

Representation, engagement and participation

Latinx students in higher education

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Commissioned by King's College London

This report was written by The Centre for Education and Youth. CfEY is a ‘think and action-tank’. We believe society should ensure all children and young people receive the support they need to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We provide the evidence and support policy makers and practitioners need to support young people. We use our timely and rigorous research to get under the skin of issues affecting young people in order to shape the public debate, advise the sector and campaign on topical issues. We have a particular interest in issues affecting marginalised young people.

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Foreword

On our doorstep at King's, there is a large and vibrant Latinx community. Yet it is a section of our locality that traditionally we have known little about. As Latinx ethnicities are not currently a census or UCAS category, they are a group which lacks visibility in both policy and institutional settings. In King's Vision 2029 we have committed ourselves to serving our community, and this necessarily includes our Latinx community. We have commissioned this report so we are able to better do this.

We believe that Latinx students should be recognised as a distinct group within our university populations. Engagement and support should be tailored in the same way that the Higher Education sector is already doing for other BME groups. For King's College Widening Participation Department, following the recommendations of this report means having a basis on which to build effective access programmes which meet the needs of Latinx students. It means having the knowledge to ensure that once at university, Latinx students develop a sense of belonging and are equipped to gain successful outcomes.

We call on other universities to take steps to follow the recommendations of this report and upon the Office for National Statistics to introduce a specific Latin American ethnicity option for the 2021 census. We encourage those working with the Latinx community to take a relational approach, to prioritise sustained and reciprocal engagement so as to provide a more visible platform for Latinx voices.

Joanna Merchant

Head of Widening Participation (Pre-16),
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They call us 'the invisibles', los invisibles. For all our colours, flavours and rhythms; Latin Americans would expect all before invisibility. We pride ourselves in our joy, musical spirits and loud voices. The grinding reality of being Latin American in the UK has made invisibility a new custom for our community, one that is hard to escape.

This report resists invisibility with Latin American parents, students and teachers. This research, beyond words, recognises that there is a community behind los invisibles; with challenges and nuance of their own. It sheds light on a community with great aspirations and, above all, on challenges that can be overcome through action and policy.

Paulina Tamborrel

Community Organiser, Citizens UK

Executive summary

This report explores the representation of Latin American or ‘Latinx’ young people in higher education in the UK. It is the fourth in a series of reports about the underrepresentation of certain groups in UK HE, the work that widening participation practitioners can do to support them, and the people they need to engage with in order to achieve lasting change.

The impetus for this report is somewhat different to the previous reports in the series. We know little about whether or not Latinx young people are underrepresented in higher education, due to the fact that there is little or no official data on the size and characteristics of the UK-resident Latinx population, how Latinx young people do at school, and how many of them are undertaking some form of higher education. Although this absence of data limits our ability to say whether or not Latinx young people are underrepresented in higher education in numerical terms, it nonetheless reinforces the fact that they lack formal recognition as an ethnic group to which young people and their parents can choose to ascribe and ‘be counted’. This is why previous research on the Latinx community in the UK has dubbed them ‘the invisibles’, and this invisibility as a group is likely to have a significant impact on the extent to which public services, including higher education institutions, are responsive to their needs – even when they form a sizeable, and growing proportion of the population: in 2013, there were roughly 250,000 Latinx people living in the UK and roughly 145,000 of these lived in London.

Despite high levels of education and employment, the Latinx community is overrepresented in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, such as in the cleaning and hospitality sectors. Many Latinx young people therefore come from families with a low socioeconomic status in the UK, although this varies markedly by country of origin. Many parents also have limited proficiency in English and may not have secured citizenship or settled status. This can create a disconnect between Latinx families and the education system.

Our fieldwork identified five main issues that relate specifically to the education system and which can compound the effects of family circumstances. These include:

- 1. Lack of knowledge of the UK education system:** this can hinder Latinx pupils’ access to school places and limit parents’ ability to provide support with schoolwork and decision making.
- 2. Lack of awareness of how citizenship status can affect eligibility for funding:** this can stand in the way of access to student loans or result in heightened student fees.
- 3. A need for pupils to act as ‘linguistic brokers’:** when Latinx pupils have to facilitate interaction between parents and their school this can create conflicts of interest.
- 4. A high degree of reliance on community-based support networks:** this can cause difficulties in areas where networks are weak, due to lower Latinx population density.
- 5. The school admissions system:** the slow pace of admissions and schools’ reluctance to admit pupils who speak English as an additional language can ‘lock’ Latinx young people out of the school system.

Alongside these potential barriers, however, our fieldwork identified significant support amongst Latinx parents, and their children, for the goal of progressing to higher education. In many cases obtaining a degree from a UK university was a highly prized goal, and was sometimes the primary reason behind a Latinx family’s decision to move to the UK. The young people and parents we spoke to were often

concerned about whether they would ‘fit in’ at university, and sometimes displayed a preference for staying local to London, where they were part of an extensive Latinx community. However, the prospect of higher education remained a positive one, despite these misgivings.

We conclude our report with a series of recommendations for widening participation practitioners, based on the evidence and perspectives we encountered during our research. Latinx young people do not face a uniform set of barriers to accessing higher education in the UK, and as always, effective widening participation activity needs to be tailored to individual pupils and parents/carers. However, depending on their existing programmes of work, we suggest that HEIs wanting to develop their widening participation work with Latinx young people should consider six ‘best bets’:

- 1. Support Latinx pupils to secure and declare their citizenship status.** This work should begin early, and could involve signposting families to pro bono legal support, or supporting with the cost of the child citizenship fee such as through the Citizenship Payment Plan.
- 2. Address language barriers,** for example by holding information and advice events in community venues, with Latinx students, or students on Spanish or Portuguese courses, acting as interpreters.
- 3. Go beyond access.** Helping Latinx pupils to secure a place on a higher education course is only half the story. HEIs should ensure they are providing Latinx students with the support they need, throughout their course, to have a positive experience of higher education and make fulfilling next steps. Latinx students may require particular support with feeling as though they ‘fit in’ at university, and navigating their parents’ expectations of what they should do when they graduate. HEIs should involve students in this support, providing resources and logistical support for peer mentoring between existing students and new, or prospective students, both on- and off-campus.
- 4. Work with key community brokers** to establish strong, long-term partnerships between HEIs and Latinx groups. This can happen directly, by working with local church groups and community groups, or through a community organising group or a Council for Voluntary Services. Investing in these links will help HEIs to ensure they are taking a culturally sensitive approach based on existing grassroots connections and knowledge of the Latinx community.
- 5. Call on the ONS and UCAS to officially recognise Latinx students,** building on the work started by groups such as LatinXcluded. As well as providing official recognition for students who wish to identify as Latinx, gathering this data would help HEIs to monitor and evaluate their outreach work with this group and better tailor their support in future.
- 6. Ensure Latinx people are visible in a variety of roles within HE.** For instance, HEIs should support their Latinx academics to have a visible profile, and to play an active role in outreach work. This will help to demonstrate the many, key roles Latinx people play in the day-to-day life of higher education in the UK.

Introduction

The 16-25 Latinx population in the UK is growing rapidly, particularly in the capital. The latest estimates place the UK Latinx population at 250,000 in 2013, with roughly 145,000 of these living in London (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016: 8). The Latinx community now represents a significant proportion of the capital's total population, broadly comparable in size to other large migrant and ethnic groups. Despite this, the Latinx community lacks formal recognition in official statistics, and is therefore considered by some to be 'invisible'. As well as posing a challenge to accurately estimating the size of the Latinx population, a lack of formal recognition also makes it impossible to assess how Latinx pupils achieve at school, and the extent to which they take up opportunities to progress to higher education.

The insights we have into the socioeconomic status of Latinx families in the UK, the language barriers they can face when interacting with public services, and their often 'irregular' migrant status suggests that Latinx young people may face barriers accessing higher education in the UK. However, these are assumptions based on our existing knowledge of the Latinx community, and new research is needed to understand Latinx young people's engagement with higher education in the UK. This report therefore explores five research questions:

1. What are the demographics of the Latinx community in the UK?
2. Are Latinx students underrepresented in UK HE?
3. What are Latinx young people's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, HE?
4. Are there barriers to HE access and outcomes for Latinx students in the UK?
5. What should UK HEIs do to support Latinx access to HE?

We approached these research questions from a range of angles, using a variety of research methods. We began with a desk-based trawl of existing research and data. This exposed the paucity of research into Latinx young people's experiences of, and progression through, the UK education system. We then convened a steering group of experts in this field, including academics, student campaigners, support workers and parents. We followed up the steering group with a range of interviews and focus groups involving teachers, widening participation practitioners and representatives from local authorities, alongside Latinx pupils and parents. This wide-ranging fieldwork allowed us to identify a set of barriers that may stand in the way of Latinx young people's progression to HE in the UK, and based on these, we have developed a set of recommendations for future action.

Methodology

This report brings together findings from a desk-based review of existing research and data, an initial expert steering group, together with a round of expert interviews, and focus groups and interviews with young people, parents and teachers. Our aim was to address the research questions set out in section 1 by examining the existing knowledge base, identifying gaps, and addressing these gaps through fieldwork.

2.1 Desk-based review of existing literature

We began the research with a detailed review of academic and grey literature relating to each of our research questions, alongside a review of existing datasets from UCAS and HESA. We did not apply strict geographical or date filters to our literature searches, in order to avoid placing further limitations on an already shallow pool of existing studies. We also approached widening participation practitioners and academics in order to identify studies that might not have been picked up in our own searches.

2.2 Steering group

During our desk-based research, we convened an initial expert steering group in order to test our research questions, hear angles on the research we had not considered, and identify existing literature and data we may not have picked up in our desk-based review. The steering group was recorded and transcribed, and involved the following individuals:

- **Paulina Tamborrel:** Community Organiser, Citizens UK
- **Ana Souza:** Visiting Professor, Universidade de Brasília and Visiting Academic, Oxford Brookes University
- **Gabriela Sepúlveda:** King's College London undergraduate
- **Cathy McIlwaine:** Professor of Development Geography, King's College London
- **Liliana Torres:** Parent Power leader

2.3 Expert interviews

We conducted five expert interviews with leaders with a higher education, community organising and local authority perspective on the issue. Interviews were conducted by phone, recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

- **Paulina Tamborrel:** Community Organiser, Citizens UK
- **Jack Hopkins:** Leader, Lambeth Council
- **Sarah Guerra:** Director of Diversity & Inclusion, King's College London
- **Jimmy Pickering:** Widening Participation Manager (Post-16), King's College London
- **Anne-Marie Canning:** Director of Social Mobility & Student Success, King's College London

2.4 Student, parent and teacher focus groups

We drew up a sampling grid for the student, parent and teacher focus groups, in order to try and capture a range of perspectives on our research questions. Our sampling grid targeted five different groups: HE students; post-16 students; secondary students; parents, and teachers/teaching assistants.

Focus groups were held with:

- Two Latinx higher education students from London South Bank University
- Five Latinx secondary-aged pupils from St Gabriel's College, Lambeth
- Five teachers: Claudia Lopez-Prieto (St Gabriel's College, Lambeth), Susanna Redondo Vera, Amy Earthrowl, Fred Morgan, Jem McKay (all St George's Catholic School, Westminster)
- Four mothers from *Espacio Mama Southwark*, a mums' group in Camberwell

Due to difficulties recruiting post-16 students, we conducted a single face-to-face interview with a Latinx sixth form pupil from St George's Catholic School, Westminster, in place of a focus group.

Interview and focus group transcripts were analysed as a single set, in order to identify different perspectives on each of our research questions in turn. This approach allowed us to reflect the ways in which experiences, barriers and potential solutions vary between different groups and individuals, to highlight areas of consensus and areas of contention. Ultimately, we brought these nuances to bear on our recommendations for future action, so that they reflect the complexity of the issue of Latinx representation in HE.

We acknowledge that our fieldwork was based solely in London, and the teachers who took part in our research came predominantly from one school in the capital. Targeting our fieldwork in this way allowed us to capture as many expert perspectives as possible in a short timeframe, but it is important to note that, as a result, our findings may not reflect the experiences of Latinx young people living and attending schools in parts of the country with a smaller Latin American population.

What are the demographics of the Latinx community in the UK?

3.1 Defining ‘Latinx’

In this report, we use the term ‘Latinx’ to describe Spanish or Portuguese first language speakers from Central America (including Mexico) and South America, alongside those from Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016). The constituent countries of these regions are set out in the table below.

	Country
Central America	Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico.
South America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.
Caribbean islands	Cuba, Dominican Republic.

The label ‘Latinx’ is not used universally. Much of the existing literature uses terms such as ‘Latin American,’ ‘Latino,’ ‘Central American’ or ‘South American’ to refer to this group (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016). The adults and young people we spoke to as part of our research also identified with a wide variety of labels. For some, the term ‘Latin’ was favourable:

‘We are all Latin. [We are all from] Central America and South America so we are Latin.’

Parent

For others, however, it was more important to be identified by the specific country they were born in:

‘My daughter thinks she is English. She’s English and she said, Mummy, “I’m first English and then I’m Brazilian and then I’m Colombian”’.

Parent

The UK’s Latinx population are not widely discussed or acknowledged (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016). This is reflected in the limited existing literature examining the lives of Latinx people in the UK, and their absence from official statistics such as Census data.

This report seeks to address some of the gaps in existing research by exploring the experiences of Latinx young people and their families, specifically in relation to their access to higher education. In the process, we explore the barriers they face and the ways in which they interact with the UK education system more widely.

3.2 What statistics tell us

Existing data on the UK’s Latinx community is limited. This is primarily because ‘Latinx’ is not identified as an ethnic group in UK Census data or in administrative processes underpinning public services. Therefore, people who might identify as Latinx may ascribe as ‘other’, or ‘mixed’ for official

purposes. Given that the size and characteristics of the UK's Latinx population cannot be ascertained directly from official statistics, researchers' estimates, drawn from a range of sources, provide the most accurate estimates available.

The lack of formal recognition of the Latinx population in the UK can lead to their exclusion from important elements of social and political life, and from the design and provision of public services. For instance, formal recognition as an ethnic group can be a prerequisite for local authority provision of outreach, interpretation and information services relating to education, housing, health and voting (Mas Giralt and Granada 2014). As a result, some groups are campaigning for official recognition of the 'Latinx' label, as part of calls for greater recognition of the UK's Latinx community (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016).

3.2.1 How big is the UK's Latinx population?

McIlwaine and Bunge (2016) estimate that, in 2013, there were roughly 250,000 Latinx people living in the UK and roughly 145,000 of these lived in London. These figures are derived from a range of data, including the 2011 Census, mothers' countries of birth from national statistics and statistics on recent arrivals to the UK from the EU.

Previous research suggests that around a fifth of the Latinx community in the UK can be classified as 'irregular', meaning that they are living in the UK without up to date documentation (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011). This contributes additional uncertainty to attempts to estimate the size of the Latinx population in the UK. Irregular status can be due to a number of factors including refused asylum applications, out of date visas, bureaucratic failures in processing immigration applications and, in a small minority of cases, unauthorised entry. As well as making it difficult to assess the size of the Latinx population in the UK, irregular status can expose Latinx people to a heightened risk of exploitation, such as by being forced into modern slavery (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011).

3.2.2 Where do the Latinx community live?

Available data suggests that around 60% of the UK's Latinx community is resident in London (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016), with a significant concentration south of the river in Lambeth and Southwark (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011). The Latinx community now represents a significant proportion of the capital's total population, broadly comparable in size to other large migrant and ethnic groups, such as the Polish-born population (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016). Existing research has tended to focus on estimating the size of the Latinx population living in London, given its geographical concentration. As a result, there are few accurate estimates of the number of Latinx people living in other parts of the country.

3.2.3 Where do the Latinx community work?

Despite high levels of education and employment, available data suggests that the Latinx community is overrepresented in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, such as in the cleaning and hospitality sectors. This reflects a precedent first established by initial large-scale waves of Latin American migration to the UK in the 1970s (McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011). Many Latinx people are employed in elementary occupations in the UK, having left professional and managerial jobs in their home country, often in pursuit of better pay. Poor proficiency in English is an important driver behind this 'occupational downgrading'. Latinx people are also more likely to work part-time hours compared to other groups in the UK (McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011), with part-time work tending to be lower paid than full-time work.

Against the backdrop of these overall trends, it is important to acknowledge that Latinx people have different countries of origin and that they have come to live in the UK as a result of various waves of

migration. Individual groups have different employment levels, skills and qualification levels due to the social and economic structures they were part of in the countries they emigrated from (Krausova 2015).

3.2.4 What is the socioeconomic profile of Latinx communities in the UK?

Although labour market information for the Latinx population is piecemeal, available data and existing studies suggest that Latinx workers in the UK are disproportionately likely to have low socioeconomic status, primarily because of their over-representation in low-skilled and part-time work. Latinx workers are also at particular risk of workplace abuse, exploitation and discrimination, making it difficult for them to be upwardly mobile (Mas Giralt and Granada 2014). As a result, Latinx people can find it beneficial to distance themselves from their community when they are trying to gain access to the labour market or educational opportunities, as one expert we spoke to explained:

'Some will appear light skinned and will prefer to present themselves as such for job access and things like that... Generally there's this idea that it will be better for... the individual to try to distance themselves from the community and sort of put themselves in European or white standard.'

Gabriela Sepúlveda

Are Latinx students underrepresented in UK HE?

We suggest that the representation of Latinx young people in UK HE can be considered in three ways:

- categorical representation;
- numerical representation, and
- cultural representation.

These three aspects of representation are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The absence of official statistics relating to the Latinx population in the UK is mirrored within higher education, where there is no centralised data on the number of Latinx students at UK-based HEIs. Neither UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) nor HESA (The Higher Education Statistics Agency) identify ‘Latinx’ or ‘Latin American’ as an ethnic category in their administrative processes, and so it is not possible to disaggregate Latinx students from the wider student population. While HESA does record students’ nationalities, on its own this does not provide an accurate proxy for identifying Latinx students. In this way, the ‘categorical’ representation of Latinx students – their ability to ascribe as Latinx during the applications and admissions process – impacts on our ability to make claims about their ‘numerical’ representation – that is, whether or not the size of the Latinx student population is proportionate to the wider Latinx population in UK society. Our qualitative research with young people, adults and experts provided additional insights into the Latinx community’s representation in Higher Education, in particular their ‘cultural’ representation – that is, the extent to which Latin American perspectives and identities are given space on campus, and the extent to which Latin Americans are present in a range of roles.

4.1 Categorical and numerical representation

Our fieldwork for this report provided early indications that HEIs are beginning to gather their own data during admissions, in order to identify students from Latin American backgrounds, and other backgrounds not reflected on the UCAS form. However, in general, universities do not identify Latinx students as a target group in their own right, and only engage these students in widening participation outreach work if they are studying at partner schools or have other target characteristics, such as being eligible for Free School Meals or living in a low participation neighbourhood. Until reliable data on the number of Latinx students applying to UK universities are gathered centrally, or can be aggregated from HEIs’ in-house data, it is not possible to assess whether Latinx young people are relatively more or less likely to progress to HE than their peers.

Some groups are currently campaigning for UCAS to allow students to define themselves as Latinx when they apply to higher education. However, as we identify in section 5, this needs to be accompanied by measures to avoid mis-categorising Latinx young people who are eligible for settled status, leave to remain, or British citizenship as international students, as this can lead them to being charged international rather than home fees.

4.2 Cultural representation

Many universities have a Latin American student society, and our research for this report revealed that this is the case at all Russell Group universities. However, the presence of these societies on campus does not tell us how well Latinx culture is integrated into university life more generally, or the extent to which these societies provide spaces for expressing the voices and perspectives of Latinx young people who live in the UK. The activities, priorities and audience of Latin American societies vary widely, and this may be shaped in part by the extent to which they are run by UK-resident Latinx students, Latinx international students, or students from other backgrounds. For instance, while some Latin American societies might focus on raising awareness of issues and campaigns relating to UK-resident Latinx students' experiences and representation, other societies may exist as forums for all students to explore 'Latin American' or 'Mexican' culture more broadly.

Alongside student-governed spaces, it is important that HEIs consider how Latinx people are represented in their academic and non-academic workforce, to prioritise the 'visibility' of these staff and the range of roles they perform. This helps to promote a sense of Latinx people being part of the 'fabric' of HE, and demonstrates to Latinx students that they are not locked out of high status careers. Given the concentration of Latinx workers in elementary positions in the labour market, it is likely that for some HEIs the largest Latinx group on campus might be found within their cleaning team. Some of the experts we spoke to suggested that Latinx young people can be dissuaded from applying to university either because they feel there is no one 'like them' there, or because the only Latinx people on campus are focused in these types of roles:

'Whenever I talk to [Latinx young people] about the idea of going to university they seem really hopeless about it. On one hand I think it is due to the stigma of being Latin American, and I've got the response a lot of times: "what would I do in a university? They would think I'm one of the cleaners".'

Gabriela Sepúlveda

Taking these three types of representation together, it is clear that we cannot make a judgment about the numerical representation of Latinx young people in UK HE without them being able to categorically identify as Latinx, if they choose to do so. Moreover, if the voices of Latinx students, and the presence of Latinx academics and workers is insufficiently visible on campus, this is likely to sustain prospective Latinx students' worries that higher education is 'not for them'.

Are Latinx students underrepresented in UK HE?

Very little work has been done to develop a picture of Latinx young people's perceptions of and attitudes towards HE in the UK, with studies tending to focus instead on parents' views. A report on irregular migrant children and families in the UK found that among the young people interviewed, those who talked about their future aspirations mostly 'wanted to be educated in the UK, often to study at university, and find a career and work' (Sigona and Hughes 2012).

Sigona and Hughes go on to reference one Latinx young woman who was interested in studying at a UK university rather than returning to Brazil because she had completed her A-levels here. She described how going back to her home country Brazil would feel like she had to 're-start everything' (*ibid.*). Whilst speaking to young people and their teachers during our own fieldwork, we heard a range of attitudes towards university, with some students keen to attend and others unsure. In comparison, for most of the parents, UK HE seemed to be a highly prized goal that they hoped their children would achieve in the future.

5.1 Mixed feelings

Existing research finds that education is the reason for many migrants' decision to move to Europe and then to the UK, and 'is held on par with, or above economic reasons for migration' (Berg 2015). This view was reflected in one of the HE student interviews we conducted. Andres Roncancio, originally from Colombia, described how he had moved to the UK from Spain when he was 18 with his father because they felt it would offer 'more opportunities' in the future. When he found success and gained a university place his mother and younger brother decided to move to London as well in the hope it would open new doors for him too. Andres described how his family put up with working long hours and living in shared accommodation for a period in order to have the chance of accessing HE, and then work, in the UK:

'For me coming to London and having the opportunity here was kind of like it was a rush of positivity and saying, "Things are going to go well and they're going to go well because I'm working hard and I'm going to get them".'

Andres Roncancio

In the Lambeth school focus group, pupils also spoke positively about the idea of UK HE. When asked to write down words that came to mind when they thought of university, their responses included 'a better future', 'quality of life', 'independence' and 'knowledge'. However, they also chose words that showed they viewed the experience of HE as potentially tough, including 'targets', 'challenge' and 'hard work'. Pupils saw the long-term benefits of higher education as linked to these shorter-term challenges:

'I chose hard work because I think university is a good thing and will help you a lot in the future but it's also very hard – there you will need to work hard and quality of life because I think that if you get a career and university your quality of life would be so much better than if you didn't go to university.'

Pupil, aged 15

'I'll feel relieved once I finish uni, after everything, all the struggles.'

Pupil, aged 13

All of the pupils in this focus group said they wanted to attend university and study topics that they felt were a way into highly skilled jobs such as law, astrophysics, business management, and medicine.

The sixth form pupil we spoke to, who attended a different school, was slightly more ambivalent about the prospect of higher education. He chose the words 'study', 'growth' and 'freedom' to describe university and said he felt it would be 'a good opportunity and 'worth it in the long run' but added that it was a pathway he felt 'iffy' about.

For this pupil, attending university symbolised the threshold to adulthood, which he found intimidating:

'When you think of university you think about growing up. It's a scary thought because no one really wants to grow up. You go to university and then you're off to work and join the rest of society ... I have not exactly anxiety, but when I start thinking of things like that I don't want to deal with it.'

Sixth form pupil

Despite his reservations, this pupil was nonetheless attracted to the idea of the social opportunities attending university might present. He acknowledged that the range of countries and backgrounds that students could be from at university offered an 'interesting' opportunity to meet new people.

Mayra Amezquita, one of the HE students we interviewed, described mixed feelings towards university among her family. She explained how she had come to the UK from Colombia to study English and gain a Masters degree, moving in with her auntie in Elephant and Castle, who works as a teaching assistant. While she felt positive about her experience of HE in the UK, she explained that her cousins who grew up in the UK have shown little interest in university and gave examples of two who had chosen to start families instead:

'Although my cousins grew up here they didn't go to uni... it's not very common for Latin Americans to go to uni... Once they arrive here they have to do 4 years then a BTEC and it seems so long. I think a lot of them, they get tired.'

Mayra Amezquita

Mayra said she felt there was a lack of examples in her immediate community of people who had attended and successfully completed university. She hoped that her own example of beginning life in the UK as a cleaner and moving on to become the operations manager of a company after her studies had set a good example and might influence her younger cousins, who are still in school, to do the same.

'I was promoted and then I have money to travel and I can pay rent and I can do things on my own. I've been pushing them to do it. Latin Americans as I say I believe we are so clever, we are so proactive, but I do think we have a problem of inferiority sometimes we are not very sure about ourselves.'

Mayra Amezquita

5.2 Parental pressure

The experts we spoke to in our steering group believed that parents placed a high value on their children attending HE in the UK, explaining that they had encountered parents who had attended university in Latin America but were willing to step down into low-paid jobs in the UK to ensure their children could benefit from attending a British university. Whether their long-term plan was to settle in the UK or return to their country of origin, parents were 'willing to sacrifice poor working conditions and exploitative working environments' because of the cultural capital their children could gain from a 'superior' education in the UK. Ana Souza explained the role that parents' expectations can have on 'normalising' HE for their children:

'Most of the second-generation migrants I have spoken to have told me that their parents did go to higher education even if it was back in Latin America, so there is this sort of expectation that they will also go through it.'

Ana Souza

The teacher focus group we held, and the sixth form pupil we spoke to (whose mother had attended university outside of the UK) also identified parental pressure as an important factor shaping Latinx young people's perceptions and attitudes towards HE. The sixth former said he felt his mother would 'be a bit disappointed' if he did not go to university and took an apprenticeship instead. He added that his mother had told him that the reason for moving to the UK was so that he could 'have a better life' and going to a UK university would 'help ensure that'.

The teachers we spoke to said they were aware of Latin American parents encouraging their children to work hard outside of school hours, including joining after school clubs to enhance their application to university, but that they did not feel that Latinx pupils were always as enthusiastic as their parents.

'You want to come here... you want a better opportunity for your kids in the future ... The parents want their kids to achieve, but I'm not so sure... unless the kids are very academic, highly academic, I'm not so sure that they really want to, in my experience.'

Teacher

This echoed comments from a mother in the parent focus group, who said she was concerned that her 12-year-old daughter's school was not pushing her hard enough.

'I told the teacher at school to push her more to do extra jobs or give things for her to do at home... when I see the results they say "she's here, average, but she's right where she's supposed to be". Average. I don't think average is a good mark. Not for me... I said "No: In Brazil, you're not going anywhere with average".'

Parent

This parent felt that a degree from an English university opened up global opportunities and she was insistent that her daughter would go on to HE.

'Another day she said, "Mum, don't you think if I'm doing just an apprenticeship it's good?" Oh no, please, don't tell me that. Please, please, please. I'm working very hard and I want to see you with your degree. Finish university and your degree and everything.'

Parent

However, parental pressure can vary between different nationalities within the Latin American umbrella, due to the different socioeconomic backgrounds of different migrant families. Some of the pupils we spoke to had parents who had been to university, while others had not, leading to different aspirations and expectations. This reflects the findings of a 2015 study focused on the London Borough of Southwark, which found that while 31% of residents born in South America living in Southwark had a university degree or similar qualification, this stood at 62% for residents born in Central America (Berg 2015).

Likewise, Paulina Tamborrel explained that while she had 'met mums that are incredibly keen to get their kids into higher education', she had found other parents who were not interested in the idea. She said some mothers viewed university as 'a waste of time', preferring for their children to go straight into work because they believed that their ethnicity would hold them back once they finished studying anyway:

'The experience and opportunities of some of the Latin American parents in the UK has led a fraction of them to believe that there is no great value in pursuing a university degree. Some believe that certain professions are not within the possibility of anyone they know.'

Paulina Tamborrel

Jimmy Pickering, Widening Participation Manager (Post-16) at King's College London, had also had conversations with Latinx pupils and parents that suggested not all Latin American families were enthusiastic about their children progressing to HE:

'For some families in the Latinx community, the high-pressured jobs parents are undertaking mean that there isn't always time to make accessing higher education a priority. Some families run cleaning and hospitality businesses which they want their kids to support with once they have left school.'

Jimmy Pickering

It is clear from existing literature and our own research that while many Latinx parents and pupils hold firm aspirations to progress to higher education, and often make significant personal sacrifices to realise these aspirations, some families perceive higher education to be of lower value than other routes into the labour market, and often feel that high status, professional occupations are 'off limits' for their children.

5.3 Familiarity and 'fitting in'

For the Latinx young people we spoke to, having 'inside knowledge' of HE from a familiar source appeared to be an important way of forming an idea of HE as 'for them'. This is consistent with the way that young people in general tend to source their information about higher education, as we have identified in previous reports in this series. A number of the pupils mentioned getting advice and information about attending university from cousins who had already had the experience, and said this made them feel more inclined to go to university themselves.

One pupil described her cousin attending the same university as another family member in the UK, which made her 'very comfortable' there. However, she also described how her cousin's experience had demonstrated how challenging higher level study can be:

'My cousin – I think she's in her last year... she doesn't go out as much and she's always literally finishing her work and everything and she said we're going to struggle if we don't focus now, so she's always giving me advice.'

Pupil, aged 16

Our fieldwork also revealed the importance of a familiar Latinx community on-campus in shaping young people's views of HE. When looking at images representing different aspects of university the pupils attending our focus group in Lambeth said they would like to join a Latin American society (or a Brazilian or Colombian society) because it would be a way of interacting with a smaller group of students who 'share your language or your ideas', rather than just speaking about their studies, which they said would make them feel more comfortable.

During the same exercise, the sixth form pupil flagged that finding friends and fitting in at university was a worry for him, over and above other factors such as university fees. The teacher focus group also acknowledged some Latinx pupils' concerns regarding whether they would 'find anyone relatable' if they left the Latin American community in London behind and moved to a part of the country they did not know well to attend university.

'The white British kid from Peterborough is going to know that if they go to a university anywhere in the country, there are going to be other white British kids who've had a similar background. It would be a worry that you might not find anybody that completely understands where you're coming from.'

Teacher

The HE students we interviewed had set up a Latin American society at London South Bank University to build a community there, and the society's first event had been met with enthusiasm. Mayra Amezquita said she felt it had been important for Latinx students 'to know there is a community there and they are part of it; they are represented at the uni as well.'

5.4 The role of geography

Although some of the Latinx pupils we spoke to held aspirations for high-status HEIs that were not on their doorstep, they tended to express a preference for local institutions, mirroring other underrepresented groups in higher education. This was apparent in both the pupil and teacher focus groups. The teacher focus group reported a reluctance from pupils to leave their families to attend university, and said they had seen a preference for choosing somewhere local and ‘staying at home and going to university’.

‘A lot of them are obsessed with UCL because they think that’s the best London uni, or Imperial.’

Teacher

They gave an example of one female pupil whose mother was looking into moving her family to the city in which she had got a place to attend university. They felt there was a lack of examples in the social circles of other young Latin Americans who had moved away to study independently:

‘The examples before them are very parochial; still in London in these communities. I don’t think they have many examples of someone going to Edinburgh University and then staying there for ten years.’

Teacher

Likewise, although the pupils at our focus group in Lambeth said they were attracted to high status institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, they appeared to be equally influenced by the desire to remain local.

‘For me as a dream it would be to study in Oxford or maybe stay... around London.’

Pupil, aged 15

Are there barriers to HE access and outcomes for Latinx students in the UK?

Latinx pupils are not identified as a distinct group in official statistics, which means we know little about their attainment or progress at school. However, previous research gives an indication of their experiences of compulsory education in the UK, which in turn points to some of the barriers that may affect their access to HE (IRMO 2016). These barriers, which were echoed in our fieldwork, include:

- Lack of knowledge of the UK education system
- Documentation
- Language barriers
- Area-level differences in support
- Slow systems
- Bullying

6.1 Lack of knowledge of the UK education system

Some Latin American young people face challenges accessing secondary schools in the UK, partly due to a lack of familiarity with the UK education system (Mas Giralt and Granada 2014). In particular, variation in the ages at which children transfer from primary to secondary school in different countries can leave young Latin Americans who have recently arrived in the UK stuck outside of education ‘for considerable periods of time’ (Mas Giralt and Granada 2014).

This barrier was articulated clearly in the parent focus group, during which the majority of parents wanted to ask questions and solicit advice about the UK education system, rather than speak about their own experiences. They were keen to find out more about further education options and student loans in particular. Likewise, during the teacher focus group, it was suggested that both Latin American pupils and their parents knew little about how to apply to university:

'They don't know about UCAS until we tell them. They don't know about student loans until we tell them.'

Teacher

One teacher explained how pupils’ understanding of the system tends to be based on other family members’ experiences, until they begin receiving more formal advice and guidance from their school. However, they also observed that many Latin American pupils had siblings or cousins who had started their own families at a young age, and they therefore lacked role models who could provide advice and guidance on how to access further or higher education. This was reinforced by one of the HE student interviews we conducted. Mayra Amezquita said she felt her family lacked role models among their community who had attended university and made a success of it. She explained that the parents in her family had been unsure of how the system worked and how to support their children through it. She felt this had led to missed opportunities for her family members who had moved to the UK from Colombia.

'I think a lot of the parents don't know how the system works and... what their children need to go to uni, which kind of A-Levels they need, which universities are good.'

Mayra Amezquita

We did however find that many of the pupils who took part in our focus group displayed a solid understanding of the UK education system, including how to apply for student finance. One pupil demonstrated a detailed understanding of UK HE, and said she had learned a lot from taking part in the King's Scholars Programme, which aims to encourage pupils from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds to apply to, and succeed at, top universities. This finding is likely to have been influenced by the fact that all of our focus group participants attended schools in London, where there is a relatively dense network of higher education institutions and corresponding outreach work.

In the steering group discussion Ana Souza said Latin American pupils can also be hindered at school by parents' lack of awareness of cross-national differences in the tools and techniques that teachers use, and the ways in which parents should provide support. For instance, if a child is attempting to complete homework and a parent intervenes to help them, they may guide their child to tackle the problem in a different way to the approach used by their teacher. Schools therefore need to help parents to support their children effectively:

'Sometimes, instead of helping, parents actually make it more difficult because there is no communication, so parental involvement is something that's really important in terms of them actually learning the different educational culture in the UK ... what is expected from parents and what is expected from schools.'

Ana Souza

Social norms can also put barriers between parents and schools. For instance Ana Souza explained that she had come across examples of Latin American parents voicing concerns that teachers did not like their children because teachers in Brazil tend to be more comfortable being physically close with young pupils. This mismatch in behaviour can 'play a role in how involved the kids become and how comfortable they feel'.

6.2 Documentation

Some Latin American families who have migrated to the UK may not have the documents required for legal immigration or residence. This can particularly affect recent migrants, given that it can take many years to secure settled status, indefinite leave to remain or full citizenship. While a lack of documentation does not entirely prohibit young Latin Americans from accessing education in the UK, previous research has shown that it can become a sticking point at certain stages, including in the transition into further or higher education.

In most cases, children who have come to the UK from overseas have the right to attend state-funded schools in England. This includes dependent children accompanying parents entering the UK on a work visa or any citizen of the European Economic Area – which might for example include families who have migrated to a European country such as Spain or Portugal, before coming to the UK. The local admission authority for a school cannot refuse a child a school place simply because of doubts about their immigration status.

In line with this, existing research finds that irregular migration status does not dramatically affect the educational experiences of children of compulsory school age (Sigona and Hughes 2012). However, in some circumstances these children may end up missing out on benefits such as free school meals or financial support for travel or school uniform.

On the other hand, documentation can become a more significant barrier at later stages in the education system. The transition to non-compulsory education, such as further or higher education, can be

particularly problematic for young people from families with irregular migration status, where eligibility for home fees and financial support is crucial in order not to be ‘locked out’ of the system. This can mean that young people feel ‘anxieties and frustration at being excluded from the education system’ (Sigona and Hughes 2012).

When they come to apply for UK HE, a young person only qualifies for ‘home’ university fees (rather than the higher EU or international student fees) if they are ‘ordinarily resident’ in the UK without any immigration restriction on the length of their stay on the first day of the first academic year of their course. They must also have been ordinarily resident in the UK for a full three year period before the first day of the first academic year of their course, and the main purpose for their residence must not be to receive full-time education during these three years (The UK Council for International Student Affairs 2019).

Teachers in the focus group we conducted highlighted confusion around the impact of immigration status on university fees as a significant barrier to Latinx young people’s access to higher education. One teacher who was in charge of managing UCAS applications at their school reported that while the majority of Latin American pupils at their school have UK or EU citizenship, every year they encounter some ‘who are hamstrung by the fact that they don’t’, meaning they would have to pay the much higher international student fees to go to a university in the UK. This teacher explained that one student recently returned to their home country as a result. Another teacher told us pupils did not understand that they would be charged international student fees if they did not state their nationality as British on their UCAS applications:

‘They all tried to put themselves as Latin American or non-British even though they had British passports and citizenship. No, put yourself as British or they’ll charge you.’

Teacher

6.3 Language barriers

6.3.1 Parental language skills

For non-native speakers, learning English in the UK as an adult is becoming increasingly challenging, and for Latin American parents this can limit their ability to support their children’s education. Funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses in England more than halved between 2010 and 2016, from £203 million to £90 million. This reduced the number of courses available, making access even more difficult for those already working long or irregular hours in low-paid employment. Existing research identifies a lack of evening classes or crèche facilities and the introduction of course fees for those not in receipt of unemployment benefits as the main obstacles to accessing this training (Mas Giralt and Granada 2014). This means that many Latin American parents who have migrated to the UK have weaker English than their children.

Sigona and Hughes (2012) found that language barriers affected basic elements of the school routine of irregular migrant children. These ranged from parents knowing when to collect a child after school to more complex interactions such as talking to teachers at parents’ evenings. One Brazilian mother said not being able to speak English meant ‘I don’t know what [my son’s] difficulties are, what I should do, you know, I find it very complicated’ (Sigona and Hughes 2012: 33).

During our steering group discussion Liliana Torres shared her own experiences from when she was younger and her parents did not speak English:

‘My parents – they really cared about my education, but it was very difficult for them to express themselves with my teachers... there’s obviously a need for more people speaking the language in schools and their needs being met.’

Liliana Torres

She added that she had recently spoken with a teaching assistant from a school in south London who was struggling with the language barrier. The woman reported working with large numbers of Latin American pupils but finding it very challenging to communicate with their parents.

The Latin American Women's Rights Service recognises insufficient English as a 'major stumbling block' for parents who end up sending their children to classes 'without really knowing what the levels, exams, or steps are,' and therefore struggling to properly support their children's learning (Berg 2015: 14). They have therefore worked in partnership with the Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organization (IRMO) in Southwark to produce a Spanish-language 'brief guide to the education system in London' for parents in the area, to address a need for up-to-date and detailed information that would help to support families and young people arriving in Southwark.

Jimmy Pickering said the language barrier among parents was a challenge for universities, as 'working with parents to influence their young people to think about their university options' is an important component of widening participation outreach work. KCL has tried to address this challenge by engaging with a new Spanish language version of the South London parental engagement programme Parent Power, run by non-profit organisation Citizens UK. KCL provides training and information for the group about the education system in the UK and how to give their children the best chance of going to university. The work of the Parent Power group has so far secured access for families to fully funded open day visits to universities, including Cambridge, and some 90% bursaries to private summer schools.

6.3.2 Latinx young people as linguistic brokers

Weak English language skills among Latin American parents can mean that their children take on an interpreter role, supporting their families to navigate systems such as education and health. This was discussed by the experts in the steering group and Ana Souza described the child's role as a 'linguistic broker' for their families. She said this can be an additional burden that impacts on their learning and that in some cases, pupils manipulate the information that teachers try to pass on to parents, obstructing their own educational achievement.

Paulina Tamborrel agreed, describing the experience of a Latin American sixth form pupil she had worked with who felt she had been left out by other Latin American teenagers because, unlike her, they were happy for their parents to not be informed about their school work as it gave them 'the freedom and unspoken permission to do whatever they want', without discipline.

Latinx pupils' sometimes subversive use of their role as a linguistic broker between their school and their parents was also described by one of the pupils in the Lambeth focus group:

'I speak Spanish to my parents and then sometimes, when I want to say something I don't want my parents to know, I speak English to my brothers.'

Pupil

6.4 Area-level differences in support

The type of support that pupils receive varies depending on the area they live in, with London boroughs that have a higher concentration of Latin American families tending to be more likely to offer support such as bilingual teaching assistants. Jack Hopkins, Leader of Lambeth Council, explained that his area is home to a variety of residents from many different nationalities, including a significant Latin American population, and he felt this had helped to encourage local schools to celebrate diversity. For instance he cited a number of primary schools in Lambeth that now teach Portuguese, in response to high numbers of children speaking Portuguese as their first language. However, Hopkins said he would like to see even more done to empower teachers to talk confidently about pupils' cultural heritage:

'If you look at the profile of the teachers, they're quite overwhelmingly white and some people that want to engage in the different cultures feel, 'oh I don't want to be clumsy, so I'm probably not going to get involved because I don't want to make a mistake'... So there's something about having to give confidence to our teachers... if we're really going to celebrate this, then that's about us engaging and learning.'

Jack Hopkins

In the steering group discussion Ana Souza said that local help is sometimes driven primarily by the community rather than the education system, with local volunteers stepping in to offer their support out of 'goodwill'. She also noted that support varies widely between different areas:

'I've seen schools who are very good at providing everything that's available in terms of bi-lingual support, so they might produce even guides in Portuguese, lists of simple sentences or words for kids to be welcomed; they have the buddy system where Brazilian children who have been there for longer and who speak fluent English to support the newcomers, so there is a lot happening that happens in a positive way but then it varies from borough to borough – there are boroughs that have nothing.'

Ana Souza

Anne-Marie Canning acknowledged that schools, colleges and universities located among large Latin American communities should be proactive in working out how to best serve Latin American students. She said recent work at KCL has been motivated by a 'growing sense that we really needed to pay attention to the Latin American community':

'We've always been uncomfortable about the under-representation of Latin American students [at KCL], knowing that we're in a place of high density for them, both in London and in the UK, and that's started to grow. The more we built our community engagement, the sense that we weren't serving our immediate local community became more and more clear.'

Anne-Marie Canning

A scan of existing widening participation outreach activity as part of our fieldwork suggested that relatively little activity is currently directed at Latinx pupils, who tend not to be identified as a target group by university widening participation teams. Latinx pupils are only likely to be included in outreach work if they attend a target school or have other target characteristics. Jimmy Pickering argued that part of the problem is the current lack of data relating to this group, which limits a university's ability to target Latinx pupils even if they have a desire to do so.

6.5 Slow systems

Latin American parents' existing linguistic and knowledge barriers can be compounded when official systems are slow, inflexible and difficult to access. This issue was explored in research by the IRMO between 2015 and 2016, when the organisation supported 41 children aged between 5 and 16 to access school. 24 of the children they supported with school places were resident in Lambeth, and these children had waited an average of 18.5 weeks each to be placed, even though school applications should only take around three weeks to be processed. Over half of these pupils missed more than a term of school while waiting for a place (IRMO 2016).

This delay in access to school places is also highlighted in another recent research report, which finds evidence of 'an increase in families arriving and waiting for school places', some schools that are 'reluctant to take children who do not speak English because of a lack of resources' (Berg 2015: 14). Likewise, Sigona and Hughes (2012) recount the experience of one Brazilian mother who struggled for five months to find a school place for her son, because of his English language skills.

6.6 Bullying

Existing research has shown that Latin Americans in the UK face discrimination in a range of contexts, including in education. McIlwaine et al. (2011) is the most comprehensive research on London's Latin American community undertaken to date. The research was jointly commissioned by Trust for London and the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) found that two-thirds of second-generation Latin Americans who participated in their research identified discrimination as an issue in their lives. The most frequent type of discrimination was workplace abuses, but educational racism and police harassment were also flagged as prevalent. One 20-year-old of Colombian origin said in relation to schooling 'my friends can all speak English, but in college we are always put in the lower end in the lower streams and they never advise us to go to university' (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011: 116).

Mas Giralt and Granada (2014) also suggests that once Latinx children are able to access the education system they face further barriers that include 'in some cases bullying and exclusion'. This can take particular forms, including sexual harassment for girls. As the authors argue, 'these barriers are further compounded for teenage Latin American girls who are often objectified through the stereotype that 'Latin Americans girls are sexy', in some cases leading to harassment and abuse'.

However, bullying might vary area-by-area, with some evidence suggesting discrimination is less prevalent in more ethnically or linguistically mixed schools. Interviewees in Sigona and Hughes' 2012 study reported positive experiences of schooling and said that even where there were problems 'a solution was usually found'. One Brazilian child reported that they had not faced any race issues, in part due to being in a mixed ethnicity classroom.

'I thought in the beginning that they were going to treat me differently because I'm from Brazil but there in the school there are many people from other countries, here in London there are many people from other countries and I also thought that the English kids my age would treat me differently because I am from Brazil, but no they treated me like a brother.'

Pupil

The children we spoke to said they enjoyed school, and none reported that they had experienced bullying, although some mentioned being labelled with the wrong ethnicity, for instance by peers, and having to explain which country they were from.

What should UK HEIs do to support Latinx access to HE?

As we identified in the opening section of this report, Latinx families' previous experience of higher education, and young people's own participation rates, are likely to vary according to their nationality, language, and socioeconomic status. Latinx young people do not face a uniform set of barriers to accessing higher education in the UK, and as always, effective widening participation activities need to be tailored to individual pupils and parents/carers. However, based on existing research and our own fieldwork, we have identified six 'best bets' for HEIs who want to work with Latinx families as part of their widening participation activities.

7.1 Support Latinx pupils to secure and declare their citizenship status

As relatively recent migrants, Latinx families may not have secured British citizenship, settled status or indefinite leave to remain, which could affect their eligibility for student finance and could require them to pay international rather than home fees. Some of the teachers we spoke to told us that Latinx young people and their families can realise this for the first time when they come to apply for university, at which point there is little they can do to seek a resolution.

Widening participation work with primary and early secondary pupils presents an opportunity to raise parents' awareness of the impact of their citizenship status on the cost of sending their children to university. This work should begin early, as the process for securing indefinite leave to remain, settled status or full citizenship can be lengthy, complex and costly. As well as raising awareness, HEIs could signpost parents to relevant support organisations, including pro bono legal support, to help them navigate the process of applying for citizenship. HEIs should also explore options for supporting families with the cost of securing UK citizenship, through programmes such as the Citizenship Payment Plan, which provides interest-free payments to families who cannot afford the £1,012 child citizenship fee.

Our fieldwork also highlighted that some Latinx families choose not to declare their British citizenship on application forms, potentially excluding their children from the financial support and home fees for which they are eligible. Latinx pupils applying to HE may therefore benefit from having schools and colleges screen these sections of their application before they are submitted.

7.2 Address language barriers

Depending on their country of origin and the length of time they have been resident in the UK, some Latinx parents/carers may only have basic proficiency in English, limiting the extent to which they can navigate official systems and administrative processes. HEIs should seek to minimise these language barriers in their written guidance and parent-facing outreach activities. Translating text-based information into Spanish and Portuguese may prove unaffordable, depending on the size of the potential Latinx cohort HEIs are working with. However, it may be possible to host targeted workshops in community venues such as churches, rather than on campus or in schools, as we recommend in our previous report in this series (Mulcahy and Baars 2018). These workshops could offer a paid opportunity for Latinx students, or students on Spanish or Portuguese courses, to act as 'ambassador interpreters' for the parents who attend.

7.3 Go ‘beyond access’ and co-create support with Latinx students

HEIs should ensure they are providing Latinx students with the support they need, throughout their course, to have a positive experience of higher education and make fulfilling next steps. Our research suggests that Latinx students may need support with particular issues, such as feeling they ‘fit in’ at university, and navigating their parents’ expectations of what they should do when they graduate. However, HEIs can avoid second-guessing Latinx students’ support needs by involving them in the design and delivery of the support that is available to them. This may involve providing resources and logistical support for peer mentoring between existing students and new, or prospective students, both on- and off-campus. This would enable Latinx students to share their stories and experiences of higher education and create a sense of belonging for their peers who may see UK higher education as an unfamiliar environment. As Anne-Marie Canning noted:

‘I think universities often don’t spend enough time thinking about how it feels to be a student... We know that building social belonging is so critical... So, listening to students, adapting our university community and environment to... make them feel welcome, because that correlates very closely to student success, both in terms of attainment and outcomes.’

Anne-Marie Canning

7.4 Work with key community brokers

HEIs should identify local community brokers who can help to establish strong, long-term partnerships with Latinx groups. Local infrastructure organisations (often known as Councils for Voluntary Services) are a useful first port of call to facilitate links with community and voluntary sector organisations, such as local church and community groups. These local organisations can be particularly effective gatekeepers when engaging with Latinx families, given that existing research and our own fieldwork suggest Latinx parents are less likely to engage with events held in schools or on university campuses.

A local Council for Voluntary Services will be able to identify local organisations with aims and values that align with a university’s widening participation remit, and that have a culturally sensitive approach based on existing grassroots connections and knowledge of the Latinx community. In some cases, HEIs may have existing links with community organising groups with established roots within the local Latinx population. For example, King’s College London have been working closely with the Latinx community in the capital via Citizens UK through community organisers, parents, student campaigners and others.

7.5 Call on the ONS and UCAS to officially recognise Latinx students

Schools, HEIs and student societies should call on the UK Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics to allow individuals to define their ethnicity as ‘Latin American’ in future rounds of the UK Census. This will provide the basis for UCAS to allow prospective students to do the same in admissions paperwork when they are asked to state their ethnicity. This approach would build on the campaigning work of LatinXcluded, who have made initial progress on this issue with King’s College London, the National Union of Students and Lambeth Council. As well as providing official recognition for students who wish to identify as Latinx, gathering this data would help HEIs to monitor and evaluate their outreach work with this group and better tailor their support in future.

7.6 Ensure Latinx people are visible in a variety of roles within HE

Our fieldwork suggested that Latinx young people, and their parents, sometimes see higher education and degree-based professions as unattainable for people from a similar background to their own. HEIs should ensure that, as much as possible, Latinx workers are visible in a variety of roles on campus. For

instance, they should support their Latinx academics to have a public profile, and to play an active role in widening participation outreach work. This would help to counter the perception, voiced in our fieldwork, that the only Latinx people on university campuses in the UK are cleaners. Ultimately, activities that raise the profile of Latinx students on campus (see 5.2 and 5.4) must be accompanied by efforts to shed light on the other ways in which Latinx people play a central role in the day-to-day life of higher education in the UK.

What future research do we need in this area?

In addition to the six recommendations for action outlined above, we have identified five priority areas for future research. These priority research areas are based on our assessment of key gaps in the existing literature, alongside potential barriers to Latinx participation in higher education that need to be examined in greater detail.

1. Ensure future research pays sufficient attention to Latinx young people who live or study outside London, in areas without a sizeable Latinx population. This research should consider young people's experiences of life and study in these areas, as well as their decision-making around higher education.
2. Explore young people's affinity with the 'Latinx' label or identity, potentially through peer research. This research should aim to include young people who live in different regions of the UK, with different nationalities and whose families have been resident in the UK for different lengths of time.
3. Explore how Latinx young people's decision-making is affected by their parents' aspirations and expectations, particularly in cases where families have moved to the UK specifically to access higher education. This research could consider the extent to which young people consider their parents' aspirations to be supportive, and the extent to which they can become a barrier to expressing, and acting on, their own aspirations.
4. Assess the state of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in the UK, how this provision varies by region, how provision has changed over time, and how it could be improved. This research could consist of a mapping exercise to identify 'cold spots', market research to assess the quality of provision available, and an evaluation of current pressures from the perspective of providers and tutors.
5. Explore Latinx students' experiences of FE, and the extent to which further education supports their access to HE. This research could compare the courses of study and attainment of Latinx young people attending different forms of further education, alongside a longitudinal study of changes in their education- and career-related aspirations and plans over time.

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This report was written by **The Centre for Education and Youth**. CfEY is a ‘think and action-tank’. We believe society should ensure all children and young people receive the support they need to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We provide the evidence and support policy makers and practitioners need to support young people.

We use our timely and rigorous research to get under the skin of issues affecting young people in order to shape the public debate, advise the sector and campaign on topical issues. We have a particular interest in issues affecting marginalised young people.

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