

Brexit: the political is personal values and emotion in career thinking

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Research Study

Why study the impact of Brexit on graduate career choice?

- The Brexit referendum is an opportunity to consider the effects of political events on career thinking.
- Findings from this small scale study will (hopefully) stimulate further thinking and discussion about the personal impact of political (and economic) uncertainty on the individual.

Methodology

- 15 final year UK students, from a cross section of courses at UWE Bristol (ages 21-26; 7 male / 8 female)
- In-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted July-Dec 2017
- Interview transcripts – thematically analysed

Findings revealed the centrality of emotions and values in career decision-making.

2 broad, interrelated, themes emerged, which were directly attributable to the Brexit campaign and referendum result.

Maybe before I was just, I want some job. But now it's "What can I do? What can I contribute?" So it's probably made me a lot more passionate, but also more serious about it.

It's definitely made me more motivated to try and create a better society

It's made me realise that you can't just go and do a job, 9-5, earn your money, go home, because that's not how society changes for the better.

I want to be a teacher, this kind of teacher, because of Brexit. I'd try and work where maybe there are signs of this kind of division. I'd seek out the problem. I'm not sure if I'd succeed, but I'd at least try.

I don't want to be seen as that English person who has these beliefs and values, working in a place where this is all we are, this is England, this is how we'll stay. I'd want to work with people and try and open up the social boundaries.

Theme 1: an emphasis on personal values

Career thinking is driven by a commitment to how the future could/should be.

There's some sort of regression going on, an intolerance towards migrants. And I think maybe Brexit didn't create that, but it definitely revealed it. Or maybe legitimised it.

I don't want to live in a place where those values aren't existing, or they're going backwards....So I don't think I'll live in England. I would live in England if we stayed in the EU.

This world that I'm going to be an adult in, that I'm going to be working in, that I'm going to be bringing my own children into, is it going to be a very secure one?

I thought we were better. I thought we were a progressive country

The impact it will have on me specifically is that I won't look for work in the UK, and I won't continue my studies in the UK.

I had some bridge into Europe. Now a lot of those doors have been closed off.

Theme 2: uncertainty and anxiety reveal political career thinking

Career thinking is driven by the anticipated personal impact of Brexit.

Not all doom and gloom!

*Things change,
people change.
The world is ever
changing.*

*It's about being
adaptable and
resilient to
change.*

*Jobs are out
there, and they
are jobs where an
impact can be
made.*

*The world is still going to
need teachers....That's
not going to go away
because we've left the
EU.*

*Maybe it's time
for a change?*

2017 (career aspirations)	2019 (destinations – Feb/March)
Primary teacher	PGCE Primary teacher training, UWE
Doctor or Physicians Associate	MSc Advanced Biomedical Science, UWE
NHS Graduate Management Scheme	MSc Sustainability and Management
Medical Research	Medical Laboratory Assistant (part-time), NHS
Clinical Psychology	Support Worker – zero hours contract; agency work
Management, Business, Human Resources	MSc Human Resource Management, UWE
Sustainability, Environmental	Permitting Officer, Environment Agency
Human Rights, Politics, Think Tanks	MA Global Studies (University of Gothenburg, Sweden & Fudan University, China)
Prison Reform, Charity sector	Customer Assistant, Sainsburys – zero hours contract
Secondary Teaching	PGCE Secondary Teacher Training, UWE
Midwifery	Midwife, NHS
Financial Services Management	Management Trainee – Enterprise Rent A Car
Sound Engineering	Freelance sound engineer/also DJ & musician
Mechanical Engineering	Graduate Scheme – Renishaw
Computer and Electrical Engineering	MSc Computer and Electrical Engineering, UWE

The big thing regarding Brexit and my career specifically is that I really, really need further education - my job is so low level and low pay because I don't have a postgrad, and I can't afford it. It's free in Europe, but because of Brexit, I can't do that. So I'm stuck. The grad job market is unforgiving and disheartening. It's all a bit hopeless because of Brexit.

I'm a little bit terrified that if I don't manage to get a cheap masters in Europe I'm going to end up abandoning science all together and joining my friends earning far more in miserable telesales jobs.

How much Brexit is actually affecting my career I have no idea, but I do know all my peers who have the option to get hold of an EU passport like me are doing it, so we're definitely worried!

Since graduating I've only become more and more aware of the effects of Brexit on my career aspirations. It's just so hard to get a job. You end up doing jobs you don't need a degree for.

It hasn't really affected me, I suppose. I ended up doing what I trained to do. But I'm still worried about what the future holds. And I definitely can't afford to buy a house or have many nice things. Maybe that sounds selfish, because at least I've got a job and a career, but I don't know....I don't really understand any of it, if I'm honest!

I just had to keep going, from temporary contract to temporary contract, until I got this job. Another temporary contract, but at least it's getting closer to what I want to do and it's a longer temporary contract this time. Is that because of Brexit? I don't know, maybe, probably, who knows?

Yes, I still want to leave the UK. I just can't see myself living here long term. I don't know that I blame Brexit anymore, but this country is still divided and nothing's improved. It's all such a mess.

My thoughts.....

A shift in practice to **place values centre stage and acknowledge the potential impact of social and political context ?**

An approach which is:

- **Part psychological**

(e.g. *Who am I? What motivates me? What do I want to achieve in life?*);

- **Part sociological**

(e.g. *What sort of society do I want to live in? What do I want to change? What is stopping me?*)

Thank you!

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McCrary, M. and Thomson, T. (2019)

[The political is personal: Brexit and the career aspirations of UK undergraduates](#)

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