

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning, and welcome to the Student Hub Live event brought to you by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences from the Open University. The topic for today's two-and-a-half-hour programme is understanding Brexit. What has happened since the vote? And we have five really interesting sessions from a range of academics across the faculty.

But some of you may not have been to Student Hub Live events before, so for those watching live, let me briefly explain how it all works. My name's Karen, and I'll be presenting the programme. I'll be bringing all of your questions in the chat, the things that you're voting from using our interactive widgets into the discussion today live.

You can vote, you can chat, you can tweet. Our hashtag is #studenthublive18. You can send us an email as well, which is at studenthub@open.ac.uk. And you can talk to each other as well. So you can talk about anything Brexit or non-Brexit-related.

This afternoon, we've got some sessions on exams, and I know that a lot of students out there are eagerly looking forward to starting studying their afternoon and over the bank holiday weekend. But hopefully this will be some topical entertainment for you in the morning.

So we've got some widgets we'd like you to vote on. You can tell us where you are in the country, you can tell us how you're feeling right now, which level you're studying, and which subject area you're studying. Also, you can tell us if you've been to one of these events before. So do please click on the box that applies to you, and then you can also see what other people have said as well.

Now bringing all of your conversation into the studio today is Mychelle and Joan at the moment, and we also have David. And Pete Wood is also engaging in the topic remotely as well. Mychelle and Joan, how are you today?

MYCHELLE: Oh, great, thanks. Even though it was raining outside, I am so excited to be here. I just love Student Hub Live.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And welcome, Joan.

JOAN: Thank you. It's the first time I've done this. I'm really looking forward to having a good discussion about Brexit today.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well, thank you both. So the programme today, first we're going to look at one year down, the story so far. And I'm going to be joined by Georgina Blakeley and George Callaghan to discuss that. We're then going to take a look at expert knowledge and conspiracy theories with Alan Shipman and David Robertson.

We'll then look at analysing the vote, identity and geography with Allan Cochrane and Kesi Mahendran. And then material Brexit, making international borders and homes and music. And that's going to be with Robert Samuels and Philip O'Sullivan. And then last but not least, we're joined by Richard Heffernan and Eleni Andreouli to look at so what's next? New politics and new identities.

So there's an awful lot to discuss. Let's crack on with it. Georgina and George, welcome to the studio today. Now you'll see some different widgets popping up on your screen as well. Has your opinion on Brexit changed since the vote? How well do you think on our continuum scale Brexit is going? Should English regions have a say in the Brexit negotiations? And should there be a second referendum on the UK leaving the EU?

So first let's take a look at the vote. I mean, topics on Brexit often start with a good old map, and we look at how everything's happened. And really, the focus of the conversation now is not sort of on picking that in that sense, but thinking about what that means here and now. George.

GEORGE CALLAGHAN: So if you look at the map of the so-called United Kingdom, and it looks at the vote for those who said they were going to remain in the European Union and those who said they would leave, what it shows is a map of, in a sense, a dis-United Kingdom. More striking just to the north of the UK is a country called Scotland. And you can see there that the entire country of Scotland that is measured by local authority area voted to remain inside the United Kingdom.

And again, if you look to the left and side there, that's the north of Ireland. There is a bit beneath that, the Republic of Ireland, which is not shown on this map. And there you can see that there was a predominant remain vote. So the big picture-- and we're going back a couple of years here now just to help set the context-- is that although it is UK in name, actually, the different nations that comprise the United Kingdom did not all vote in the same way. And there's some striking differences.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: And I think the interesting thing that the map also shows, actually, is that, OK. England looks pretty blue in general. But then if you look at that closely, there are kind of pockets of yellows,

which shows actually that a lot of the split within England is between urban areas and rural areas. But actually, as we'll see, that also isn't as quite straightforward as we might like to think.

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely. And we'll talk about a little bit of that later. But let's unpick some of the key things that have happened since, because it does feel like a world away, doesn't it?

GEORGE CALLAGHAN: Yeah. There were a number of different events. In one sense, the biggest event is actually not much has happened. Not much has happened in terms of the concrete political negotiations. There's been a tremendous amount of press coverage of it. But actually, in terms of moving the negotiations on in a political sense, in a negotiating sense, actually, very little has happened in two years. So that's probably-- the biggest event is a nonevent.

And behind that, there's been a tremendous amount of political negotiations. And in a sense, if you think about what students can learn from Open University studies, it's to try and kind of lift the bonnet of the negotiations and try and look at how power is being negotiated and fought over within these Brexit negotiations.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: There are some things we do know. So we know, for example, that we now have a 21-month transition period. So although the official leaving date is 29th of March, 2019, that transition period actually takes us to December 2020. So a little bit of kind of wriggle room in terms of getting used to things.

We also know that there's been very broad, high-level agreement on sort of the three key areas that then allow the negotiations to go forward. So how much was the UK going to pay, basically? The divorce settlement, as it's often called in the media.

There was always a broad agreement on what happens to UK citizens living in the EU, and also what happens to EU citizens living in the UK. And of course, the real chestnut, what happens in Northern Ireland with the Northern Irish border? But that's at a very high level. And actually, as with all things, the devil is in the detail. And it really will be with this set of negotiations.

GEORGE CALLAGHAN: And in terms of what's happened in the economy, where I think, again, people expect there to be a cliff edge after the Brexit vote. That didn't happen. But one of the features of the way an economy works is that many of the indicators are what is called lagged, so that means it takes time from a decision taken place to seeing the impact of that decision. And perhaps students

and viewers might have noticed just this week that the governor of the Bank of England estimated that each household has lost 900 pounds worth of income because of the Brexit decisions.

And part of that is because-- one of the impacts of Brexit is that firms delay their investment decisions. So what's happened is that many companies are sitting on substantial amounts of money that they could invest, but they're just sitting on that. It's kind of piles of cash. And they're banking it as opposed to investing it in their people and technology and plant and machinery. So there has been a slight decline in the growth of the UK's economy, most likely because of Brexit.

KAREN FOLEY: Did you want to say anything about the Scottish Parliament continuity bill?

GEORGE CALLAGHAN: Yes. So one of the other features inside the UK is that Brexit has brought to the fore the constitutional structure of the UK. Because one of the aspects of Brexit is that going through the UK Parliament is the EU withdrawal bill. Now presently, Scotland has got control over a number of areas-- agriculture and fishery, for example-- that are linked to the European Union.

The proposal from the UK government is that these powers will come back to Westminster, and then they may or may not be devolved to Scotland. What the Scottish Parliament is saying is actually, that is not good enough. It breaks a principle of the devolution settlement. And any powers that Scotland currently has competence over that are linked to the European Union should in the first instance come back to Scotland.

So there's been a continuity bill passed in the Scottish government that says just that. And we're heading at the moment for a constitutional crisis where the Westminster government is saying, no, this should come back to Westminster, and the Scottish government has said, no, this shouldn't. It should come back to Scotland.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: And I think what the negotiations show really clearly is not only do we have a divided society. We have a divided political elite. So for example, the House of Lords have put forward 14 amendments on the European withdrawal bill, and they range from the kind of say that Parliament will have on the final deal, and what happens after that if it's not agreed. But also, even the Labour peers going as far as saying that the UK must remain in some form of single market, which is completely not what the sort of Brexiteers would want.

GEORGE Yeah. When I actually read it, there was 15 amendments. And just as an aside, with the House

CALLAGHAN: of Lords, is that certain parties-- for example, the Scottish National Party-- because of a kind of principle position, don't have any representatives in the House of Lords. So one might imagine that, if they had chosen to participate in the House of Lords, the defeats that the government have received in the House of Lords would have been by an even higher magnitude.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm. There's this whole idea as well that whilst there's crisis in the Tory party, there's also this gridlock in central government with Westminster sort of being in that sort of stalemate. So there's an awful lot happening.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Absolutely. I don't think anybody knows what they're doing, to be honest. I was telling George earlier, last night I was at a *Question Time* with Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester. And he was complaining bitterly that it's impossible to get the attention of ministers because they are completely fixated on Brexit.

And of course, let's not forget, no one has done this before. No nation state has left the European Union before. Greenland left, but of course, that's not a nation state, and it's an entirely different matter to a country like the UK leaving.

KAREN FOLEY: We asked everyone at home how well you thought Brexit was going, so let's take a look at what you had to say. So total chaos right--

[LAUGHTER]

--is an overwhelming response. Why might that be then? I mean, what are some of these issues here? I mean, it's obviously incredibly complex. And as you said, there's this whole issues with devolved government and central government, et cetera, and all of this detail going on. But obviously, aside from the fact that no one's ever done something like this before in this magnitude, there is the sense of really feeling the unknown.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Yeah, absolutely. There is no blueprint for anybody to follow. There's not really a set of instructions that people can follow. And I think what it shows is the extent to which our economy, our legislation is so closely intertwined with the European Union now. And actually disentangling all of that is incredibly difficult. That's why I say that there's absolutely no comparison between an overseas territory like Greenland leaving in the sort of mid-1980s and the UK.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** I think it's also interesting, Karen, as an economist, people like to think of themselves also as political scientists. That word scientist comes in. So in, say, the academic domain, one's

looking at graphs and charts and theories, and so it's got a scientific feel to it. If you look at the Brexit vote, it drew heavily on emotions. So people voted-- a bit of a generalisation-- but it was an emotional response primarily.

And what many people, including some of the senior Tory ministers, is they hadn't actually-- if I can use that car analogy-- haven't lifted the bonnet. You lift the bonnet, and beneath that you find there's 12,000 different legal relationships to the European Union. So you know, it's almost like a kind of body. It's so intertwined that the complexity of trying to unpick that is incredibly challenging. I mean, one might even argue, actually impossible.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: The emotion point is a really interesting one, because I think one of the supreme ironies of all of this is that the places that voted to leave, particularly those that are economically deprived, will suffer the most from leaving the European Union. One, because they are areas that have benefited most from the European structural funding and cohesion funding. But also, those areas tend to have their economies most linked to the EU in terms of trade. So the greatest impact will be precisely on those areas that voted to leave.

KAREN FOLEY: We've got some questions from people at home, so let's take a look and see what they have to say. Mychelle.

MYCHELLE: So I've got two questions, and Joan has a couple as well. Jeanette has said that she is interested in what implications Brexit has on human rights. And Jerry has said he's interested in ways in which Brexit is happening around the ongoing debate around Scottish independence.

GEORGE OK. Well, shall I take the second one of those?

CALLAGHAN:

KAREN FOLEY: Of course. Jerry's discussion on Scottish independence.

GEORGE CALLAGHAN: OK. Well, it brings it to the fore. And in one sense, if one goes back to the other referendum, the Scottish referendum, one of the biggest arguments that was made by those who were saying vote no-- in other words, stay inside the United Kingdom-- is that by staying inside the UK, Scotland's place in Europe would be guaranteed, or at least would be ensured and safe. Whereas at the time, if Scotland had voted to leave the UK, the argument was that you would also leave the European Union.

KAREN FOLEY: Would you like to have a look at a bar chart that we've prepared as well, George? Because that might give you some things to draw on.

GEORGE Yes, we could look at the bar chart, yes.

CALLAGHAN:

KAREN FOLEY: So here we can see we've got percentage point difference between the UK nations.

GEORGE OK. So this bar chart. Now this now is not the Scottish referendum. This is the Brexit

CALLAGHAN: referendum, and it shows the percentage point difference in the different nations of the UK between those who said remain and those who said leave.

So what is incredibly striking is that in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the percentage point difference of those who voted to remain is really high. I mean, in Scotland, it's of the order 23%, 24%. So you're looking at taking a nation, a country out of the European Union that voted quite strongly to stay in.

So if you go back to the other discussion that was raised by Jerry, what are the implications for Scottish independence, well, on the one hand, the people of Scotland were told, if you want to stay inside the European Union, you must stay inside the United Kingdom. A couple of years after that, the United Kingdom in its wisdom wants to leave the European Union. So I think it brings back into the foreground the Scottish independence question.

However, whether it makes it any clearer what the outcome will be, I'm not sure. In a sense, it depends very much on the kind of outcome. If it is what is known as a hard Brexit, which will have negative economic implications, I think that will then push more Scottish citizens to think, well, if we could be independent in Europe, that may well be a better future.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** And I think in terms of human rights, I think one thing that we can say there is actually, a lot of our human rights don't depend precisely on EU legislation. They depend, for example, on UN legislation. So there's kind of a higher sphere of human rights than just those of the European Union.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Yeah. That was a good-- thank you, Georgina, for answering Jeanette's question there. OK. So we've had a look at some of the sort of factors that are going on. And I wonder if we might-- particularly Georgina, because you're very interested in the way that local politics and central politics sort of interact.

We mentioned the point then about ministers vying for attention, et cetera, and also the fact that you were saying that so many of these countries will be more-- some of these areas of the country and regions will be more deprived. How does that work in terms of the local central interplay? And how can ministers actually try to support people within those areas when so much is changing, particularly in rural areas that rely on farming and grants from the European Union?

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:**

Well, I think-- so the one thing to say, it's quite interesting that we talk about devolution to Scotland and Wales. But actually, there's a kind of quiet devolution revolution going on in England at the moment, and you have a number of city regions with elected metro mayors.

So I was talking, for example, about Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester, who have been devolved a certain number of powers, a certain sort of funding. So Greater Manchester, for example, had devolved six billion pounds for health and social care. So you know, it's kind of a quiet revolution going on, but in English terms, it really is a constitutional innovation.

But of course, the irony is that those kind of devolved areas, on the one hand, it's a great time to have these devolved powers, because Westminster is literally looking the other way. So there's lots that can be done.

But on the other hand, it's very difficult to get anything done, because a lot of those devolved powers require legislation from Westminster, and that is not forthcoming at all. So to give one example there, the adult skills budget was supposed to be devolved this year. It won't be until next year, 2019, when it gets devolved because there isn't time to get the legislation through. Just isn't time to get that legislation through Parliament.

And of course, the fear is within those kind of English regions, Westminster doesn't like to give power away. It's an extremely centralised state. And it may well take that power back, you know, pretty much as you were saying about Scotland.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:**

And I think what's fascinating, Karen, for our students, is that it demonstrates that inside the social sciences, people are not learning about dry and abstract theories and academic material. This is a set of tools and a kind of knowledge base that will enable people to try and understand the world around them.

I mean, given Brexit, you still might end up scratching your head. But you know, you can actually try and analyse how power works, how money flows around the economy. So another

plus of Brexit is it brings to the fore many of the power conflicts that social science draws upon.

KAREN FOLEY: Because of course, whilst we don't know what's happening in the future, we do have some theories. I mean, there must be some sort of sense that we can gain from an academic understanding of the past or ways of working. And it's an interesting point, George, because you know, writing modules in such a changing landscape must be incredibly complex.

But some of those theories hold and some of those ways of looking at the world in particular, you know, judging your work on DD102 where we have this cycle of an argument where we're looking at the claims and the evidence and the extent to which those support that. And hopefully, our students would also be looking at some of these claims in a little bit more of an academic way than just relying on the media interpretation.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Absolutely. As George was saying, I mean, I think, you know, the Brexit referendum is a gift in some way, because it gets at the really big questions of political science, the really big questions of economics. So we were talking earlier about the possibilities of a second referendum. And of course, the argument against is, well, the people have spoken.

But who are the people? You know, that is the core question of sort of politics and democratic theories, you know, that assumes that there is a people already out there, nicely defined. But we could put the question a completely different way and say, well, why weren't 16-year-olds allowed to vote? You know, aren't they the people? Should they be kind of defining that people?

Or alternatively, if we'd held the referendum six months later, a lot of those older people or those older voters would have died off. So the outcome would have been very different depending on how the people is defined. And yet, we just assume the people is there, kind of already made.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** And I mean, if I could then introduce another idea, which is statistics. You know, I think a lot of citizens are wary of numbers and statistics. And yet, if there was a better understanding of numbers, how they're composed and how they're used, I actually think citizens would be able to interrogate a lot of the evidence around Brexit, the pros and cons.

And then again, one of the ironies is that people made a relatively emotional response based on minimal data. And what's happened in the two years since? Actually, there's been a deluge of data. I'm not convinced that citizens have got the analytical capacities to interrogate that

data. And again, that's where higher education studies, maybe the OU helps a lot.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Because OU students do have those skills. You mentioned sort of DD102. And even students right at that kind of start of their studies know that in order to assess a claim, they have to look at the evidence and interrogate that evidence and see, is it reliable? Is it robust? What is the source of that evidence? Where has it come from? So right from the start, our students are trained to do that in a way that perhaps the general public isn't.

KAREN FOLEY: And in the next session, we're going to take a look at experts and the extent to which experts have influenced things. And you know, how much we've listened to them.

But I'd like to talk in this session about the role of the media, because you say it was a very emotive, a very-- it was a very media-driven debate around a lot of things that may not have been central to the arguments. And in a sense, your point, George, then about to what extent people were making informed choices is an interesting one.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** That's right. I mean, and I suppose as an academic, one has to start by defining the terms of what one means by media. I mean, often it is the print media that kind of initially puts the fuel in the daily news agenda. And the print media in the UK does tend to have by and large a right of centre slant. I've said the UK, of course, what you have to immediately recognise is that the different countries in the UK have got their own media.

So for example, in Scotland, there's two or three national kind of quality dailies that will take a different slant. So the media, the print media is tremendously powerful in driving the news agenda. And often that print media starts from a particular ideological place. And in Brexit, that particular place was the European Union is something that the UK should leave.

KAREN FOLEY: We've got some more questions. Can we go over and see what people have been saying? Mychelle and Joan.

JOAN: Yes, I've got a question from Richard who's based in Barcelona and is a new student. He's brought out some of the viewpoints of what it's actually like living overseas and perhaps worrying about what the prospects are for his job there. And also asking, will I need to move back to the UK as a result of this? So it would be interesting to get the views on how it's actually impacting those who are concerned about their own futures and living elsewhere.

MYCHELLE: And I'm concerned too, because I'm an Irish citizen. And I think that opens up a whole 'nother discussion. You know, in nine months' time, do I have to go?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. And those are big questions, aren't they? And they're still going on.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Yeah. And I don't have kind of the real details of that other than to say that I do know there has been broad agreement to protect the rights of both UK citizens living in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK.

But that's also within the context of this kind of much wider debate that we're living at the moment of the Windrush generation and people who have lived here for years and years and years, feeling that they're British citizens, and being treated in the most deplorable way because their papers aren't in order. So I can absolutely understand the anxiety of people faced with that.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** And Richard's question also speaks back to an earlier point, which was when people made the decision, I don't think they realised how interlinked Europe already is, and how many British citizens live in Europe, and how many European citizens live in Britain. And how in a sense, you know, the boundaries, the national boundaries are so blurred.

And it's only after the event that all these incredibly important practical questions-- if I retire to the south of Spain, can I still draw my pension? Can I still use the local health service?

KAREN FOLEY: And if I live in Ireland, can I nip over the border to the shops if I'm used to going that way and happen to live there?

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** And the answer to those questions we will only know when the Brexit negotiations conclude, whenever that will be.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** And it's interesting that one of the main reasons people gave was that they wanted decisions about the UK to be made at the national level. But of course, we live in a globalised world now, so the ability to take decisions at that nation state level for any nation state is much reduced compared to what it would have been, say, in the 1940s and 1950s, because we live in such an interconnected, interlinked world.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** And therefore, one could argue-- and this is a question that I'm sure many political scientists and even philosophers are looking at is, would it be right to have a second vote? And the argument for yes, it would, Richard's question comes to play.

There are so many issues and questions that have come to the fore to people's minds after

this result that one could make up a strong argument to say, look. There are so many big questions. People didn't really know about that when they made this momentous decision. Once when the negotiations are concluded, is it democratically correct to take this back to the voters and say, look, this is what it will mean for the Richards in Ireland and the people living-- sorry, for the Richards in Barcelona and the people living in Ireland?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Which brings us back to the level of debate. I think the level of debate was very poor, at least in England. I don't know. Scotland, as you say, is a slightly different context. But I really do think that voters were failed by political elites on all sides, because the level of debate just was not very good at all.

KAREN FOLEY: But do you think it was the level of debate or the level of listening or exposure, I guess, or interest that people took? We seem a lot more interested now.

[LAUGH]

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Yeah, yeah. It's a mixture. We know that the average citizen is not particularly interested in politics, but that's really then the duty of political elites to get their message across and to have a message that is reliable, that is based on claims that are based on evidence.

**GEORGE
CALLAGHAN:** And I think what students should realise, in a conversation, like this, between academics, we're still talking at a very generalizable level. But on that, what I would see in terms of the level of political debate in Scotland is that the Scottish referendum hadn't had, in a sense, politicised the citizenry to a general extent, and so people were used to thinking about economic growth, currency, trade figures. So there was already a relatively well-educated populace that were ready to think.

So that could be one of the explanatory variables for why that earlier bar chart, which showed the percentage point difference was so big in Scotland. Because actually, people had time to think at a slightly more advanced level. I'm not saying they're more advanced thinkers, but the debate was of a slightly different order.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm. Mm. And this is the one thing, isn't it, is that with sitting and talking and planning, thinking about the session and thinking, well, what good has come out of all of this, it is that level of engagement. And I think one of the things that has come out is people are more actively involved in politics. It has been made a lot more real in various forms.

GEORGINA
BLAKELEY: But again, I think we have to be careful about talking about it in general terms, because I do think that we live in a very polarised society. And Gerry Stoker, a political scientist, explained that the leave vote came from places that don't matter. It was the revenge of places that don't matter. And that sort of feeling that they haven't been represented, and that they still feel excluded from politics in this country.

GEORGE
CALLAGHAN: I mean, I would say that anything that gets people politically engaged and thinking critically and looking and thinking analytically is good.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes.

GEORGE
CALLAGHAN: And actually, I think it could well be good for Open University recruitment.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Well, on that note, I think we'll end this session. Thank you very much, George and Georgina. That's been a fascinating start to the programme. Our next session's going to focus on experts and conspiracy theories. But first, we have a video about power. So enjoy that, and join us back for that next session in five minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]