cooperation discourse is visible when interviewees refer to the idea that research profits from cooperation with UK researchers, which have been growing over time, became fruitful, and cannot be replaced: *"This is a political question. (...) We have to work with our friends and I can't imagine that they destroy that"* (Germany, academic). Simultaneously, the hope for alternative funding structures is also reasoned referring to competition issues: *"This makes a lot of sense, also because we can make a special offer to our students if we manage to establish exchange programs"* (Germany, admin).

The narrative on hopes in both countries convened discursive elements of the cooperation discourse addressing the need for national governments to take initiative and create frameworks in which academics can continue to work together. In this, the cooperation and competition discourses are linked, as interviewees argue that cooperation is needed to stay competitive and thereby emphasize the importance to take political initiative in this direction.

### **5. Pragmatism as a managerial approach in dealing with Brexit.**

The narratives on 'concerns', 'hopes', and 'beliefs' illustrate how Brexit is perceived in the two countries. Based on this sense making, the interviewees also talked about managerial consequences for university leadership.

In both countries, the interviewees display, at least implicitly, a pragmatic attitude in their managerial approach to deal with the consequences of Brexit. This pragmatism aims at preventing greater losses and guarantee future gains. In the case of Portugal, the narrative on hopes stressed that the

interviewees do not see major changes in their teaching or research activities following Brexit and thereby signal to continue as before since *“the academy is much more concerned with the quality of research that is developed than with everything else. From my point of view and from what I have seen, that is what matters”* (Portugal, academic). With regard to European mobility but also to non-European networks and cooperation, the interviewees also share a pragmatic stance in the Portuguese case. Internationalization is described as a key strategic cornerstone when aiming at the creation of an international student community. The advantages of European mobility programs providing funding also to non-EU countries and students are being appropriated to diversify the international activities by focusing on Eastern Europe and Northern African countries. Here, Brexit is framed as a window of opportunity to seek other partners and diversify consortia and networks. For example, interviewees at the institutional level underlined that new partners from the Mediterranean region should be seen as an alternative given that they share similarities and interests (Magalhães et al., 2018). Thereby, interviewees in Portugal also convened discursive elements of competition about what happens with student mobility if a hard Brexit would take effect. The Portuguese interviewees report that UK universities will compete at the same level as ‘third countries’ such as the USA, Canada, South Korea, Japan, or Australia. In this scenario, *“the UK can only enhance its attractiveness with a very significant increase in its own budget for science and research, which might happen in more strategic scientific areas for the UK”* (Portugal, national level). From the side of the EU, this might entail very significant and competitive funding under the Framework Programmes for Research (FPs), thus enhancing competitiveness in attracting academics.

Also in Germany, interviewees in their narrative on beliefs display a pragmatic stance stressing that, *“even with Brexit scientists will continue to do research with colleagues and our system in academia won’t change”* (Germany, academic). Likewise, with regard to the narrative on hopes about alternative structures for funding for cooperation with the UK, pragmatic assumptions are visible in the data. Interviewees, in Portugal, describe that *“the UK can only enhance its attractiveness with a very significant increase in its own budget for science and research, which might happen in more strategic scientific areas for the UK”* (Portugal, national level). From the EU side, this might entail significant and competitive funding under the Framework Programme for Research (FP9), thus enhancing competitiveness in attracting academics and researchers. From his perspective, the EU will remain attractive for students, graduates and researchers, as it *“offers well-funded programmes and has many excellent quality alternatives to UK institutions”* (Portugal, leadership). Finally, interviewees, from Germany, also referred back to the consistency of collaboration regarding one of their primary tasks when highlighting that *“on the side of research ... I do not have big concerns”* (Germany, academic).

In the narratives, it becomes clear that the pragmatic stance leads to a more relaxed attitude as the competitiveness of German and Portuguese universities and academics is not expected to significantly change due to Brexit. This is even more relevant given that these similar managerial approaches stem from very different national frame conditions at least with regard to the research funding programs. While Portugal is a small country with fewer universities that are not *per se* regarded as big players on the European research funding market, Germany is one of the biggest players with regard to research funding. Referring to Pareto (1935) one could say that Portuguese universities are more in the position of foxes trying to win a greater piece of the cake and hoping for systemic change, while German universities may be considered as lions, already possessing a greater piece of it. In Germany, the fear to lose its leading position is as present as the hope to extend it. Nevertheless, interviewees in both countries balance concerns through pragmatic stances. Focusing on managerial consequences allows them to somehow show a relaxed attitude with regard to consequences of Brexit for universities in

their own national context. It seems that academics have embraced the lens of a competition discourse since they accept that European higher education systems and institutions have to compete. In this context, pragmatic views become important.

In Germany, the pragmatic stance of the interviewees reflects 'quiet opportunism' resulting from the expectations of getting some advantages from the UK leaving the EU even if interviewees always reaffirm that they deeply believe in the value of cooperation in higher education and would favor the UK within the EU.

Quiet opportunism as part of thoughts on managerial consequences is also interesting, because interviewees mark it as something they tell only quietly while demonstrating that they wish the UK would remain in the EU. This avoidance of an impression of being in favor of Brexit is also showing the relevance of discursive elements of the cooperation discourse. All of our interviewees in Germany emphasize their hope that Great Britain remains in the EU. . Nevertheless, interviewees argue that if they cannot avoid Brexit, they expect some advantages with regard to competition and thereby express opportunism.

German interviewees when referring to the high success of UK universities in gaining European research funding, expect some advantages for German project proposals in the future, if UK institutions are no longer eligible to apply for funding. *"Statistically it is like this. Sure, the UK is a net winner [in European research funding], they will stop contributing to the overall amount of funding, but as they extracted more than they contributed, this leaves a Delta which obviously will be distributed among the other countries"*(Germany, leadership). The fact that German researchers will be in a leading position for future research projects also feeds quiet opportunism: *"And especially Germany coordinates, for example, only very few projects [in Horizon 2020], this is something that people complain about. I could imagine that we might [...] in the future have to coordinate more projects [...] But that would not be something negative, but rather something positive"* (Germany, admin). The opportunism is also reflected in descriptions of how Brexit could drive top researchers from the UK to other countries including thoughts about Germany attracting UK researchers due to its research environment: *"We are in negotiations with an excellent scientist who we try to employ at our university and that plays a role in the talks. The uncertainty in the UK because of Brexit might help us, even if one would not expect that she would leave the [name of university in UK] in order to come to [name of the university in Germany]."* (Germany, leadership).

## 6. Conclusion

The distinction between discourses and narratives allowed shedding light on the role of discursive elements of competition and cooperation to feed the narratives on concerns, hopes and beliefs. Overall, the analysis of the three narratives shows that cooperation and competition are powerful prevailing discourses that are represented in the perceptions of Brexit in the field of higher education.

The benefit of the approach used in this paper is that it enabled us to go beyond the discursive struggle on the meaning of possible effects of Brexit on higher education and allowed us to identify that the narratives on hopes, concerns, and beliefs convene elements of cooperation and competition discourses. Additionally, the study enables an empirical view on the relation of cooperation and competition discourses within the narratives. Within the narratives, the discourses of cooperation and competition appear blurred assuming different weights in different contexts. In the narrative on concerns, the discourse on competition is more present, in the narrative on beliefs the discourse on

cooperation is more dominant, and the narrative on hopes convenes more evenly elements stemming from cooperation and competition. With regard to the way how the interviewees make-sense of these narratives it becomes clear that the discourse on competition became dominant in the field of higher education.

With regard to the narrative on beliefs in Germany and Portugal, the interviewees seem to rely on existing ties and on the strength of the academic ethos to maintain their professional networks. Here, the discourse of cooperation is most powerful and especially in Germany, interviewees expressed their will to oppose political movements and decisions that might endanger academic cooperation. In Portugal, given the weaker position of the higher education system in the European landscape, more pragmatic assumptions on cooperation become relevant. Narratives on hopes in both countries bring out discursive elements of the discourse of cooperation addressing the need of national governments or institutional leadership to take the initiative. With regard to the narrative on concerns in both countries, the discursive elements of the discourses of competition and of cooperation are visible, but most of the concerns are linked to the former discourse.

Finally, perceptions on managerial consequences, including 'quiet opportunism' in the German case, mainly convenes the discursive elements of the competition discourse. From the managerial approach, interviewees keep an eye on the balance between gains and losses for the national system and institutions, highlighting the potential gains that countries might have from Brexit. With this regard, the analysis in two very different systems shows surprisingly similar results in the sense that competition is a strong, and to a certain extent, the central discourse. In turn, the discourse of cooperation emerges from academics' professional ethos and is important for their self-perception within an international academic world with the aim to maintain and further enhance the competition and advantages coming from Brexit.

The contrast between higher education systems and policies make, on the one hand, the increasing focus on competition clearly visible, and, on the other hand, it highlights the values of collaboration that are inherent in the academic profession and its ethos. This contrast is a source of tension within European higher education. Due to the exploratory nature of our study, these results clearly demand further research that would not only expand the empirical cases but also grasp the influence of the discourses of cooperation and competition. One way would be to apply different methods of conducting interviews giving additional room for reproducing discourses in narratives. Additionally, focus group interviews are an option for future research, which would give insights into the power relations between discourses and in what happens in cases when these discourses clash. Moreover, as some of the interviews already pointed to the international view on post-Brexit Europe and its perceived attractiveness for researchers and students, a follow-up in this direction investigating shifts in the perception of the EHEA would be a fruitful avenue for future research.

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## 1.1. Appendix

### 1.1.1. Interview guide

<b>Set A = University leaders – To edit and adapt depending on role</b>
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1. What are the principal international activities, partnerships and other connections with the UK in your university? You might refer briefly to

- Mobility of people (students, faculty, others)?
- Programmes of study, degree structures, quality assurance?
- Research and scholarship?
- Shared resources and facilities?
- Other forms of cooperation?

[2. In general terms, what changes do you foresee in the next few years, in the pattern of international activities, partnerships and other connections? Where is internationalisation going?]

3. Among your international partnerships and activities how do you evaluate those with the UK?

- In terms of income? (e.g. through incoming students)
- In terms of strategic positioning?
- In terms of institutional identity?

3. In what fields are partnerships and engagement with the UK the strongest/the most beneficial?

4. What are your main concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on your institution?

- How will Brexit impact formal alliances / collaborations / funding / staffing / programmes / research / student recruitment? [expand depending on the respondent's area of expertise]

5. How do you plan to compensate for the main Brexit-related problems you foresee emerging?

- What steps have already been taken?
- Do you plan to seek new partners / new funders / new student markets?
- What steps are you planning to take in order to deal with the fall-out of Brexit with regard to ongoing research programs (e.g. how to deal with staff, share funding and well-established networks)?

6. How do you engage with the government and sector bodies to communicate your university's concerns and influence decision making?

- What are your main demands to government?

7. Are you confident that in the negotiation process both UK and EU will take due account of the current tight ties at the academic level?

[- Would you consider feasible and necessary to advocate for a specific protocol on higher education in the future agreement between EU and UK?]

8. Do you expect to see an increase/decrease in competition between countries and HE institutions? If so, how and why and along what lines (e.g. research, or teaching and for students, etc.)?

- How do you see the place of /EU in such a competitive environment? Would that mean an increased need for intra-EU cooperation?
- If so, how and along what lines? Would you privilege an increased cooperation between Northern/southern European academic institutions?

9. What are the benefits of having international staff for your institution?

- At senior/junior level?
- Is the presence of non-national staff in teaching roles important for the institutional image/recruitment purposes?

10. In your opinion, what draws non-national staff to apply for work at your institution?

- How common it is for non-national PhD students at your institution to secure employment at your institution / elsewhere in the country?

11. Any sign of an 'academic exodus'? / decreased volume of applications from UK nationals in your own institutions?

- **[EU only]** How many UK workers/students can you afford to lose? If there will be a risk of future staff shortages and immigration rules will be very strict, will you be able to replace them with local/European graduates?
- Would the quality of research/teaching be affected as such?
- How easily can you replace them – in teaching, research posts? How would staff shortages impact on staff costs, would they increase/decrease? How would that impact on flexible academic programming/curricula and adjustments to fluctuations in student numbers? What would that mean in terms of risk-taking when starting a new study line, new course, etc.?

12. What steps has your institution taken so far in relation to UK staff retention?

- How could your institution support UK workers? (e.g. fund visas, access to lawyers)
- Would you still consider hiring UK candidates instead of EU candidates in spite of foreseeable barriers?

13. Do you think that the attractiveness of EU academic institutions will be affected after Brexit? If so how could the EU remain attractive in the international academic environment ?

<b>Set B = Administration – To edit and adapt depending on role</b>
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1. What are the principal international activities, partnerships and other connections with the UK in your university? You might refer briefly to

- Mobility of people (students, faculty, others)?
- Programmes of study, degree structures, quality assurance?
- Research and scholarship?
- Shared resources and facilities?
- Other forms of cooperation?

[2. In general terms, what changes do you foresee in the next few years, in the pattern of international activities, partnerships and other connections? Where is internationalisation going?]

3. Among your international partnerships and activities how do you evaluate those with the UK?

- In terms of income? (e.g. through incoming students)
- In terms of strategic positioning?
- In terms of institutional identity?

3. In what fields are partnerships and engagement with the UK the strongest/the most beneficial?

4. What are your main concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on your institution?

- How will Brexit impact formal alliances / collaborations / funding / staffing / programmes / research / student recruitment? [expand depending on the respondent's area of expertise]

5. How do you plan to compensate for the main Brexit-related problems you foresee emerging?

- What steps have already been taken?
- Do you plan to seek new partners / new funders / new student markets?
- What steps are you planning to take in order to deal with the fall-out of Brexit with regard to ongoing research programs (e.g. how to deal with staff, share founding and well-established networks)?

7. Are you confident that in the negotiation process both UK and EU will take due account of the current tight ties at the academic level?

- [- Would you consider feasible and necessary to advocate for a specific protocol on higher education in the future agreement between EU and UK?]

8. Do you expect to see an increase/decrease in competition between countries and HE institutions? If so, how and why and along what lines (e.g. research, or teaching and for students, etc.)?

- How do you see the place of /EU in such a competitive environment? Would that mean an increased need for intra-EU cooperation?
- If so, how and along what lines? Would you privilege an increased cooperation between Northern/southern European academic institutions?

11. Any sign of an 'academic exodus'? / decreased volume of applications from UK nationals in your own institutions?

- **[EU only]** How many UK workers/students can you afford to lose? If there will be a risk of future staff shortages and immigration rules will be very strict, will you be able to replace them with local/European graduates?

- Would the quality of research/teaching be affected as such?

- How easily can you replace them – in teaching, research posts? How would staff shortages impact on staff costs, would they increase/decrease? How would that impact on flexible academic programming/curricula and adjustments to fluctuations in student numbers? What would that mean in terms of risk-taking when starting a new study line, new course, etc.?

12. What steps has your institution taken so far in relation to UK staff retention?

- How could your institution support UK workers? (e.g. fund visas, access to lawyers)

- Would you still consider hiring UK candidates instead of EU candidates in spite of foreseeable barriers?

13. Do you think that the attractiveness of EU academic institutions will be affected after Brexit? If so how could the EU remain attractive in the international academic environment ?

<b>Set C = faculty – To edit and adapt depending on role</b>
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1. What are the principal international activities, partnerships and other connections with the UK in your department? You might refer briefly to

- Mobility of people (students, faculty, others)?

- Programmes of study, degree structures, quality assurance?

- Research and scholarship?

- Shared resources and facilities?

- Other forms of cooperation?

[2. In general terms, what changes do you foresee in the next few years, in the pattern of international activities, partnerships and other connections? Where is internationalisation going?]

3. Among your international partnerships and activities how do you evaluate those with the UK?

- In terms of income? (e.g. through incoming students)

- In terms of strategic positioning?

- In terms of institutional identity?

3. In what fields are partnerships and engagement with the UK the strongest/the most beneficial?

4. What are your main concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on your department?

- How will Brexit impact formal alliances / collaborations / funding / staffing / programmes / research / student recruitment? [expand depending on the respondent's area of expertise]

5. How do you plan to compensate for the main Brexit-related problems you foresee emerging?

- What steps have already been taken?

- Do you plan to seek new partners / new funders / new student markets?

- What steps are you planning to take in order to deal with the fall-out of Brexit with regard to ongoing research programs (e.g. how to deal with staff, share founding and well-established networks)?

7. Are you confident that in the negotiation process both UK and EU will take due account of the current tight ties at the academic level?

[- Would you consider feasible and necessary to advocate for a specific protocol on higher education in the future agreement between EU and UK?]

8. Do you expect to see an increase/decrease in competition between countries and HE institutions? If so, how and why and along what lines (e.g. research, or teaching and for students, etc.)?

- How do you see the place of /EU in such a competitive environment? Would that mean an increased need for intra-EU cooperation?
- If so, how and along what lines? Would you privilege an increased cooperation between Northern/southern European academic institutions?

9. What are the benefits of having international staff for your department?

- At senior/junior level?
- Is the presence of non-national staff in teaching roles important for the institutional image/recruitment purposes?

10. In your opinion, what draws non-national staff to apply for work at your institution?

- How common it is for non-national PhD students at your institution to secure employment at your institution / elsewhere in the country?

11. Any sign of an 'academic exodus'? / decreased volume of applications from UK nationals in your own institutions?

- **[EU only]** How many UK workers/students can you afford to lose? If there will be a risk of future staff shortages and immigration rules will be very strict, will you be able to replace them with local/European graduates?
- Would the quality of research/teaching be affected as such?
- How easily can you replace them – in teaching, research posts? How would staff shortages impact on staff costs, would they increase/decrease? How would that impact on flexible academic programming/curricula and adjustments to fluctuations in student numbers? What would that mean in terms of risk-taking when starting a new study line, new course, etc.?

12. What steps has your institution taken so far in relation to UK staff retention?

- How could your institution support UK workers? (e.g. fund visas, access to lawyers)
- Would you still consider hiring UK candidates instead of EU candidates in spite of foreseeable barriers?

13. Do you think that the attractiveness of EU academic institutions will be affected after Brexit? If so how could the EU remain attractive in the international academic environment ?

<b>Set D = Staff on insecure contracts</b>
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1. What are your current employment situation citizenship/residency status?



- Position, duration of contract, workload, pay
- Other roles / other institutions / other work
- Family situation, children, residency status

2. What is your employment and migration history? (= what led you here?)

- Date when PhD obtained, positions held since, which countries, unemployment periods?
- Why did you move to [present country]? How long were you planning to stay (and why did that change)?
- How long have you been working at X? In what role(s) if different from the previous one? Has your income increased/decreased?
- Since you moved to the [present country], has your personal situation improved or deteriorated?

3. Is being a non-national an advantage in your field/institution?

- What is the fit with your previous experience?
- Were your nationality/origin/credentials/experience/language skills an advantage to secure this job?
- How is your international experience valued in your field/department?

4. What is the impact on Brexit on your current situation?

- Did you receive any communication from your head of department, dean, VP, HR, union (if a member)?
- Have you experienced discrimination, comments etc. in your workplace since the referendum?
- Any indications that your current position might be at risk?
- If you left your current job, how easily could you be replaced?
- How likely is it that you would be in the same position next year/in 2/5 years' time?

5. What are your future prospects?

- Steps taken to secure residency/citizenship/relocate since the referendum?
- Employment prospects in the UK, and elsewhere? (Home country? Value of UK/EU experience?)
- How will Brexit affect the labour market in your area?
- What do you think is the main barrier to securing stable employment in the UK/EU in your present situation? (language, residency status)?