



# The Impact of Brexit on British International Schools Located in Europe

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## ABSTRACT

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On 23 June 2016, voters in the United Kingdom (UK) decided to terminate the UK's membership of the European Union – an event commonly referred to as Brexit. While some of the realities of living in the aftermath of Brexit are already acknowledged and understood, the topic of education in schools is still relatively unknown and evolving. This paper aims to look at the practices of British international schools in Europe and make recommendations to a specific British international school (Campion School) to ensure that it remains an attractive proposition for pupils and parents in a post-Brexit era.

The thesis looks at the issue through the lens of four threats:

- Demand for student places in international schools
- Supply of teachers working in international schools
- Curriculum implemented in schools
- Ontological challenges relating to international education.

Purposive and expert sampling methods were used to email a questionnaire to the Headteachers/Principals of British and international schools in Europe. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 42 respondents based on the abovementioned threats. The results were then triangulated and compared to the working practices of Campion School. Proposals were then made to safeguard Campion's existence and ensure that the school remains at the forefront of British/international education in Greece.

The study acknowledges that other events of global significance, such as Covid-19 and the conflict in Ukraine, blur the overall picture. However, at the time of writing, Brexit does not pose an existential threat to British international schools in Europe. Overall, pupil numbers remain buoyant. Very few schools have adapted their overt curriculum, and ontological challenges did not convey the need to move away from a school with a British identity. However, the study identified a shift in university applications from the traditional flow of applications to the UK to one where pupils applied to multiple countries, including many in the EU. Staff recruitment has become problematic regarding cost and time, but not unsurmountable for schools to overcome.

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Key words: Brexit, British, international, schools, EU

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

BSME	British Schools in the Middle East
BSO	British Schools Overseas
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIS	Council of International Schools
COBIS	The Council of British International Schools
DBT	Department for Business and Trade
DfE	Department for Education
ECF	Early Careers Framework
EU	European Union
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
HE	Higher Education
HMC	The Heads' Conference
IB	International Baccalaureate
IPC	International Primary Curriculum
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
NABSS	The National Association of British Schools in Spain
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
TA	Teaching Assistant
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
USA	United States of America

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Brexit will have a pervasive impact on society in the UK and the EU (Hughes, 2021).

On 23 June 2016, voters in the United Kingdom (UK) faced the question of whether the UK should remain a member of the European Union (EU) or whether it should leave. Fifty-one point eight percent (51.8%) voted to leave. The UK's membership concluded on 31 January 2020, with the transition period elapsing on 31 December 2020. This withdrawal process is commonly referred to as 'Brexit' - the abbreviation of the two English words, Britain and exit - and signifies the departure of the UK from the EU.

While the reality of living in the aftermath of Brexit is already acknowledged and understood in certain aspects of society, other areas of the post-Brexit landscape are still relatively unknown and evolving. One such area is that of education, or more specifically, international schools in Europe that offer primarily a British-style education to the pupils they educate.

Relatively little has been written on the subject of Brexit and its impact on international schools, and one of the aims of this thesis is to rectify the situation. Prior to the completion of the withdrawal process, Cambridge (2017) hypothesised that there could be four potential threats for international schools located within the UK:

- Demand for student places in international schools
- Supply of teachers working in international schools
- Curriculum implemented in schools
- Ontological challenges relating to international education.

While the threats identified by Cambridge (2017) relate to international schools in the UK, it is logical to postulate that the same concerns could also apply to British international schools located in Europe.

### 1.1 Objectives and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to look at the impact of Brexit on British international schools in Europe, an area of study where very little has been written. More specifically, the study will look to answer the question, **how can British international schools in Europe remain an attractive proposition in a post-Brexit era?** The newly gained knowledge will then be compared to the practices of a specific British international school - Champion School - to ensure the school remains a viable entity and the education provided remains relevant for its pupils and parents.

Given that the study is taking place some three years after the completion of Brexit and two years after the end of the transition period, enough time has elapsed to enable trends to be evident. However, it should be noted that the timing of Brexit coincided with the global Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the causality of any findings may be complex and not solely related to the impact of Brexit. Nevertheless, as purported by Cambridge (2017), Brexit has the possibility to be an existential threat to international schools. Consequently, this study aims to identify recommendations of best practices to enable international schools to remain worthwhile entities in a post-Brexit era.

## **1.2 Background - Champion School**

Champion School is a non-selective international school based in Athens, Greece. It offers an education based around British (Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), National Curriculum for England and Wales) and international curricula (International Primary Curriculum (IPC), International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma), is non-selective and is an all-through school for pupils from the ages of three to eighteen. Champion is fifty-three years old and has a tradition of academic success, with most pupils historically graduating and attending university in the UK. Pupil numbers hit an all-time low after Greece's economic crisis of the late 2000s (Dimitris Tziovas, 2017; Johnston, 2021), but since then, pupil numbers have steadily increased.

It is important to understand the context in which Champion operates. Being a fee-paying school, Champion survives by attracting parents to enrol their children. These are a mixture of ex-pat international families as well as Greeks seeking

either the best education they can provide for their child or for those Greek families that have a more global outlook on the world. Therefore, Champion needs to stay competitive with both the best Greek schools as well as other international schools operating in Athens.

Within Athens, five other international schools provide an education based around the medium of English, three with a British/international based curriculum and two with an American/international based curriculum. Certain districts in Athens attract a plethora of international ex-pat families, and the other international schools can be deemed to be located in districts that are more attractive to ex-pats compared to where Champion is located. Champion has the advantage of a spacious campus built on green belt land in the peripheries of Athens.

### **1.3 Objectives for the Thesis**

The paper will be a research-orientated development thesis using the threats identified by Cambridge (2017) as a lens to guide the development process in a post-Brexit era:

- Demand for student places in international schools
- Supply of teachers working in international schools
- Curriculum implemented in schools
- Ontological challenges relating to international education.

The outcomes will give insight to the senior management of Champion School, Athens, Greece, to help shape practices, ensuring Champion remains competitive in a changing market landscape. Thus, the results can help to ensure that Champion provides the best opportunities to its current pupils and that the school remains a viable concern for staff and future pupils.

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has blurred the aftermath of Brexit for international education, so this is a topic that is relevant both now and for at least the next 12 years – the length of time that a child enrolled at school in Year 1 has left before their compulsory schooling is complete.



Although the topic of international schooling is extremely broad, centring the study on what makes Campion competitive in a post-Brexit society through the lens of the threats identified by Cambridge (2017) will ensure that the focus is sufficiently narrow to be of considerable benefit. Reviewing relevant literature and comparing Campion's practices to the systems and routines of other schools in Europe will have direct relevance to the procedures of Campion School; it will ensure that the school remains a viable entity and relevant to its pupil and parent community.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The strategic question underpinning the study is, "**How can British International schools in Europe remain an attractive proposition for parents in a post-Brexit era?**" To ensure that there is a sufficient focus for the thesis, the following research questions will be utilised:

1. What changes have British international schools detected since the culmination of Brexit?
  - Change in pupil numbers (increased/decreased, differences in year groups/phases/key stages)?
  - Change in the university destination country?
  - Change in the nationality of applicants?
  
2. How has Brexit changed the working practices of how schools operate?
  - The medium of English?
  - British/International curriculum (A-levels/ International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma)?
  - Highly trained teachers?
  - The identity of the school?

Depending on the results, the study aims to make recommendations to Campion School to ensure it remains a viable entity offering the most appropriate education for its pupils in a post-Brexit era.

## **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

This introduction intends to establish the background context and framework for the research. The second chapter will then set the theoretical framework and look at the relevant literature around the dangers identified by Cambridge (2017), using each of the four threats as a starting point for reviewing relevant literature.

The third chapter then details the methodology used to collect and analyse the data. It also looks at potential issues related to the data collection process, such as reliability, validity, ethical considerations and bias. Chapter four then presents the results of the data analysis.

In chapter five, the main findings are discussed, and recommendations affecting the working practices of Campion School are made. The final chapter then revisits the research questions to summarise the findings and identify some of the study's limitations. It also recognises issues that arose throughout the research process and identifies areas for further research.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to the completion of the withdrawal process, Cambridge (2017) hypothesised that there could be four potential threats for international schools located within the UK:

- Demand for student places in international schools
- Supply of teachers working in international schools
- Curriculum implemented in schools
- Ontological challenges relating to international education.

Therefore, the review of relevant literature will be viewed through the lens of these four key strands.

### 2.1 Demand for student places in international schools

The international school market can be seen as a global multi-billion dollar industry (MacDonald, 2006). Since then, and due to globalisation and the increase in the middle class in many developing countries, the number of schools worldwide that identify as international schools has been proliferating (Bates, 2010). According to ISC Research, there are 13,179 International Schools globally, 2,393 of them located in Europe (*ISC Insight*, 2022). Many of these schools offer a British curriculum. Currently, 59 schools in Europe are recognised as British Schools Overseas (BSO) schools, meaning that in the last three years, they have undergone an inspection process that is recognised by the British government.

Throughout the world, the UK brand is one earmarked by quality, excellence and pioneering leadership (HM Government, 2019).

Education is an important export sector to the British Economy, which generated 20 billion GBP in 2016 (Kleibert, 2023). It is perhaps not surprising that Colin Bell, CEO of the Council of British International Schools (COBIS), commonly references COBIS's close working relationship with the UK's Department for Business and Trade (DBT), something also acknowledged by Debra Forsyth, CEO for the British Schools in the Middle East (BSME). At first glance, this might be surprising, and one might postulate that closer links with the Department for Education

(DfE) would be most prevalent. However, the DBT appreciate the financial revenues that can be gained through the export of a British education. This stance also fits with previous government's desire to market 'brand UK'.

### **2.1.1 Higher Level Education**

The literature on international schools shows quite clearly that their success depends largely on their ability to confer credentials that facilitate entry to the elite universities of developed countries (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

While the focus of this paper is aimed at schools throughout the EU, it is worth looking at the picture of Higher Level education (HE). After all, if the DBT is to reach its aim for education to be a leading export industry, most of the revenue generated will be by students coming to live and study in the UK for HE courses. Many of these students will have attended an international school: historically, most pupils attending a British international secondary-aged school have transitioned to a university in the United Kingdom.

In 2014/15, twenty-three per cent (23%) of all full-time students studying HE courses in the UK were foreign. EU students accounted for five point three per cent (5.3%) of all full-time undergraduates and twelve per cent (12%) of all taught Masters students. (Mayhew, 2017.) Mayhew goes on to mention that following the Brexit vote and before the end of the transition agreement, there was a slight fall in entrants from the EU. As immigration and migration were key policy drivers to the leave campaign for Brexit, one might speculate that the fall in numbers was due to a perception that the UK is less welcoming and more hostile to overseas students.

It is worth mentioning again that the termination of the transition period coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, causation is a complex issue. However, it is clear that since the conclusion of Brexit, there has been a decline in European student applications to British Universities (Stacey, 2021). One might rush to the conclusion that UK universities have a funding deficit due to a lack of income from students from the EU. However, this is not the case. The academic year 2021/22

saw a dramatic fall in enrolments from EU citizens, but this was offset by increased numbers of entrants from UK citizens and increased entrants from non-EU countries (Mayhew, 2022). Therefore, one might hypothesise that students in the EU are looking for 'better value' in their HE courses in countries other than the UK.

While UK citizens residing in Europe maintain certain benefits for several years post-Brexit, such as access to university places with home fee status, it is worth looking at the situation for EU citizens residing in Europe. Previously, EU citizens were afforded the same home fee status as UK nationals. Following Brexit, EU citizens are now required to pay the more expensive rate of international fees. In some cases, this can be more than double the cost of tuition for home fee status. Perhaps equally, if not more concerning to students from the EU is the loss of access to the Student Loan Company, thereby reducing their access to the finances required to fund their continuing studies (Mayhew, 2022).

Given the increased cost of university fees and the loss of access to the Student Loan company, it is perhaps unsurprising that EU citizens are looking at alternative HE options. The once-seen as the high-priced option of the USA is now potentially viewed as equally competitive, perhaps even more so, as US colleges have a long tradition of scholarships, thereby reducing the overall cost of education. The liberal arts programs can also be more appealing to students as it means that school-aged children are not required to make a definitive choice of subject prior to arriving at university. (Mayhew, 2022.)

Moreover, there has been an increase in English-taught university programs in Europe (Bothwell, 2017; Stacey, 2022). To offset the (potential) financial impact of Brexit, many UK universities opened satellite campuses across the world, and by definition, Europe, thereby removing the need for the (costly) student visa that is required to study in the UK (Scott, 2021). Considering that these European alternatives can appear much more affordable than university programs in the UK, it might be wise to speculate that EU citizens are looking at these courses as a realistic alternative to HE courses in the UK.

If the 'go to' destination of a UK university is no longer going to be the prevalent option for graduates of British international schools, then it brings into question a parent's desire to send their child to a British international school in the first place; thereby potentially posing an existential threat to British international schools located in Europe.

### **2.1.2 Student Diversity**

A lack of freedom of movement has the potential to reduce the diversity of the student body (Charkaoui, 2023).

International schools thrive on the diversity of their pupil population. In many schools, there will undoubtedly be many host country pupils, and there are almost certainly pupils from many different countries. A lack of freedom of movement from British nationals may mean fewer British passport holders will be enrolled as pupils, which has the potential to diminish the British cultural identity of the school.

## **2.2 Supply of teachers working in international schools**

It is well known that international schools have a high turnover of staff who are far more open to travel and short-term contracts (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). According to Bunnell & Atkinson (2020), there remains a reliance on Native English-speaking Anglo-American speakers as teachers in traditional international schools. Before Brexit, British passport holders had freedom of movement to work across the entire EU, but this has now ceased to be the case. With the labour flow restrictions, it might be reasonable to hypothesise that Brexit will force British international schools to seek alternative streams of attracting suitably well-qualified teachers to their schools. If these teachers are from the host country, one might hypothesise that this also has the effect of stemming the continual flow of teachers moving on after a few years of employment.

Linking the above paragraph to the comment by Charkaoui (2023) regarding the diversity of the student body, one might also hypothesise that Brexit might change the diversity of the teaching body. On the one hand, it might further diversify the

nationalities of the teaching body as schools look to recruit the most suitably qualified teachers from all over the world. On the other hand, one might argue that it will do the exact opposite and narrow the pool of nationalities amongst the teaching staff by hiring more locals who are suitably qualified. A third option is that schools continue to look to hire from the UK, with the possibility that the hiring process will become costlier financially and in time invested.

It is well noted that there has been a teacher recruitment problem in the UK, particularly in the subjects of Maths and Physics (Barmby, 2006; Romei, 2016; Passy, 2020). The latest attempt to resolve the teacher recruitment issue is to allow recognised bodies overseas to train and qualify new entrants to the profession (*MENA Report*, 2023). This can be seen as beneficial for British international schools in Europe. Recruiting European citizens who are trained teachers within the British education system but still retain freedom of movement within the EU can certainly be seen as beneficial to many international schools. However, this is not universal across all countries in Europe. In Greece, for example, as well as having a recognised teacher qualification, a would-be teacher needs to have newly qualified teacher (NQT) recognition (now early career framework (ECF) recognition); without such (NQT/ECF) recognition, the employee will not be able to gain a teaching licence. Therefore, it will be impossible to employ somebody straight out of a UK-style teacher training institution, regardless of where the training occurred.

### **2.3 Curriculum implemented in schools**

International Schools are autonomous, private bodies that cater to the globally advantaged (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

This study does not delve deeply into the definition of what an international school is. However, the work of Bunnell offers a discussion about intuitional legitimacy to truly call themselves international (Bunnell, Fertig and James, 2016, 2017). For simplicity's sake, a British international school will be deemed one where the curriculum on offer has elements that are similar to those found in a state school in the UK, the principal exams on offer being GCSEs and A-levels.

The etymology of the word curriculum comes from Latin and relates to a course of study rather than a subject. According to Hamilton, the first use of the word curriculum in relation to education appears to be in around 1576, with the word's origins seemingly closely linked to the Calvinist desire to bring increased order to education (Hamilton and Powell, 2014). Curriculum can mean different things in different contexts (Curcher, 2021). To think of curriculum as the subjects taught at school is too simplistic. Wilson (1997) describes eleven (11) distinct types of curriculum. Many, if not all, of these will be prevalent within a British international school, some of them consciously, some of them unconsciously. For example, what a school wishes to teach the children would be classified as the written or overt curriculum. What a school chooses not to teach the children would be classified as the null curriculum.

British international schools will need to make conscious decisions about the relevance of their curriculum moving forward. For example, will a school continue to teach British History, or will it deviate to a more European-centric course? Therefore, one can speculate that there may well be changes to both the overt and the null curriculum in a post-Brexit era both within schools in the UK and also in mainland Europe. One can also speculate that the social curricula and phantom curricula will evolve differently as the reality of living in a post-Brexit world is felt differently in the UK compared to mainland Europe, and, over time, the curricula diverge (Charkaoui, 2023). Another argument why the curricula in schools may deviate is given by Bond, who states that a curriculum needs to be coherently planned and provide skills for future learning and employment (Bond 2021). One can speculate that the skills required for future learning and employment will diverge as the needs of the UK and the EU follow separate trajectories.

It is clear that from a marketing perspective, international schools are an alternative to most, if not all, other schools found locally. Gardner-McTaggart (2018) suggests that it is this distinction that is fundamental to their existence and allows them to thrive, while Suresh, Babu and Mahajan (2021) suggest that it is possible to fuse an international school's existence with that of the host country. Fitzsimons (2019) found that attending an international school helped some pupils acquire a sense of international identity, while for others, it reinforced their national belonging. Focussing on US schools located internationally, Mahfouz, Sausner



and Kornhaber (2019) found that implementing the “Common Core” helped schools maintain their US culture and eased transitions between International and US schools.

While in the EU, bilateral recognition of qualifications was afforded to member countries. Following on from the end of the transition period, many A-level schools in Spain (the A-level being a qualification that is commonly sat by 18-year-olds in the UK), or more specifically the pupils they educate, found that Spanish universities no longer recognised the British qualification as equal to the Spanish equivalent exam. While this has been resolved for the time being (*UK - Spain mutual recognition of school qualifications* | *British Council*, 2023), as time progresses, one may speculate that there may well be further diversification in curriculum development and, consequently, accreditation processes between the UK and the EU. (Charkaoui, 2023).

### **2.3.1 English Language**

A core philosophy of any British International school is that the primary language of delivery is English. Even for those schools that also teach some classes in the host language, many other lessons are taught through the medium of English. Parents will send their children to a British international school to develop their English language skills and proficiency. Therefore, a relevant question regarding the impact of Brexit might be, “Is there still a need and desire for European citizens to speak English”? (Modiano, 2017). Modiano argues that the answer to the previous question is ‘yes’, and Brexit may leave space for the emergence of “an authentic European English, used by members of the EU as a second language”. This implies that the elite, internationally minded and socially mobile members of society will continue to value all that an international school has to offer, including enhanced proficiency in the use of the English language.

### **2.3.2 Language Learning**

Referring to schools in the UK, Lanvers states that the learning of a Modern Foreign Language (MFL) is in decline (Lanvers, Doughty and Thompson, 2018). One can speculate that the attitudes of the British voters who voted to leave the EU

will further eradicate the number of school pupils who desire to study an MFL subject to a high level. There are 24 official languages in the European Union, including English (*Languages, multilingualism, language rules | European Union*, no date). One of the founding aims of the European Union is multilingualism. It might seem obvious that children attending an English-speaking school in a host country in mainland Europe will become proficient in multiple languages. Therefore, a possible decline in MFL proficiency amongst children in UK schools might benefit children attending British international schools. Assuming that children attending international schools are more adept at languages than their counterparts in the UK, this would suggest that they should ascertain higher scores in high-stakes exams such as GCSEs and A-levels. This can then be used as an advantage for admission to a UK university.

### **2.3.3 Next Steps – Curriculum implemented in schools**

Biesta proposes three domains for the purpose of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2015). An effective curriculum needs to address these different elements. What is unclear is precisely what this will look like in British International schools post-Brexit. Perhaps in the near future, the curriculum in British International Schools will be akin to the curriculum model proposed by Stommel (2017), where he argues for emergent outcomes where trajectories are set in advance rather than exact outcomes being predetermined.

## **2.4 Ontological challenges relating to international education**

The ultimate ontological challenge related to international education is the existence of the school. Therefore, a realistic question to ask is whether Brexit poses an existential threat to British international schools in Europe? Will schools that previously identified themselves as British intentionally change their identity to satisfy market demands?

### **2.4.1 British Values**

Modern education and education policy are inevitably entangled with the world beyond one's own national borders (Fan and Popkewitz, 2020).

Since 1945 and the decolonisation of countries in the Near and Middle East and South-East Asia, several changes have radically altered Great Britain. The two ruling parties (Labour and Conservative) have historically had very different stances on the topics of nation, multiculturalism and globalisation. This division in the eyes of the people led to tensions between multiculturalism, monoculturalism and monoethnic ideals of national identity. (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2021.) There was confusion over what it meant to be British.

For a school to be officially classified as a British School Overseas (BSO), it must pass an inspection recognised by the UK government. Part of this inspection checks that the school adheres to fundamental British values. Therefore, it is relevant to ask what these fundamental British values are and whether they are still appropriate for British international schools in a post-Brexit era?

In the document the 'Standards for British Schools Overseas', the Department for Education states that the school must "not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (Department for Education, 2023). One can argue that these are not uniquely British and are relevant for all schools regardless of the country of origin (Colls, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that these values are appropriate for all international schools. This can be seen as complementary to the principles of peace and equity, which Gardner-McTaggart assert are inherent in the ethos of most international schools (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). At this point, one cannot see how Brexit can adversely affect these ideals.

#### **2.4.2 The identity of the school**

Education can be viewed as a political instrument that is used to advance, support and/or reinforce a national British perspective/identity (Maylor, 2016).

Identity can be seen as a way of coercing social cohesion. Therefore, a British international school can be seen as an attempt to forge social cohesion through the lens of a British/international identity.

International schools thrive on the differences they afford compared to their local rivals. The international nature of the education they offer is then seen as fundamental to their schools' identity. (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018.) It is, therefore, an essential question to ask if schools will retain their British identity post-Brexit, or will they position themselves as more international?

Schools that market themselves as British have a conscious decision to make regarding how they evolve post-Brexit. Suresh Babu & Mahajan (2021) argue that it is possible, and indeed beneficial, to brand itself as both local and international at the same time – in the case of their study, Indian and international. Bunnell (2005) found that for many international schools, there was little evidence of strategic planning for a marketing plan. Therefore, a challenge for British international schools located in Europe will be to develop a marketing plan that represents the (new?) ideals of the school in a post-Brexit era.

## **2.5 Conclusion of Theoretical Framework**

Very little has been written on the impact of Brexit on British international schools located in Europe, but by looking at the written literature through the lens of Cambridge (2017), one can see patterns emerging as to the obstacles that British international schools will need to navigate.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

While the current literature around the chosen topic is scant, one can postulate that schools have responded to the realisation of Brexit by making a number of distinct choices. Initially, it is hypothesised that these choices are in response to some or all of the threats identified by Cambridge (2017). Therefore, the initial phase of the research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It was conducted by sending a questionnaire to international schools across Europe, the questions relating to Cambridge's four threats. A survey can be seen as an efficient way of collecting data as it is a flexible method that can be employed in various situations (McCombes, 2019). As well as sending questions that were quantitative in nature, respondents had the opportunity to respond by writing open-ended comments. This allowed for deeper contextual information and helped triangulate the results from the closed questions.

#### 3.1 Overview of Methodology

In research-orientated development work, the borderline between quantitative and qualitative research is, however, often blurred. The methods may take on the role of a medium. (Moilanen, Ritalahti and Ojasalo, 2022.)

In order to answer the strategic question, "How can British International schools in Europe remain an attractive proposition for parents in a post-Brexit era?" a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was obtained through a survey. An email questionnaire was considered the most relevant method for obtaining the required data as it allowed ease of access to a large sample size without the constraints of time; the results of the survey then being relatively easy to manipulate. (McCombes, 2019.) One drawback of a survey via email is the lack of help and support afforded to the interviewee (Moilanen, Ritalahti and Ojasalo, 2022). However, it should be noted that the questionnaire did not ask questions that can be deemed as pertaining to sensitive information. Therefore, this increases the chances of obtaining reliable data.

Quantitative research is usually used to collect and analyse information using numbers and statistics, usually expressed in terms of numbers and graphs. It is

commonly used to establish generalisable facts about a specific area of focus. In contrast, qualitative research usually looks at words and meanings and is used to understand conceptions, opinions or experiences. It is utilised to give an understanding of topics that are not well understood. (Streefkerk, 2019; Sternad and Power, 2023.) However, one can also use quantitative techniques to analyse qualitative data and/or to include open-ended responses to gather qualitative responses in a quantitative questionnaire (Sternad and Power, 2023).

Quantitative methods were used to obtain statistics relating to changes that respondents have (or have not) occurred in international schools following Brexit. A copy of the initial email requesting participation in the survey can be found in Appendix 1, and the questions related to the survey are included in Appendix 2. The researcher tried to ensure that the language used in the survey was kept as clear and straightforward as possible with the recognition that the target sample could be deemed experts in this field. Nevertheless, the researcher tried to ensure that the questions did not include unnecessary, or burdensome to understand, industry-specific jargon. (McCombes, 2019.)

The questionnaire looked to identify changes such as:

- Change in pupil numbers (increased/decreased, differences in year groups/phases/key stages)
- Change in the university destination country
- Change in the nationality of applicants
- The medium of English as the language of instruction
- British/internationally recognised qualifications (A levels/ IB Diploma)
- Highly trained teachers
- The identity of the school.

This started to give answers to the two research questions:

1. What changes have British International Schools detected since the culmination of Brexit?
2. How has Brexit changed the working practices of how schools operate?

To better understand contextual information and add credibility to the quantitative data, respondents were given open-ended questions to include any other information that they believed was relevant and/or important. Answers were then triangulated, giving credibility to the results of the research.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

In order to see how schools have responded to the aftermath of Brexit, the questionnaire was written based on the threats identified by Cambridge (2017). Most of the questions were closed in nature, but the option to expand on answers and give additional contextual information was afforded at the end of each section. Using closed questions facilitated statistical analysis of the answers, while the ability to provide additional contextual information allowed for greater identification of themes not previously considered by the author.

Care was given when creating the questionnaire to ensure bias was not evident in the makeup of the questions. To ensure the questionnaire was functional, it was first trialled by two Headmasters at other British international schools in Athens. It was made clear to the Headmasters in Athens that their answers would not be included in the results due to a possible conflict of interest between the schools. Therefore, the reliability of the data obtained by these sample questionnaires was not important, merely the feedback obtained to ensure that the questionnaires were suitable and fit for purpose. The feedback from the two Headmasters in Greece was positive, and only minor amendments to the questionnaire were made. Their responses were not included in the data analysis.

A large number of commercial alternatives are available for the use of online questionnaires. In the end, Jotform was the platform of choice for several reasons. To try and facilitate a high uptake in responses, the questionnaire was designed for an efficient end-user experience. Jotform allowed for images to be used in the creation of the questionnaire as well as the branding of TAMK. It was also designed so that the questionnaire would not be too time-consuming for the respondent and take no longer than ten minutes to complete (Moilanen, Ritalahti and Ojasalo, 2022). The user experience was enhanced due to the fact that Jot-

form allows for conditional logic to be applied to the questions based on the subject's response, hence making the questionnaire a smoother and better experience for the respondent. A paid subscription was used to eliminate the Jotform branding so as not to influence the respondent in any way.

Jotform is also GDPR compliant, permits a large number of responses to be gathered, and allows the responses to be exported to spreadsheets for data manipulation and analysis of the results.

### **3.3 Participants**

The intention was to reach as much of the population of British International Schools located in mainland Europe as possible. Therefore, purposive sampling was used. This type of sampling method refers to the researcher's judgement on selecting the best information available to achieve the aims and objectives of the study (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Sternad and Power, 2023). Purposive sampling can be deemed as appropriate as British international schools located in Europe can be seen as a subset of all international schools located in Europe. Due to requiring individuals with a high level of knowledge of the workings of the school, the questionnaire was addressed to the Headteacher/Principal of the school. Therefore, this can also be seen as expert sampling. This type of method (expert sampling) is useful when investigating new areas of research, as in the case here (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

The email addresses to whom the survey was sent were obtained by data freely available on the internet. This information was found by utilising the websites of four organisations with schools located in Europe: COBIS, HMC, NABSS and CIS. Three of these organisations have membership all across the globe, but this thesis is only interested in international schools in Europe. Therefore, great care was taken to edit the list of schools and only contact schools located in Europe.

A small caveat to the list of international schools in Europe is that international schools in the United Kingdom and Greece were also omitted. While the United Kingdom is certainly in Europe, the fact that these schools are outside the Euro-



pean Union means that they may have responded differently to schools in mainland Europe. Greece was omitted to enhance the reliability of the data response and did not include information from schools that can be perceived as Champion's potential rivals.

It is worth noting that two of the organisations listed above, COBIS and NABSS, have the word "British" in their titles. Cambridge (2017) hypothesised one of the threats of Brexit to be existential in nature. Given that this information is being gathered two years after the completion of the transition period, it might be fair to assume that some schools have already decided to consciously move away from their "British identity" and more towards an international one. Therefore, the decision was also taken to include international schools located in Europe from within the organisation of the Council of International Schools. This way, should a school that previously identified itself as British in nature already transitioned to a more international outlook, there was a chance that they would still be included in the survey results. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the validity of the data obtained might be called into question as answers relating to the moving away from a British identity could be seen as biased as schools that have already transitioned will be omitted from the survey sample.

In total, the email/questionnaire was sent to 269 schools. Delivery failed to 3 email addresses, so the sample size was a potential 266 schools. Due to a low response rate, a reminder email was sent. Again, a second reminder email was sent due to a low response rate. In the end, 42 schools responded, meaning a response rate of 16%.

### **3.4 Reliability and Validity of the study**

Quantitative methods produce superficial, reliable data, whereas qualitative methods produce deeper but poorly generalisable data (Moilanen, Ritalahti and Ojasalo, 2022).

Reliability and validity are two factors that are crucial to the success of all investigations and research studies. Reliability implies that the results of this study can be reproduced if the research is conducted again under the same circumstances

and conditions. A highly reliable study does not necessarily mean the results are correct. Validity, on the other hand, means that the results of the study have measured what was intended. (Middleton, 2019.)

To enhance the reliability and validity of the results, great care and attention were given to ensure that each question was narrow enough in focus with enough context to ensure that the respondent could answer accurately. Care was given to ensure that no questions were irrelevant to the desired outcomes of the survey. (McCombes, 2019.)

Given that only 42 schools responded, this can be seen as a reason for less reliable data. It also brings into question a possible issue of sample bias. That is to say, only those people who felt strongly about the issue responded, and it missed the silent majority. However, in the case of this study, by inviting a large number of respondents from all across Europe is a reason for the enhanced reliability of the study.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

A paragraph was written at the beginning of the questionnaire highlighting key ethical issues (Bhandari, 2021), as seen in Appendix 2. The action research was conducted according to the principles laid out by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023): reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability.

- **Voluntary Participation.** Respondents were free to answer the questionnaire or not.
- **Informed Consent.** It was made clear that by responding to the questionnaire, they consented to their answers being included in the research. It was also made clear that the research would be published on the internet.
- **Anonymity.** Respondents were allowed to complete the questionnaire without leaving identifiable data. The names of individual schools were not collected, merely the country that they are located in.
- **Confidentiality.** No identifiable data of respondents is given in this thesis.
- **Potential for harm.** The data is kept securely following the principles of GDPR and is only available to the researcher.

### 3.6 Research Bias

Because purposive sampling was used, there is a high risk of researcher bias. This was minimised due to the large number of schools to which the questionnaire was sent.

Qualitative action research is subjective and, by definition, susceptible to the author's preconceptions and biases. The author recognises this fact and has tried to ensure that the analysis of data has been conducted as objectively as possible. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that biases may have crept into the work. These biases may include the choice of data collection methods, the language used in the questions, and recommendations made as a result of the findings of this action research.

Possible bias may also have arisen because the author is also the Headmaster of the organisation. This dual role of researcher and Headmaster may be prevalent in the construction of the data analysis and the interpretation of the results. Therefore, it may be said that confirmation bias is rampant throughout the conclusions (Street, 2017). To mitigate the impact of researcher bias, the author remained aware of the dual role and strove to remain consciously objective throughout the process.

Finally, it has to be acknowledged that participant's desirability bias may have crept into the answers from the questionnaire. This is where the respondent may feel the need to respond in a manner they think is socially acceptable (Bergen and Labonté, 2020).

## **4 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The purpose of this study is to look at the impact of Brexit on International schools located in Europe. This chapter will look at Campion's current response in light of Brexit through the lens of the threats identified by Cambridge (2017). It will then summarise the results of the questionnaire, again through the lens of the threats identified by Cambridge (2017). Where additional themes have emerged, these will be commented upon.

If Campion is going to take on board the best practices from other international schools located in Europe, it is first necessary to analyse current practices at Campion in the wake of Brexit. Attributing one cause to the specific effect on one action in education is highly complex (Allen, Evans and White, 2021). This is especially true when looking at the impact of Brexit at Campion, due partly to the confusion and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Other factors that may have impacted pupil numbers in international schools in this specific epoch include the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Brexit also coincided with the introduction of a new headmaster at Campion.

### **4.1 Campion's response to threats identified by Cambridge (2017)**

At the time of writing, it is two years since the conclusion of the transition period. Before looking at the practices of other international schools, it is worth looking at Campion's immediate response to the threats identified by Cambridge (2017). At this point, the author does not hypothesise whether they directly result from Brexit or whether other contributing factors play a role. Instead, it identifies changes to practices that have occurred since the conclusion of the transition period (31 December 2020).

#### **4.1.1 Demand for Student Places at Campion School**

Since the culmination of Brexit, pupil numbers at Campion have risen. However, it is recognised that this could well be attributed to other factors, not least Greece and the schools' effective response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that many of the increased pupil numbers came from Greek nationals relocating

back to Greece. While some of these were undoubtedly a response to Brexit, many Greek nationals, both from the UK and the Middle East, returned to Greece due to a change in personal priorities brought on by the pandemic, such as a desire to be closer to family members, and a sense of security in Greece's response to the pandemic. Greece's Golden Visa (Krestas, 2019) has continued to attract much attention from foreign nationals, particularly Chinese. Many of those attracted to Greece through the Golden Visa scheme require an international education. As such, Campion pupil numbers have grown.

However, while the overall pupil numbers have grown, a slight reduction in the number of pupils in the Junior School, particularly in the very youngest year groups, is evident.

Campion has also decided to appoint a specialist universities advisor. Previously, this was a post that was held by someone who also had teaching responsibilities. The intention of appointing this individual is to meet the needs of applying to a more diverse number of universities across a broader range of countries.

#### **4.1.2 Supply of teachers working at Campion School**

Campion always advertised in well-known UK newspaper publications (including online) such as the TES. From the time of the economic crisis in Greece in 2008 (Krestas, 2019), the headmaster has always tried to recruit, whenever possible, candidates with an association/connection to Greece. Since Brexit, the recruitment process of UK nationals has become much more complex due to the necessity of the long-stay type "D" visa. This has elongated the process of relocating to Greece. It also increases the cost of recruiting UK nationals as the school absorbs the expenses associated with obtaining the required paperwork. This includes ensuring professional qualifications such as degree certificates and teacher training credentials are certified with an apostille stamp.

Experience over the past three recruitment cycles has shown it now takes multiple months to gather together all the correct paperwork together. In fact, for the academic Year 2022/23, two members of Campion staff arrived after the start of the term because their first application for a type "D" visa was rejected.

In response to the elongated application process, Campion has moved the date of resignation earlier. Formerly, it was the end of March, but this has been moved to the last working day in February.

It is worth noting that during the past three recruitment cycles, the three since the culmination of Brexit, the exact requirements of bringing a new employee with a British passport have changed each year. Such changes include where applicants had to attend to apply for the type “D” visa, first in the Greek embassy in London, which later changed to the Global Visa Centre. Initially, applicants had to obtain a type “D” visa, and their work permit was issued upon arrival in Greece. Now, the work permit must be obtained before the type “D” visa is issued.

Campion’s experience of recruiting new staff clearly shows that the landscape is still changing and is likely to remain such as the most efficient solutions to work-force problems are found.

#### **4.1.3 Curriculum implemented at Campion School**

Campion School has changed its curriculum in two significant ways to ensure it remains competitive in a post-Brexit era. One such change is a conscious decision directly based on the existential survival of the school. The other results from a “happy accident” forced on the school by the local education ministry.

As mentioned in the introduction, Campion is a fee-paying school. Very few multinational companies in Greece offer their employees the benefit of paying for their children’s education. Therefore, most Campion parents pay their tuition fees themselves. For some parents, this is a financial challenge but a decision they have taken in the long-term interests of their child. Since the termination of the transition period, those pupils who do not hold a British passport or proof of pre-settled status no longer have access to UK university home fee status. Therefore, these pupils are required to pay the much higher cost of international university fees, and the idea of parents sending their children to university in the UK is no longer affordable.

Hughes (2021) identified that The Netherlands is most likely to be the preferred alternative country for a Higher Education degree with the language of tuition remaining English. Hughes also identified Germany as the second most likely destination. In response to broadening the number of destination countries where Campion graduates may attend university, the school has consciously decided to introduce German into the Year 9 curriculum. The intention will then be that these pupils have the option to continue studying German through to graduation at the end of Year 13 and have the option of progressing to higher education in Germany.

The “happy accident” referred to earlier refers to a law that has been in place since schools in Greece started teaching the IB diploma in the 1990s. In response to Greece’s fear that host country schools would abandon the local curriculum and thereby, in part, facilitate a loss of its cultural identity, the Greek government of the time imposed Law 2327, 31 July 1995.

Paragraph 23a of this law states, “the IB diploma is considered equal and equivalent to the high school diploma awarded by the high schools”, and paragraph 23b states, “In addition to the curriculum of the International Baccalaureate, the course of Modern Greek Language and Literature and the History of these classes, according to the curriculum of the public schools”.

While it might be seen as a utilitarian law to help Greek Nationals preserve a sense of national identity, it is next to impossible for many pupils who are enrolled in international schools in Greece to follow the required program of study as their proficiency in the Greek language is far below the standards necessary to access the content being taught. For many years, sensibility reigned, and this was not strictly enforced in international schools. However, more recently, and with the increased popularity of the golden visa scheme (Krestas, 2019), the Greek Ministry of Education has exerted more pressure on international schools to adhere to this requirement.

In response to this requirement for all pupils to take the isotimia (ισοτιμία - equivalence) lessons, Campion has acted by increasing the provision of Greek for be-

gainers in the Junior School, with the intention to improve their levels of proficiency sufficient to access the material required in their final two years of study. A second modification to the curriculum is in the reduction of time given to the teaching of physical education in the IB diploma years. Instead, this time has been transferred to the teaching of the isotimia (equivalence) lessons. In theory, this means that Champion graduates can now access (with the passing of some additional examinations) the Greek HE market.

#### 4.1.4 Ontological challenges relating to international education

As mentioned above, Brexit has the potential to be an existential threat to British international schools. The question of whether parents should send their children to a British International School in the wake of Brexit is one that all potential parents have to contemplate. Therefore, it is logical to look at two critical sources of information since the conclusion of Brexit: pupil numbers and university destinations.

TABLE 1. Pupil Numbers at the start of the school year at Champion School

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Junior	286	281	265	265	257	259	260	255
Senior	297	317	311	336	350	378	398	409
Total	598	598	607	600	607	637	658	664



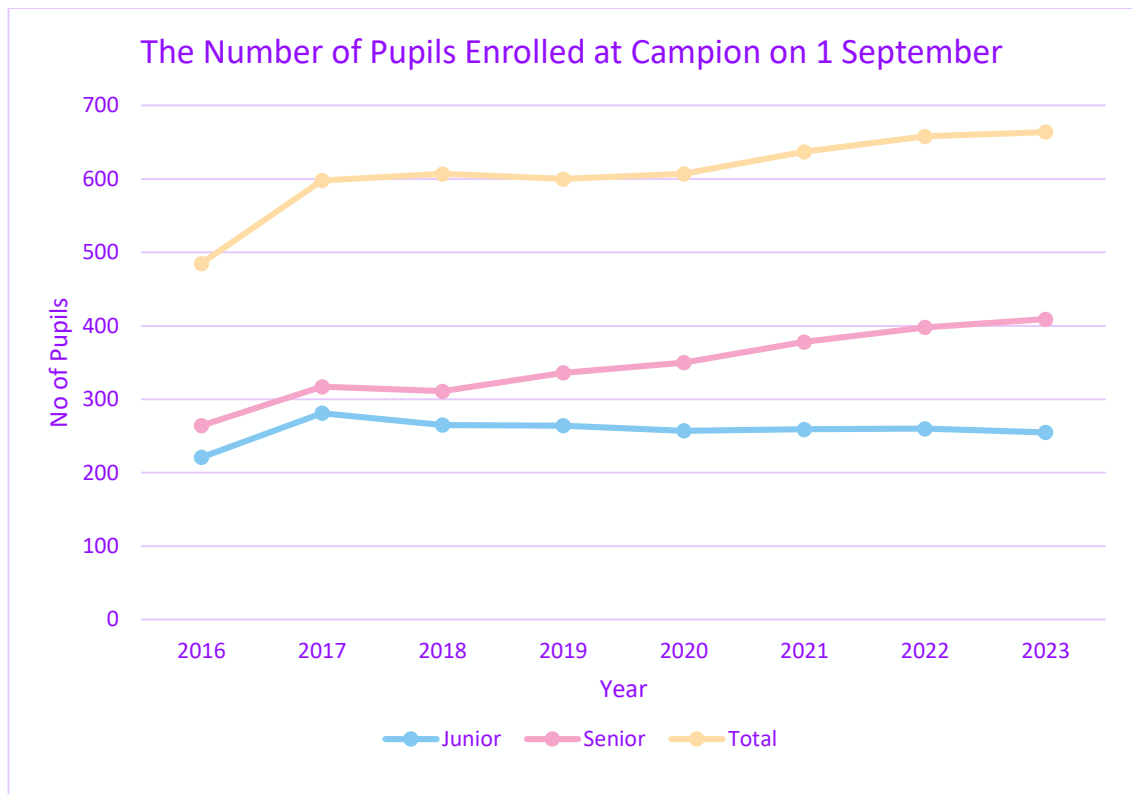


FIGURE 1. The number of pupils enrolled at Campion on 1 September

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the numbers of pupils enrolled at Campion on 1 September each year since the Brexit vote on 23 June 2016. A rise in pupil numbers can be seen from the graph at the start of the academic year 2017 - the first year after the vote to leave. From that point on, for the Junior School, it can be seen that a liner regression line with equation:

$$y = 276.29 - 3.32x$$

where  $x$  represents the number of years after 2016.

suitably models the number of pupils in the Junior School. A Pearson's correlation coefficient of:

$$r = -0.825$$

implies that the correlation line is strong and negative, meaning that one can conclude that Campion Junior School has steadily lost pupils regularly since 2017.

However, when one looks at the picture in the Senior School, it can be seen that the regression line can be modelled by the equation:

$$y = 17.571x + 286.71$$

With a Pearson's correlation coefficient of:

$$r = 0.978$$

This implies that the correlation line is very strong and positive, signifying that Champion Senior School has consistently gained pupil numbers since the culmination of Brexit.

Returning to the existential threat to a British international school, it appears that there may be a threat to the number of pupils in the Junior School but possibly, somewhat counterintuitively, not in the Senior School. One might hypothesise that a possible explanation might be due to those children having previously been enrolled in a British/international style education before the vote to leave the European Union, whereas that is not the case for Junior-aged children.

A second adaptation that Champion has made since the culmination of Brexit is to employ a specialist Universities Counsellor; previously, it was a role held by a member of the teaching staff. Since the culmination of Brexit, university destinations have diversified, including many more European countries, such as Spain and Holland. This means the position has become more complex and time-consuming than in previous years.

TABLE 2. A list of countries for university entries at Champion School since Brexit.

	<b>Country of Entry</b>	<b>No. Pupils 2021</b>	<b>No. Pupils 2022</b>	<b>No. Pupils 2023</b>
<b>Europe</b> <b>45 = 46%</b>	England	10	15	14
	Scotland	3	2	2
<b>EU</b> <b>41 = 40%</b>	The Netherlands	6	5	2
	Ireland	3	--	--
	Italy	3	--	2
	Germany	--	2	--
	Cyprus	1	--	--
	Czech Republic	--	1	--
	Denmark	1	--	--
	France	2	1	--
	Greece	--	1	3
	Poland	1	--	--
	Portugal	1	--	--
	Spain	2	1	1
	Sweden	--	1	1
<b>N. America</b> <b>15 = 15%</b>	United States	2	--	11
	Canada	--	1	1
<b>Total = 102</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>37</b>

Table 2 clearly shows that since the culmination of Brexit, many pupils have opted to pursue a university degree outside of the traditional location of the UK. The fact that over the last three years, Champion pupils have attended universities in thirteen different countries within the EU shows how diverse the job of University Counsellor has become. It has become a job with a need and requirement to have a working knowledge of how to apply to universities worldwide successfully.

Returning to the theme of ontological changes, while Champion has retained its British dimension and its British identity remains fundamental to the school's

ethos, it is pointed out that the school has actively marketed the successful placement of pupils in universities across Europe. Thereby increasing the international dimension of the education provided and ensuring that the school remains attractive to both those families who desire a university education in the UK and those who would prefer the (more cost-effective?) option of a university course in mainland Europe.

## 4.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire Responses

### 4.2.1 Demographics of Questionnaire Responses

In total, the email/questionnaire was sent to two hundred and sixty-nine (269) schools. Delivery failed to three email addresses, so the sample size was a potential two hundred and sixty-six (266) schools. In the end, forty-two (42) schools responded, meaning a response rate of 16%.

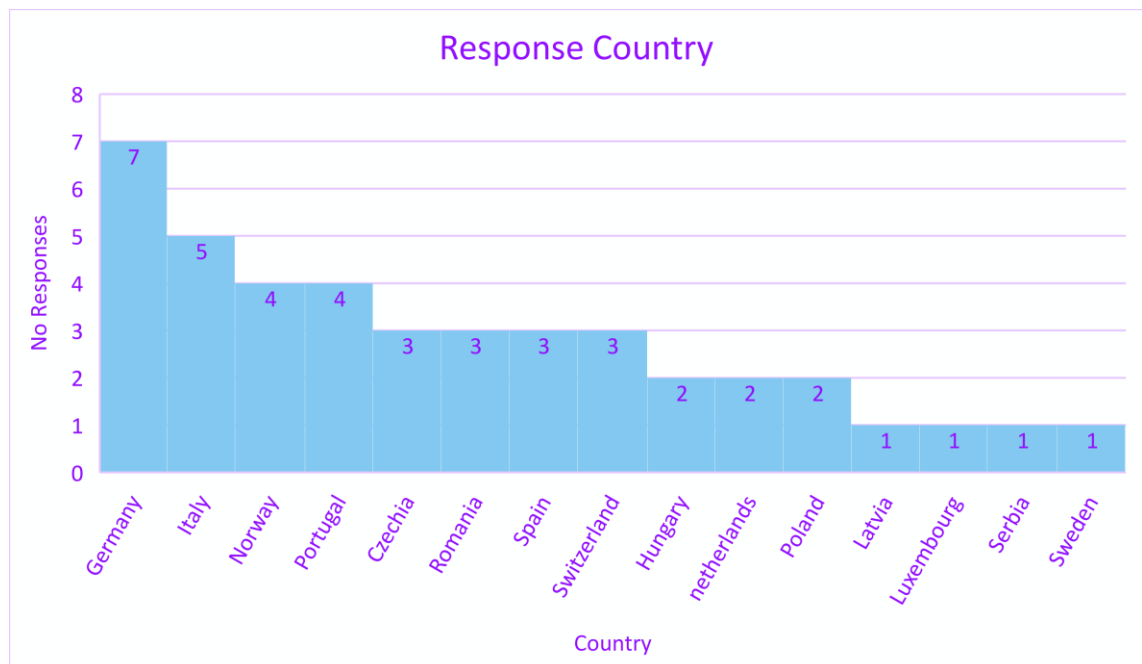


FIGURE 2. The number of responses per European country

As shown in Figure 2, the highest responses came from schools in Germany, Italy, Norway, and Portugal, with seven, five, four and four, respectively. Of the forty-two respondents, thirty-five schools were pre-university schools; that is to

say, they taught children between the ages of 16 and 18. All schools taught children between the 11 to 16 age range, and thirty-nine schools taught children in the 5 to 11 age.

TABLE 3. The identity of schools who responded to the questionnaire.

Type of School	Response
A BRITISH school overseas (e.g. we follow primarily a British curriculum)	<b>5</b>
A British international school that offers a combination of BRITISH curricula, INTERNATIONAL (GCSE & IB) and LOCAL.	<b>1</b>
An international school that offers a combination of LOCAL curricula AND INTERNATIONAL curricula	<b>3</b>
A British international school that offers a combination of BRITISH curricula and INTERNATIONAL curricula (e.g. GCSEs and IB Diploma)	<b>7</b>
An international school that primarily offers an INTERNATIONAL curriculum (e.g. International Baccalaureate)	<b>23</b>
An international school that follows the British national curriculum, but in a project-based learning format	<b>1</b>
An international school that offers a combination of LOCAL curricula AND INTERNATIONAL curricula	<b>2</b>

Table 3 shows how the school's identity and market themselves to prospective parents. Of the forty-two respondents, twenty-three describe their school as an international school that primarily offers an international curriculum. Fourteen respondents described their school as British to varying degrees.

Twenty-eight respondents had membership to CIS, while fifteen belonged to CO-BIS, and six schools had BSO accreditation. The main reason this was deemed important to the school was the opportunity for networking.

#### 4.2.2 Questionnaire Responses Relating to Demand of Student Places

Of the forty-two respondents, thirty-eight (90%) responded that their pupil numbers had stayed the same or increased. Only three respondents stated that their

numbers had decreased. When analysing the fourteen schools that describe themselves as “British” to varying degrees, one school indicated that pupil numbers had decreased. Additionally, another school stated that it had initially decreased but later increased due to other factors.

Thirty-two respondents stated that no new British/international schools had opened since Brexit, nine noted that a new school had opened, and another one said that a new British/international School was about to open. Forty respondents stated that no British/international schools near them had closed since Brexit, but two respondents said that the closure of a British/international school was impending.

Comments relating to demand for student places included, “XXX is seeing a surge in Indian nationals due to the recruitment of tech staff for companies based in the city”. Another respondent commented, “My demographics may be more related to the Ukraine war and COVID dynamics rather than Brexit... The growth of a nearby NATO base has had a far more obvious impact on XXX’s enrolment”. One respondent noted the complexities of assigning a change in demographics solely to Brexit and wrote, “Brexit was one of three very significant factors affecting the demographics from 2019-2023”.

“Initially, after Brexit, about 5% of our total numbers left citing the uncertainties of Brexit and a return to the UK as a motive for leaving. We prided ourselves on being a very British school with the children naturally speaking English in the playground, but since Brexit, we have had to take in many more locals which means that Spanish is now the dominant language and we have had to employ more staff to raise the quality of English”.

When asking respondents to look at trends relating to different ages/phases of education, despite the overall growth, four respondents made comments that the growth in the Senior School exceeded the growth in the Junior School, with one school commenting that they had noticed a slight decrease in applications to the early year’s foundation stage (EYFS) section.

When questioned regarding the demographics of the country applicants were applying from, only fifteen schools responded that they had not noticed a change in demographics. Sixteen schools reported a reduction in British passport holders relocating from the UK. These reductions were offset by fourteen schools reporting an increase in people relocating from schools in Europe, while ten schools conveyed an increase in European passport holders relocating from the UK. Twelve schools reported an increase in applications from locals.

The theoretical framework has already identified the choice of university destination as a potential impact of Brexit. Of the thirty-four respondents who stated that they offer pre-university courses (e.g. A levels/IB diploma, etc.), twenty noted that the number of graduates applying to a UK university had decreased. These ranged from a 10% reduction to a 90% reduction (average = 42%). Furthermore, 36% of respondents signalled that the number of graduates who ended up at HE institutions in the UK had decreased.

When questioned regarding multiple applications to more than one country, 60% of respondents felt that graduates were making more applications to multiple countries, with “other countries within Europe” being the most prevalent choice. 42% of respondents thought that the demands of the job of a university counsellor had increased since Brexit.

Two respondents wrote comments relating to a shift towards graduates ending up at HE institutions in the Netherlands, while another commented, “Very few students consider applying to the UK because of increased fees and increased bureaucracy”. This is in agreement with another respondent who wrote, “The cost of UK university is now prohibitive for many of our students”. Three other respondents also mentioned increased fees as a barrier to HE institutions in the UK.

On the other hand, one respondent commented, “We still see a positive focus on going to UK universities from alumni”, but this comment was in direct contrast to the majority of opinions expressed.

#### **4.2.3 Questionnaire Responses Relating to Supply of Teachers**

When questioned on the recruitment of staff, 81% of respondents felt that the recruitment of staff had become more challenging since Brexit. This figure rose to 100% when looking at just the schools with a British identity. Of the fourteen schools with a British identity, 74% indicated that they had changed where they advertised job openings to attract more applicants from outside the UK.

Further responses regarding the hiring of staff revealed that nine schools are put off hiring staff with a British passport, while twenty-one respondents admitted that their school preferred to hire staff with a European passport. Thirteen respondents stated that all things being equal between two applicants, one with a UK passport and one with a European passport, they would prefer to appoint the applicant with the European passport. One respondent even commented, “You are tempted to choose the worse applicant just so you can get them working legally before the start of term”.

When describing the process for obtaining a work visa, one respondent described it as “unclear, cumbersome, lengthy and needs to be started early if we are to have new staff in country for the start of the academic year”. Another respondent commented, “The quality of teaching has been drastically reduced as you are forced to pick a teacher who you know you can get work permits for over a better teacher who you have to bring in from the UK”.

In response to the challenges of hiring from the UK, one respondent commented, “We are looking to hire from Ireland if and when possible”. The respondent went on to mention that they were also looking to upskill and train their own staff: people such as alumni and teaching assistants (TAs).

#### **4.2.4 Questionnaire Responses Relating to Curriculum**

Forty-one respondents stated that they had not changed their curriculum as a result of Brexit. Only one school indicated that it had moved away from traditional British qualifications and added non-British qualifications. This school stated that it was an international school and had not changed how it marketed itself to prospective families. Therefore, further investigation would be needed to ascertain



whether this was a direct result of Brexit and exactly what changes to the curriculum were implemented.

#### **4.2.5 Questionnaire Responses Relating to Ontological Challenges**

Six respondents stated that their school name included the word British, and they are not considering removing it from their school name. The remaining thirty-six schools said they would not consider adding the word British. However, one school with British links stated that they did not have the word international in their school name but are considering adding it.

Thirty-one schools responded that they have not changed how they advertise to prospective parents. However, eleven responses indicated that they had increased the international dimension of their school, including four with British links. One British school has actively chosen the inverted choice and is promoting its British links, while one with British links has actively publicised its connections to the host country.

Three respondents believed that Brexit posed an existential threat to their schools, one for financial reasons. Comments around this included, "It is much harder to purchase English language resources from the UK due to much higher cost". Three respondents referred to the challenges associated with Brexit as either an irritant or inconvenience but not one that posed existential threats to their schools.

Further comments related to ontological challenges associated with Brexit included the loss of English as the "de facto language" and an increase in the host country language being used.

When asked to rank the reasons parents chose to send their children to their school, 76% of respondents put the high quality of education that their school provides compared to other schools locally, the subsequent highest response being that pupils will learn English to a high standard. Conversely, no one chose 'Pupils having access to UK-based qualifications' as the top priority: it was the bottom choice in 62% of respondents.

Interestingly, for 86% of respondents having better access to UK universities ranked in the bottom two choices.

100% of respondents did not identify a market shift in why parents chose their school over a competitor school.

Of the nine schools with British characteristics, one respondent indicated that they actively promote the international nature of their school more, while a second respondent indicated that they focus more on “native English and quality of education and tend not to focus on the Britishness so much”.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter intends to look at the best practices identified in both the theoretical framework and the questionnaire results and liken them to the procedures and systems at Campion School. After comparing the practices, suggestions will be made regarding any modifications to Campion's practices.

### **5.1 Implications for Campion School – Demand for Places**

The first threat that Cambridge (2017) identified was a demand for student places in international schools. In the theoretical framework, it was argued that the demand for international education worldwide is increasing partly due to the growth of the middle class (Bates, 2010). The results of the questionnaire appear to agree with this statement. That is to say, most schools in Europe have not noticed an overall decrease in pupil numbers, and in many cases, the opposite seems to be true; pupil numbers have increased. The questionnaire even identified new international schools opening up, indicating that demand for international education is rising in Europe.

Many schools were quick to point out that they could not isolate pupil numbers' growth (or decline) as solely a consequence of Brexit. Many schools cited other reasons, including the global Covid-19 pandemic and decisions by national governments to recruit globally advantaged citizens actively, schemes such as opening tech-based companies and attracting Indian nationals. Other schools cited the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as a reason for increased pupil numbers.

The picture at Campion School mirrors the picture seen across Europe. That is to say, the overall pupil numbers have increased at a point in time that the reverse might have been expected. Further analysis of the trends shows that while the numbers in Campion Senior School have increased, numbers in the Junior School have slightly declined. This is a pattern that has also been identified by four of the respondent schools. Even though this trend is only prevalent in a few schools, it is worth further monitoring as a reduction in numbers in Campion Junior School could imply that lower numbers can be expected in the Senior School in future years.

Living in the aftermath of Brexit is still in its infancy, and it is not illogical to assume that for the older children who were already enrolled in British international schools before Brexit, there is little reason to withdraw them. However, for those families who are presented with the choice of where to enrol their child for the first time, those families who are enrolling their child in the first stages of their educational career, the choice to register their child in a British international school is potentially a life-changing decision for the infant.

The theoretical framework identified implications related to HE study in the UK post-Brexit, such as the fact that applications from EU citizens are drastically reduced (Stacey, 2021; Mayhew, 2022). The work from Gardner-McTaggart (2018) identifies the importance for international schools to send their alumni to top universities. While UK citizens residing in Europe maintain access to home fee status until 2028 (Department for Education, 2020), the same is not valid for EU passport holders. EU passport holders already have to pay the increased rate of international fees. Both the theoretical framework and the questionnaire results identified reduced university applications to the UK. This is also true of Campion School.

With 60% of schools surveyed identifying an increase in applications to multiple countries and 42% of schools indicating that they feel the work of the Universities Counsellor has increased, it appears that Campion has acted proactively by appointing a specialist Universities Counsellor. It is hypothesised that the pattern of increased multiple applications will continue for some time until a dominant replacement country has been established in the HE market. Initially, this appeared to be the Netherlands (Hughes, 2021), but recent announcements from the Dutch government ('Netherlands takes another step toward limiting international enrolment growth', 2023) seem to indicate that the broader infrastructure in the Netherlands around the HE market is not currently sufficient to satisfy the growing demand. Therefore, the job of the Universities Counsellor will continue to evolve as students apply to a broad number of institutions across a wide number of countries. Consequently, it is recommended that Campion continues to finance continuing professional development for the Universities Counsellor to ensure

they remain updated on admission procedures/requirements to multiple European countries. It is also recommended that the Counsellor develops a trusted network of contacts throughout the continent to ensure that they can reach out and obtain advice regarding less mainstream (less popular) destinations. Perhaps this could be through memberships of organisations such as COBIS or HMC. After all, the number one reason stated by schools for membership to these organisations was networking opportunities.

The theoretical framework also identified a potential lack of diversity in the pupil population with a lack of British passport holders. Some British international schools have also cited this as a problem. These schools report a decrease in applications from British nationals and an increase in the host country language being spoken outside of lessons. It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at the implications of language learning. Still, one might postulate that a decrease in exposure to the English language out of class may slow the language learning process. It certainly can be seen as a change in the school's culture, and consequently, one can conclude a weakening of the British identity of the school. So far, this does not appear to be the case at Campion, but the school leadership must strive to maintain English as the de facto language of communication. Otherwise, Campion runs the risk of losing part of its British identity, and the progress that new learners will make in mastering the use of English will be slower, thereby affecting progress in all areas of the curriculum.

## **5.2 Implications for Campion School – Supply of Teachers**

The second threat that Cambridge (2017) identified was the supply of teachers working in international schools. The responses to the questionnaire, particularly those schools with a British identity, confirm that this is indeed problematic. The theoretical framework identified a dependence of staff from Native English-speaking Anglo-American speakers as teachers (Bunnell and Atkinson, 2020). While no empirical data was gathered, this trend appears evident across British international schools in Europe. It is clear from the questionnaire responses that many international schools across Europe have been put off trying to hire someone with a British passport. While one school identified the hiring of employees with an Irish passport as a potential solution, presumably due to the fact that they will be

native English speakers, it does not necessarily mean that they will have the skills and knowledge to succeed in a British international school located in Europe. Another solution that British international schools are considering is the upskilling and training of people known to the school, for example, alumni and TAs. It is worth Campion considering looking to implement this procedure, although the challenge will be to ensure that this is executed legally under the requirements of Greek law. Therefore, it is recommended that Campion assesses the advantages/disadvantages of becoming a COBIS-recognised training school that delivers Initial Teacher Training (ITT).

Campion has identified an elongated and costlier recruitment cycle, which also agrees with the questionnaire responses. Therefore, a recommendation to Campion is to maintain an increased budget for the recruitment of staff. Campion has already brought forward the deadline for resignations, which appears to be a good move. However, given that the rules of obtaining a long stay type “D” visa have changed multiple times, this new date should be monitored to ensure it is early enough to recruit high-calibre teachers. A second recommendation related to the timing of the resignation date is to ensure that it is widely recognised and adhered to by school employees. As soon as a UK national has been appointed, Campion must stress the importance of a timely visa application. Finally, in this section, a third recommendation for Campion pertains to where they advertise to recruit new staff. As 74% of schools with a British identity had indicated that they had changed where they advertise to attract more applications from outside the UK, it is recommended that Campion identifies alternative methods/places to advertise.

### **5.3 Implications for Campion School - Curriculum**

The third threat Cambridge (2017) identified was the school curriculum. The results from the questionnaire indicate that schools have not responded to the threat of Brexit by modifying their overt curriculum. To this extent, Campion has responded proactively by adding a foreign language (German) to the MFL curriculum.

The ultimate change to the curriculum would be to move away from one that is traditionally British in nature towards one that is either international or more akin to that of the host country. The fact that the questionnaire was sent to a large number of (non-British) international schools that were members of ECIS was with the intention of including these schools in the response. However, it is not impossible that such a school, which has already transitioned away from a British identity, was missed.

The theoretical framework also raised the question of learning through English and language learning. While it is a known practice that a host country school might teach an additional lesson in a foreign language, for example, a school in Greece that teaches most of their subjects in Greek but teaches Maths using the medium of English, a modification to this type of learning has not been identified as a change to British international schools in a post-Brexit landscape. That is to say, a school with a British identity has not moved to teaching a core subject, for example, history, using the medium of the host country's language. By not moving to a bilingual model of instruction, schools are actively choosing to preserve their British identity. This can be seen as in agreement with the work identified in the theoretical framework of Mahfouz, Sausner and Kornhaber with the “common core” helping to ease the transition between international and British schools (Mahfouz, Sausner and Kornhaber, 2019).

No schools identified any positive outcomes of Brexit for their school. The issue of access to HE institutions has already been discussed in section 5.1. Looking at the questionnaire results, no schools identified the potential benefit of better examination results in MFL subjects compared to schools in the UK (assuming schools in the UK lack a Eurocentric outlook in a post-Brexit society). Therefore, it is recommended that Champion monitors the acceptance rates at British universities for courses involving an MFL subject and the typical exam results required for admittance into these courses.

As part of ensuring Champion pupils have access to affordable and desirable universities, it is also recommended that Champion continues the teaching of Greek in an attempt to give pupils access to the isotimia (equivalence) lessons and the

chance of obtaining a leaving certificate that is deemed equal to the Greek high school leaving certificate (apolotirion lykeio - απολυτήριο λυκείου).

#### **5.4 Implications for Campion School – Ontological Challenges**

The final threat that Cambridge (2017) identified was related to the ontological challenges that schools face. It has already been mentioned that pupil numbers remain healthy for most international schools in Europe. Therefore, for the time being, at least, the potential worry that Brexit poses an existential threat to British international schools remains just that: a worry and not a reality.

Another threat that can be seen as existential to British international schools is a conscious decision from the school to move away from its British identity and towards a different, more accepted identity, for example, more international or more host country. This has already been discussed in section 5.3, with the outcome being that no schools that completed the questionnaire were identified. Therefore, it is recommended that Campion does not need to move away from its British identity proactively.

Assuming that Campion wishes to maintain its British identity, it is recommended that it upholds the British Values that were identified in the theoretical framework, those being democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (Department for Education, 2023).

The theoretical framework identified the work of Suresh Babu and Mahajan (2021), who affirmed that a school can market itself as both local and international at the same time. In the case of Campion, it is recommended that it continues the practice of marketing both the British nature of the school as well as its international dimension. For example, Campion should continue to highlight the international elements of the curriculum (IPC, IB Diploma) and the success of university placements all across Europe and the world while maintaining the school's already-established British identity. There is no evidence from the study to suggest that Brexit should discourage the school from maintaining its British identity.



## 5.5 Summary of Recommendations

- Continue to monitor the trend of a reduction in pupil numbers in the Junior School.
- Continued CPD for the Universities Counsellor (knowledge of a wide range of university destination countries).
  - The Universities Counsellor should build a network of contacts across Europe for advice when a pupil wishes to apply to a less mainstream (less popular) destination.
- Maintain the British culture of the school by striving to maintain the de facto language of communication as English.
- Investigate the benefits/disadvantages of becoming a recognised ITT centre.
- Identify alternative ways (places) to advertise to attract staff from all across Europe.
- Monitor the trends related to MFL subjects at university.
- No need to move away from the British identity.
  - Continue additional Greek lessons (Foreign language and isotimia (equivalence)).
  - Continue British identity/values.

## 6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, we review the original strategic question, that is to say, **how can British international schools in Europe remain an attractive proposition for parents in a post-Brexit era?**

The topic of education in the aftermath of Brexit is still an emergent field; very little has been written on the subject outside the HE sector. With the intention of giving a focus to answering the strategic question, the whole study looked at the inquiry through the lens of Cambridge (2017), who hypothesised four possible threats to international schools in the UK.

- Demand for student places in international schools
- Supply of teachers working in international schools
- Curriculum implemented in schools
- Ontological challenges relating to international education.

To give focus to the original strategic question, it was then broken down into two research questions:

### 1. What changes have British International Schools detected since the culmination of Brexit?

- Change in pupil numbers (increased/decreased, differences in year groups/phases/key stages)?
- Change in the university destination country?
- Change in the nationality of applicants?

### 2. How has Brexit changed the working practices of how schools operate?

- The medium of English?
- British/International curriculum (A levels/ International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma)?
- Highly trained teachers?
- The identity of the school?

The theoretical framework then identified examples of best practices, and by receiving questionnaire responses from forty-two international schools located in

Europe, the study was then able to identify trends currently occurring in schools across the continent. With this knowledge, the study then compared the routines and practices of Champion School with the concepts identified in the theoretical framework, as well as the real-life patterns identified by the responses to the questionnaire. Various recommendations have then been identified in Chapter 5 to ensure that Champion remains an attractive proposition for parents in a post-Brexit era.

Looking at the results of the study through the lens of the threats identified by Cambridge (2017), the first threat identified by Cambridge (2017) – the threat of demand for student places – is not forthcoming and overall, pupil numbers remain buoyant. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that, for the time being, at least, Brexit is not an existential threat to British international schools in Europe. Delving deeper, the most significant challenge related to the demand for student places in international schools is related to ensuring pupils graduating from the school can enrol at desirable HE institutions. The study identifies the need for a proficient and capable Universities Counsellor who has knowledge of university application procedures all across Europe.

The second threat Cambridge (2017) identified - the supply of teachers working in international schools – has been recognised as problematic but not unsurmountable for schools to overcome. The main reasons for this are the additional bureaucratic hurdles that need to be tackled, but this can be achieved through supplementary time and expense.

The third threat identified by Cambridge (2017) relates to the curriculum implemented by schools. Markedly, few schools identified any modifications to working practices to the overt curriculum offered by schools. What this study has not focused on is the implications to other types of curriculum as identified by Wilson (1997), for example, the null, phantom or social curricula. Therefore, an area for future research would be to look at these curricula in light of Brexit. One might speculate that it is too early for these curricula to have diverged significantly, but they may well do so in time.

The final threat identified by Cambridge (2017) relates to ontological challenges concerning British/international education. The results of this study indicate that threats pertaining to British education are not evident. Schools should continue to use British values as a way of promoting cohesion among students and actively promoting the British identity of the school. However, the results also indicate the benefit of promoting the international dimension of the education provided. For example, schools should actively promote the diversity of their European university admission success.

By taking on board the conclusions above, British international schools throughout Europe should ensure they remain an attractive proposition to parents in a post-Brexit era. The recommendations from Chapter 5 will help Campion stay competitive in a changing market landscape and assist Campion in delivering the best opportunities to its current pupils. This safeguards its existence and ensures that Campion remains at the forefront of British/international education in Greece and is a viable concern for many years to come.

One limiting factor to the study is the response rate of 16%. This could be due to the timing of sending the questionnaire to the two hundred and sixty-nine (269) schools. The timing coincided with the many schools being in recess for the summer holidays. While two reminders were also sent, again, the timing can be called into question. That is to say, one reminder was sent when Headteachers/Principals would be focused on getting the school ready to open for a new academic year, and the final reminder was sent just after the school year had commenced, and again, the Headteacher/Principal might have had other more pressing matters to attend to. However, an alternative reason for a relatively low response rate could be the sheer number of online questionnaires people receive (Moilanen, Ritalahti and Ojasalo, 2022).

While no attempt has been made to differentiate between regions/countries, it is worth speculating that different regions/countries within the EU might have been affected in contrasting ways. Mayhew (2022) mentions that although there was an overall drop off in HE numbers across the EU as a whole, the difference was even more marked in countries from central and eastern European countries.

One might speculate that the specific wealth of nations can cause these differences. Therefore, a follow-up study may wish to look at the impact of Brexit on British international schools across different regions of Europe.

As has already been mentioned throughout the study, the timing of other events of global and national significance has blurred the impact of Brexit for many schools. Events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine mean that it would be worth repeating this study in a few years to see if any additional trends and patterns have emerged and if the results of this study remain consistent.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Email requesting completion of the questionnaire

I would be grateful if you could forward this to your Head of School/Principal.

My name is Mike Henderson, and I am both a Headmaster at an international school in Greece and a student studying for an MBA in Educational Leadership at Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland. For my thesis, I am investigating the impact of Brexit on International Schools within Europe, and I would appreciate your help in completing this questionnaire, which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The final thesis will be published on the internet, with the findings accessible to all. By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to your answers being included in the research, but please note that all responses will be kept anonymous, and no one will be identifiable.

[Please click here to complete the questionnaire.](#)

Please can I ask that you complete the questionnaire by **Friday, 4th August**. I appreciate that it is your summer holiday, and I thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

I am wishing you a fantastic summer holiday.

With thanks,

Mike Henderson

## **Appendix 2. Questionnaire**

1(4)

Note: Conditional logic was applied to the form, so not all questions were shown to all respondents (depending on their previous answers). The complete survey can be seen by clicking on the link.

<https://form.jotform.com/231892596517065>

### **Questionnaire Introduction**

My name is Mike Henderson and I am both a Headmaster at an international school in Greece and a student studying for an MBA in Educational Leadership at Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland. For my thesis, I am investigating the impact of Brexit on International Schools within Europe, and I would appreciate your help in completing this questionnaire, which will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The final thesis will be published on the internet, with the findings accessible to all. By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to your answers being included in the research, but please note that all responses will be kept anonymous, and no one will be identifiable. Answers will only be used for the purpose of this research and not shared with any third parties. Answers will be kept securely and will be deleted shortly after the publication of the thesis.

### **Questions in Section 1**

- Host country of school e.g. Greece, Italy etc.
- Your name (optional)
- Name of school (optional)
- What age group does your school cater for?
- What best describes the type of school?
- Please indicate which membership/accreditation your school belongs to/has?

### **Section 2: Questions relating to pupil numbers and demographics of pupils**

- Since Brexit, have your overall pupil numbers?
- Since Brexit, has there been a change in pupil numbers in different ages/phases?
- Since Brexit, has there been a change in the demographics of your pupil population?
- Have any new British/international schools opened near you since Brexit?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of PUPIL NUMBERS/DEMOGRAPHICS as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.

### **Section 3: Questions relating to the taught curriculum**

- Have you made any changes to your curriculum as a direct result of Brexit?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of CURRICULUM as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.

### **Section 4: Questions relating to the identity of the school**

- Which statement best matches your school name?
- Since Brexit, and concerning your British/international school status, which statement best matches how you market your school to prospective parents?
- Please explain exactly how you have increased the international focus. e.g. highlighting that pupils attend universities all over Europe etc.
- Please explain exactly how you have increased the local nature (host country) focus. e.g. reintegrating back into the host country school system.
- Do you believe that Brexit poses an existential threat to the existence of your school?
  - Please explain your previous answer.
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of the IDENTITY of your school as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.

**Section 5: Questions relating to the impact of Brexit on university destinations/applications.**

- Have any British/international schools near you closed since Brexit?
- Do pupils graduate from your school and go directly to University?
- Traditionally (before Brexit), where did MOST of your graduates end up going to university?
- Since Brexit, have you seen the number of university APPLICATIONS to the UK change?
- Can you quantify how much it has increased? e.g. up by 20%
- Can you quantify how much it has decreased? e.g. down by 20%
- Since Brexit, have you seen the number of university ACCEPTANCES to the UK change? i.e. the number of pupils who actually end up at university in the UK
- Since Brexit, have you seen an INCREASE in University applications to (you may select multiple answers)
- Since Brexit, have you seen an INCREASE in University destination countries? i.e. where pupils end up going to university (you may select multiple answers)
- To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Since Brexit, pupils are making MORE university applications to MULTIPLE countries e.g. pupils are applying to universities in the UK, Holland, USA etc
- To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Since Brexit, the job of the university counsellor has increased.
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of UNIVERSITY DESTINATIONS/APPLICATIONS as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.

**Section 6: Questions related to the recruitment of staff**

- Which statement best matches your opinion related to the recruitment of staff?
- Which statement best matches your opinion related to the recruitment of staff with a British Passport?

- Which statement(s) best matches your opinion related to the recruitment of staff with a British Passport?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of the RECRUITMENT OF STAFF as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.

### **Section 7: Questions relating to Marketing**

- Please rank (by dragging the boxes) the importance of the following statements in terms of why parents choose to send their children to your school.
- Since Brexit, have you noticed any change in preferences why parents are choosing (or not choosing) your school over any of your competitor schools?
- Since Brexit, have you changed the way in which you market your school to prospective parents?
- You previously indicated that you are a member of COBIS. Why is this important to your school?
- You previously indicated that you are a member of HMC. Why is this important to your school?
- You previously indicated that your school is a BSO school. Why is this important to your school?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make in terms of the MARKETING your school as a result of Brexit? Please feel free to add comments related to the answers you have made above.