**THE NORTH EAST AFTER BREXIT**

**TITLE**

**The Future of Public Administration Teaching and Research in the North East**

**AUTHORS**

***Dr Ian C. Elliott, Newcastle Business School, University of Northumbria, UK.***

[***ian.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk***](mailto:ian.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk)

***Dr Lorraine Johnston, Newcastle Business School, University of Northumbria, UK.*** [***lorraine.johnston@northumbria.ac.uk***](mailto:lorraine.johnston@northumbria.ac.uk)

**ABSTRACT**

The North East has five universities: Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Teeside and Sunderland as well as over twenty colleges. The five universities in the region employ over 14,000 staff and generate another 15,000 jobs through their activities (Universities UK 2014). In total their activities generate Gross Value Added (GVA) of nearly £1.6 billion, equivalent to 3.8% of the total 2011 North East GVA (ibid 2014). This is higher than in any other region of England meaning that any threat to the UK university sector represents a disproportionately greater threat to the North-East economy.

This chapter will look specifically at the opportunities and threats for teaching and research of public administration within the North East as a consequence of Brexit. Potential threats include the impact of any reduction in European funding (particularly research funding); reduction in the number of European students and reduction in the number of European staff working at universities in the North East. It is also noted that any wider economic uncertainty caused by Brexit may lead to further reductions in government spending. At the same time there may be opportunities that arise for public administration teaching as a consequence of Brexit. For example, any change in the status of the UK in Europe may lead to calls for a greater regional focus in England. There may also be a greater need for public policy and administration at all levels – national, regional and local – which would require significant development of staff across all areas of public services. The need for widespread workforce development would be heightened by any reduction in European staff working in UK public service organisations.

The chapter concludes by making the case for greater collaboration in teaching and research across UK and European universities and notes that, irrespective of the final result of Brexit, pan-European research and teaching of public administration seems needed now more than ever. Northumbria University has a unique place within the North-East region as a centre of expertise in public administration and public leadership, to address these threats and respond to any opportunities.

**Chapter outline (to discuss)**

1. **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of universities in the post-Brexit North-East. Specifically, it is noted that Brexit has uncovered (or heightened) significant grievances towards metropolitan elites (whether they be in Westminster or Brussels). There is, in many respects, a sense of the left behind – with an ever-powerful Westminster to the south and an emerging force in Holyrood to the north. There have, in recent years, been moves towards addressing some of these apparent grievances with measures such as English Votes for English Laws (EVEL), development of the Northern Powerhouse, introduction of combined authorities and locally elected mayors within major cities and Local Industrial Strategies. At the same time Brexit is likely to require further investment in governance systems and mechanisms across the UK.

This chapter begins by exploring aspects of the Brexit vote and highlights some of the underpinning grievances that may have influenced the significant leave vote from North-East constituencies. This section ends by recognising the peculiar position of universities within the region. The second section then explores the response to Brexit both in relation to regional governance and in respect of universities. It is noted that universities within the North-East may have a significant role to play in a post-Brexit devolved public sector landscape. In this context it is found that Northumbria University has a unique position with a long-established track record of teaching and research in public administration.

Overall it is found that ongoing constitutional changes pose significant opportunities and threats to universities within the North-East. This region of England has a particularly high number of universities which contribute highly to the regional economy and to employment. Yet at the same time these same universities are especially dependent on links with other European countries, and to the EU, in relation to research funding, staffing and students. These existing and long-standing links may help to limit any negative impact of Brexit. They may also provide an important role as anchor institutions for further regional development and multi-level governance systems.

In this regard, Northumbria University has an enviable position as the regional centre of excellence in the teaching and research of public administration. Developments such as the new Northern Centre for Public Governance and the new Senior Leaders Master’s Degree Apprenticeship in Strategic Leadership for Public Services demonstrate the capacity within the university to foster links across and within sectors, to help bridge the skills shortage across public services, and to nurture boundary-spanning leadership capabilities.

1. **The Conundrum of Brexit**
   1. The result

Research published after the referendum result has naturally focused on the causes of Brexit with arguments centring on the many potential causes of the leave vote. These have highlighted age, social attitudes and education as significant factors that represent the ‘left behind’ who were particularly pro-Brexit (Dorling et al. 2016; Goodwin and Heath 2016). Others have highlighted how the leave vote was the culmination of long-standing public and intraparty divisions particularly over the issue of Europe (Memon and Salter 2016). Interestingly, many of these divisions and antecedents of the Brexit vote have not been resolved in the three years following the result and in fact have led to more uncertainty and political turmoil as a number of UK Prime Ministers, and many more Brexit Secretaries, have worked towards negotiating the eventual withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

It is widely recognised within the research that the nature of the Brexit vote was highly complex. In particular, it must be stressed that there is no single United Kingdom picture that can account for the Brexit vote as Northern Ireland and Scotland both voted, along with London and Gibraltar, to remain (Harris and Charlton 2016). Even with England, the largest constituent of the UK, there is a mixed picture when we consider the regions.

As shown by Harris and Charlton 2016 the West-Midlands, East-Midlands and North-East were the three most pro-leave regions but there are also significant variations within these regions. Elsewhere it has been shown that areas which voted predominantly for leaving the EU are also those which have, over the decades, benefitted most from EU funding (Bart et al. 2017). Therefore, it may be assumed that they will also be those who will lose most though others have made the case that the areas which voted remain will be hardest hit economically from Brexit (Dhingra et al. 2017).

In the North-East, as with other regions, there were many different and complex factors which influenced the vote to leave. Rushton (2017) accepts that cosmopolitanism, educational level, and local community diversity all influenced voter behaviour. Yet they also highlight that some areas within the North-East, such as Teeside, voted very differently to what might be expected given levels of community diversity in that area.

Whatever the reasons for Brexit they are likely, as suggested by Memon and Salter (2016), to have historical and deep-seeded routes. Here we can identify three important factors that have been found to be contributing factors to the leave vote at a regional level – the North-South economic divide; the impact of austerity on the North and a form of democratic deficit.

* 1. North-South Divide

The privatisation of national industries of ship building, coal and steel which occurred from the 1980’s onwards had a particularly devastating effect on the North of England, Wales and Scotland. Where the focus on boosting the financial services industry provided a significant boost to London there was no such equivalent across other regions of the UK. In other words, Thatcherism exacerbated regional inequalities throughout the UK (Jessop et al., 1988; Lewis & Townsend, 1989; Hudson and Williams, 1995). These regional inequalities have been shown to map closely to the referendum results – with economically disadvantaged areas returning the largest ‘leave’ vote (Harris and Charlton 2016).

Some progress was made under the Labour Governments of 1997-2008 to narrow this divide and by 2005, unemployment in northern regions had gone down to the national average of 5% (Johnson 2015b). Yet there is evidence to suggest that regions such as the North-East were particularly badly hit by the recession and have made particularly slow recovery since (Johnson, 2015a). Others note that Brexit is likely to exacerbate regional inequalities even further (Billing et al.,2019) due to the lack of existing sub-national governance mechanisms or regional economic development activity which might otherwise have limited these effects. It is also widely accepted that regions including the North-East that voted to leave at also those that benefit most from EU membership (Los et al 2017).

* 1. Impact of austerity

It is estimated that jobs in the public sector or dependent on public funding accounted for 73.1% of all new jobs created in the North-East between 1998 and 2007 (Erturk et al 2012). This is in comparison to only 32.8% of new jobs created in London (ibid 2012). The dependence on public finance for new job creation in the North-East during this time is seen to be the product of de-industrialisation which had happened in the previous decades whilst London, in particular, benefited from a large expansion in the banking and finance sector. GDP growth during this time was also greater in London than in the North-East (Martin et al., 2016) and wage inequality between the regions grew (Elliott, 2017)

* 1. Democratic deficit

Finally, there is a sense of disenfranchisement as combination of the above plus seeing extra powers in Scotland and Wales as well as devolution in NI (though not working) and London. There is significant literature documenting the rise and fall of regional governance in the North East (Robinson and Shaw, 1994; Robinson et al., 2000; Shaw and Robinson, 2011; Shaw and Robinson 2018). The dismantling of regional governance systems and mechanisms in the North East has contributed to a sense of democratic deficit (Shaw and Robinson 2018). It is noted that,

*It is hard enough for a North East of 2.6 million people and only 29 MPs to make an impact in a highly centralised structure centred on London some 250 miles away. It is even harder for three Combined Authorities each to get a hearing, while the local authorities, battered by austerity, have almost no influence.* (Ibid: 848)

This is mirrored by Jeffery et al (2014), who showed how Scotland were seen to have preserved advantages as a result of the devolution settlement as well as a degree of resentment towards the EU.

The North-East is again significant in this context as it was the only region to hold a referendum on the establishment of a directly elected regional assembly (which was very significantly rejected by 77.9% the electorate). Yet there continue to be calls for greater regional devolution and policy has already shifted with the development of Devolution Deals, the Northern Powerhouse agenda and legislation on English Votes for English Laws (Giovannini 2016).

* 1. The role of universities

Brexit poses particular implications for universities. In this section we will explore the current context of universities in the North-East before going on, in the next section, to consider how best universities might respond to these particular challenges.

Across the UK it is widely recognised that universities benefit greatly from UK membership of the European Union. Universities across the UK receive £1 billion a year through programmes such as Horizon 2020 and as much as 19.7 percent of all research and development funding comes from outside the country, particularly from the EU (Marginson, 2018).

Within the North-East region there are five universities (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Teeside and Sunderland) as well as over twenty colleges. The five universities in the region employ over 14,000 staff and generate another 15,000 jobs through their activities (Universities UK, 2014). The impact of Brexit is significant as it is estimated that a significant proportion of staff, and particularly research-active staff, at these universities are non-UK EU nationals. Estimates suggest that up to 18% of staff employed by some universities in the North-East are non-UK EU nationals (North East Brexit Group 2018). The economic value of universities in the North-East is estimated to be a Gross Value Added (GVA) of nearly £1.6 billion, equivalent to 3.8% of the total 2011 North East GVA (Universities UK, 2014). This is higher than in any other region of England meaning that any threat to the UK university sector represents a disproportionately greater threat to the North-East economy.

It has been noted for some time that universities have an important regional role (Charles, 2003) and that new universities in particular are already making contributions to local and regional development (Glasson, 2003). In this regard there has been growing interest in the idea of universities as anchor institutions (Goddard et al 2014) and their potential role in developing place-based leadership and regional development activities (Colledge 2015). This role would seem to be particularly important in the North-East where it has been shown that universities disproportionally highly compared to other regions. How universities may respond to these challenges is the focus of the next section.

1. **What next for Universities in the North-East?**

3.1 The resurgence of regionalism

The prominence of constitutional issues within UK politics, as symbolised by both the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 and the EU Referendum in 2016, has intensified calls for greater devolution within England (and indeed greater devolved powers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). In the case of England, the Scottish Independence Referendum was quickly followed by calls from the then Prime Minister David Cameron for English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) in 2014 (Jeffery et al 2014). This was included in the UK Conservative Party manifesto for the General Election in 2015 and new procedures to allow for MP’s representing English constituencies to have a veto on laws only affecting England were approved by the UK Parliament in October 2015.

The sense that ‘metropolitan elites’ of London were the main beneficiaries of EU membership was perpetrated widely as part of the Leave campaign in 2016 (Billing et al. 2019). Such claims were later proven to be false (Los et al. 2017) but served to highlight the sense of disillusionment amongst some at the sense of disenfranchisement and reflect a long-standing dissatisfaction at how England is governed within the UK (Jeffery et al. 2014).

In this context significant powers were devolved to the Manchester City Region in 2014-15. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), encompassing 10 local authorities, had been in place since 2011 but further powers have been devolved since then, arguably in response to the Scottish referendum (Fenwick 2015; Kenealy 2016). Undoubtedly GMCA remains a model that dominates discussion around Combined Authorities although not always well received by others (Shutt and Liddle 2019). Following the model set out by Manchester Fenwick and Elcock (2018) note that further devolution of powers is likely even if a fully federalised UK is impossible to envisage.

Although much has changed since both referendums of 2014 and 2016 in relation to the development of combined authorities, elected mayors and local industrial strategies it has been argued that their development has been “nascent and patchy” (Dickinson and Cox 2016: 3). Others have described the development of combined authorities as “prolonged and patchy” (Liddle and Shutt 2019: 91). The IPPR have argued that Combined Authorities located in the North of England should cooperate within a new Northern Brexit Negotiating Committee (ibid 2016). Others have highlighted how greater devolution of powers to the regions is essential within a post-Brexit UK but that Brexit itself is “leading to both further governance centralization and also the stalling of many policy arenas” (Billing et al 2019: 757). Within this it is important to consider the role that universities may play.

3.2 HE reforms and the challenge of Brexit

In a context of Brexit, UK government has sought to mitigate university risk through the development of Higher Education policies that seek to secure the future of the university sector. The Higher Education White Paper – *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (DBIS, 2016) exemplifies a need for universities to thrive in Brexit. In considering the consequences of Brexit on the UK higher education sector, Mayhew, (2017, S156) predicts a number of facets comprising of “massive uncertainty” and “several areas of threat” that drive reflection. Four overarching pressures have been identified in relation to universities post-Brexit: the number of EU students in the UK; access to research funding; ability to attract staff from EU countries; and the ability of UK students to study abroad (Corbett 2016; MacKay 2016; Mayhew 2017).

More recently the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, known as the Augar Review after the panel chair, has recommended changes especially in relation to the funding of higher education. The recommendations include reducing tuition fees, extending the repayment period and reducing the income threshold for tuition loan repayments and reintroducing maintenance grants for disadvantaged students. The impact on universities would be felt most in areas such as the North-East (where graduate salaries are typically lower than in London and the South-East) as well as in courses relating to the public sector, such as nursing. Yet the recommendations have yet to be adopted by the UK Government and within the Cabinet there would seem to be a range of views. For example Jo Johnson MP, the current Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for Education, recently tweeted:

“Augar (as predicated) will destabilise uni finances, imperil many courses & reverse progress in widening access. Reducing fees to £7.5k will leave funding hole HMT won’t fill + benefit only highest earning grads at expense of general taxpayer. Bad policy, bad politics” (Johnson, 2019).

At the same time Universities UK have argued for a wide range of measures that the UK Government must put in place prior to Brexit. These include acting to support EU students and staff, ensure access to research funding is sustained, and “creating a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) that is informed by the expertise and experience of universities, sufficiently accounting for devolved / regional need” (Universities UK 2018). With the later of these measures we can see how universities may play a greater role within regional governance structures post-Brexit.

Universities UK have also suggested a greater role for degree apprenticeships arguing that “the system should develop to meet current and future demand for higher level skills in areas such as digital technology, management, *public services, and to boost regional economies*” [emphasis added] (Universities UK, 2019: 3). This includes a recommendation that degree apprenticeships are embedded within local industrial strategies. The skills shortages currently experienced across the public sector, including in health, social care and policing, are likely to be exacerbated by Brexit and so the role of degree apprenticeships may become even more important.

3.3 University responses to Brexit

The North East Universities response to Brexit and fluctuations in the market have sought to transform branch campuses towards the expansion of university activities through extending outreach and third mission activities. This includes a number of universities that have established campuses within EU countries (Adams 2016). University statements have begun to incorporate strategic economic plans and create a vision for economic growth that responds to regional economic development need (REFERENCE). The development of universities towards a more extensive role for regional engagement may prove key to ensuring the benefits of greater devolution towards the regions are realised. As providers of research and knowledge exchange, universities have begun to facilitate economic growth through evolving university research capabilities that foster innovation, entrepreneurship and new technologies. Policies have sought to evolve wider collaboration and networks with businesses and public agencies through research that contributes to building an evidence base of local economic challenges.

Overcoming barriers to regional and community engagement have led North East university contributions to adopt a strategic leadership approach and evolve roles that stimulate and bring together external knowledge interactions and research networks to enable global knowledge exchange. Restraints for North East universities in facilitating economic development include closing the cultural gap between universities and businesses.

North East Universities response to overcoming the barriers to regional economic development need has been to facilitate innovative partnerships and collaborations. These partnerships evolve mutual interactions with external local and global partner organisations, public agencies and industry to advance the “knowledge economy”. Examples of university- industry linkages and entrepreneurial activities to advance research and knowledge interactions between university researchers and industry illustrate benefits can be gained (D’Este and Patel, 2007; Boardman, 2009). Initiatives to enhance productivity (Lin and Bozeman, 2005) advance university engaging with industry collaborations as science parks to advance innovation and science based technologies (Meyer-Krahmer and Schmoch, 1998; Marques et al., 2006), university interactions with business to advance applied research (Balconi and Laboranti, 2006), as well enterprise incubator support services and Living Labs which act as intermediaries for institutions seeking to commercialise Intellectual Property through engagement in “open innovation” business models (Chesbrough, 2006). Examples include Porter’s clusters that enable university business knowledge transfer including Science Parks; Business Incubators; Technology Transfer Offices; Catapult Centres (Wilson, 2012) all of which strive to find solutions to regional problems.

3.4 The case of Northumbria University

There are a number of initiatives within Northumbria University which demonstrate how universities may operate within these new multi-level governance systems as anchor institutions for regional development.

Northumbria University’s Business Clinic demonstrates university business engagement through offering students the opportunity to work on a live industry problem. These diverse partnerships offer mutual respect where students can work on a consultancy project that provides a solution to a problem. This mode advances student capabilities in learning applied skills as well as enhancing student prospects for employability and graduate retention after graduation of key skills in the North East city region.

In 2017, to boost low skills aspiration and drive ambition and increase productivity the UK government introduced the apprenticeship levy for employers. Developing a higher level skills base was a key requirement of the Wilson Review

The prospect for university regional engagement needs to build on local regional strengths, universities increasingly operate with a variety of sectors and business to facilitate student entrepreneurship including providing facilities for business through start-up grants. Since 2012, Northumbria University has seen an increase in the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship programmes. An increase in new forms of university business interactions as regional businesses, local authorities, combined authorities, charities and mayor models to advance universities role in civic society engagement.

To counter this, North East universities have begun to embed locally in city regions and influence communities in their role of anchor institutions (Wilson, 2012). Anchor institutions provide cultural benefits and build on historical past and key strengths of the city region to encourage regional growth and academic entrepreneurship.

Examples of universities in the North East taking on regional development competitive roles has seen an increase in local collaborations with business markets with uncertainty of BREXIT have begun to take on regional identities through greater collaboration

1. **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Brexit continues to threaten to challenge the long-term position, mission and sustainability of the university sector in the North East. Much anxiety over competition and the long term roles for the uniqueness of North East Universities remain, yet Northumbria University is leading the way in building on the success of *Public Management and Public Policy* (3PM) Research Interest Group which hosts important public events, bringing academic research closer to practice. Examples of 3PM research seminars include - Little Heresies Talks as well as hosting the JUC Annual Conference 2018 & 2019. This has led to a newly created Northern *Centre for Public Governance* which has begun to extend the university role as lead provider of innovative education through engagement in government apprenticeship programmes as the MSc Strategic Leadership for Public Leadership which continues to strengthen partnership working with employers and agencies across the region. These innovative modules are CMI certified, professionally relevant and academically robust SLMDA programme. This places Northumbria in unique place as centre for excellence in public policy and public management. The expansion of university mission and strategic role in regional economic growth offers engagement with local communities. Greater emphasis has placed on Northumbria University high in the rankings and maintained their capabilities to extend their teaching and research reach beyond regional economic growth.

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