

Underrepresented HHC Languages in the UK

Outreach Projects with UCL and Secondary Schools

[SSEES UCL](#) is the only HE department in the whole of the UK that offers 9 languages as single or joint honour degree from the region of East, South-East Europe, the Baltic region and / or Russia (Bulgarian, Czech (with Slovak), Croatian/Serbian, Hungarian, Finnish, Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian and Russian). We also offer a further 9 languages as [online short courses](#) in the evening, (Albanian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovene, Georgian, Macedonian, Slovak, Estonian and incoming Kazakh).

Between 2021-2023 I ran an outreach project together with the Bulgarian lecturer, Yordanka Velkova, and Ukrainian lecturer Olga Volosova, working with a secondary school in Wales, Connah's Quay High School, helping HHCL speakers of Romanian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian improve their language overall, but particularly oral presentations and writing skills. In term 3, we served them a test comparable to entry level GCSE in languages, containing a written part (functional and narrative writing) and oracy.

The project was called [PEEL](#) (Proficiency in East European Languages).

We had no funding, but received a [runner-up award](#) from UCL Widening Participation Office.



The following year we received some funding from UCL and extended the project to two more schools in London (Park View School and Buxton School) and added Albanian language, involving Albanian lecturer Mirela Xhaferraj.

We then offered 6 sessions each one hour long, online, for all three schools involved, right after the end of the school day. In Term 3, we did not offer the test as we wanted to try out a less formal assessment through a revision lesson and feedback forms.

Technically and logistically, it was a difficult experience as the three schools would have up to 15 pupils in one room, so what we saw on the screen was three small screens with lots of pupils scattered around the room. They could see us on a big screen. Hearing them was occasionally difficult, as they would giggle or move around a lot or not be close enough to the speaker.

However, this was one of the most rewarding projects I have ever done.

The topics we covered ranged from spelling rules to cultural topics and also topics requested by the pupils. Each lesson started with correcting misspellings, continued with some sticky grammar points and ended with a text and a discussion around a topic of culture.

We learnt many useful lessons regarding the issues HHCL speakers of our languages have. Their profile was varied: some (the fewest) were born in the UK, some came from Romania to the UK at various ages and some came to the UK from a second, intermediary country. Some were born outside Romania and moved straight to the UK, without spending much time in Romania at all.

The feedback was very positive. It was for the first time for most of them that they felt noticed, thanks to their heritage. This was the first time pupils were told and shown that their HL is valuable, useful and a source of pride. For the first time they felt visible and their heritage mattered. Some pupils hide their multilingual heritage, as it often brings up stereotypes or misconceptions they are not prepared to deal with, or find too painful.

Here they were now, being told by university teachers, speaking their languages, that they matter and they can do things with their heritage and home languages.

This kind of revelation led to us deciding to run a second project, looking more at how we could raise their aspirations. Often their role models are their parents and on many occasions no one in their family has been to university and their economic background is not flourishing.

We therefore started the [RAP project](#). (Raising Aspirations in heritage speakers of Romanian, Bulgarian and Albanian). We decided to try a new approach and worked only with Park View School, so we could run the project face-to-face and on UCL grounds. It comprised 3 sessions, each 3 hours long, at UCL. We covered three main topics: successful migrants, multilingualism and citizenship, careers with languages and a practical session on skills (subtitling a clip, translating a short text, applying for a job, writing a short CV and simulating a job interview).



We also added two guest languages to this project, as Park View School had many HHCL speakers from Brazil and Latin America who would benefit from the project. During the last session we brought together 5 languages into one lecture on proverbs, travelling between languages and long the language family tree. UCL lecturers Mazal Oaknin (Spanish) and Daniela Mittelstadt (Portuguese) were also involved.

Again, the feedback was very positive. Pupils loved coming to UCL, to experience university life for a total of 9 hours each. During this time we showed them that their heritage matters and they have equal rights as anyone else, to learn about the languages of the world and to meet other pupils in similar situations.

In May 2025 we organised a symposium presenting the projects and had wonderful key speakers presenting multilingual projects in schools and worldwide.

At the symposium Ella Teskey, the Head of inclusion at our partner school Park View, presented together with two of the student participants in the project, an Albanian girl called Enola and a Romanian boy, Cosmin. They explained how important these projects were for their pupils, raising their aspirations and helping them think of going to university and envisage a future with languages.

The recording of the symposium can be watched [here](#).



Future plans

We will continue to disseminate the results and the lessons we learnt during these projects as well as lobbying for the introduction of official recognition of these HL through a GCSE community language examination.

We also plan on a second symposium to reach out to even more schools and inspire them. Working date tbc is first week of July 2026.

There is one more ongoing project I want to mention:

Searching for Romanian Heritage in London Museums

[This project](#) is a student-staff collaborative project funded by ChangeMakers, a UCL department that helps enhance the learning experience.

The project challenges stereotypical perceptions and prejudices about what Romanian heritage means. It combats discriminatory perceptions promoted through mass-media and the ill-informed general public perception, by highlighting Romanian cultural artefacts in several London museums that focus on ethnography, the world and communities: the Migration Museum, the Horniman Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Tate galleries.

Heritage speaker students often related emotionally to such topics, as they sometimes experience or witness various degrees of discrimination against their families throughout their lives. The project is a great opportunity for them to understand more about themselves and read literature that deals with such difficult topics.

Awareness, reflection and change of such instances through cultural endeavours is empowering, even healing for heritage students, as well as helping with combating prejudices. Non-heritage language learners also benefit from a deeper understanding of these difficult topics, often discussed in language classes.

I hope I managed to present a complete overview of the work that is ongoing in the realm of Romanian as a HHCL at SSEES UCL, together with a few other languages.

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