

Policy Briefing: Inclusion of Latin American ethnic groups in UCL administrative forms.

Date: February 2023

Audience: Welfare and Community Zone

What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

Currently, UCL's administrative forms do not include an option when asking about a student's ethnicity that includes Latina/Latinx or Hispanic. UCL follows categories defined by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), as is standard practice throughout the sector. HESA collect, assure and disseminate data about higher education in the UK and are 'the trusted source' of higher education data and analysis¹.

According to HESA statistics, a total of 5,235 South American students were recorded to study in higher education institutions around the UK for the academic year of 2021/2022². Between 2017 – 2018, UCL accepted 457 (2.49%) students from Central and South America, out of a total of 18,361 overseas student. Between 2022 – 2023, 335 (1.19%) were accepted to study from a total of 28,059 overseas students. Most of these students come from Chile, Colombia and Peru³.

UCL has strategic partnership within the Latin American region. The UCL Institute of the Americas, which was established in 2012, has been a leading multidisciplinary institution for students and researchers offering various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The former Pro-Vice-Provost (Latin America), Professor Stephen Hart, said that deepening collaborations with partners across Latin American countries for research will allow UCL to position itself as an attractive post-graduate destinations for students across Latin America⁴.

Within student level, there are several clubs affiliated with Latin American culture, language and communities such as the Argentine Tango Society, Colombian Society, Portuguese Speaking Society, Spanish and Latin American Society.

What would change if the policy was successful?

Students' Union UCL would publicly support for the category of Latin American ethnic group to appear in all administrative forms. This may involve including the category in all Union forms, lobbying UCL to do the same, and working with various stakeholders internally and externally to encourage HESA to include this category officially.

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about>

² <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from#non-uk>

³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from#non-uk>

⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global/regional-activity/ucl-latin-america#:~:text=UCL%20community&text=There%20are%20404%20students%20from,4%2C271%20alumni%20in%20Latin%20America.>

What is the relevant national / international context to this situation?

The UK is now home to around 250,000 people of Latin American origin – born or with ancestry in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of the Americas⁵.

Yet to date, neither UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) nor HESA identify ‘Latinx’ or ‘Latin American’ as an ethnic category in their administrative processes, making it difficult to provide a more detailed overview of the Latin American community from the wider student population⁶. This is despite the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recognising ‘Hispanic or Latin American’ in their census classification⁷. At the same time, Latin Americans holding dual nationalities tend to end up in the system as ‘Europeans’ which does not showcase their ethnically diverse background that not only encompasses European, but also Indigenous, Asian, African among others⁸. Similarly, UCL’s breakdown of ethnicity groups largely follows the same format, in which their ethnicity is not visible.

Universities such as Imperial College London and King’s College London have launched discussion groups and research to examine the underrepresentation of Latin American students in higher education to understand this almost ‘invisible’ group⁹.

Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

No

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

No

Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder / public relations issues with this policy proposal?

Students’ Union UCL and UCL could work with other Russell Group universities and student representative bodies who have voiced similar concerns in increasing the visibility of the Latin American student community.

Are there any sustainability implications to this item for discussion?

No

Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this item for discussion?

⁵ <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/12/latin-americans-are-one-of-the-uks-fastest-growing-groups-so-why-arent-they-recognised>

⁶ <https://cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Latinx-students-in-higher-education-Nov-2019.pdf>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/ethnicgroupnationalidentitylanguageandreligionvariables/census2021/ethnicgroupdetailed>

⁸ <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/229854/recognition-visibility-inclusion-latin-america-imperial/>

⁹ <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/229854/recognition-visibility-inclusion-latin-america-imperial/>

If this policy was successful, it may encourage greater sense of belonging of Latin American students, which can affect a student's self-esteem and studying experience. Greater collection of data would also lead to more understanding of the group's more culturally specific needs in terms of social services, and barriers faced in enrolment to higher education¹⁰ as well as career opportunities.

What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

If this policy proposal were to pass, the Students' Union could lobby for UCL administration to encourage HESA to recognise and include Central and Latin American ethnic groups in relevant administrative forms for universities. As a collective action with other universities, the ONS could be asked to include the Latin American group in future rounds of census taking.

¹⁰ <https://cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Latinx-students-in-higher-education-Nov-2019.pdf>