

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers: The ethnic minorities most excluded from UK education

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Dr Laura Brassington is HEPI's Policy Manager. Prior to joining HEPI, she completed her PhD in the History and Philosophy of Science Department at the University of Cambridge. Her research examined access to science education in nineteenth-century Britain and its empire. While at Cambridge, Laura taught across four departments; tutored for access programmes; and lectured for the Institute of Continuing Education, which helps adult students learn throughout their lives. As co-founder of STEM for Schools, Laura is committed to leading conversations about diversity in the history of science and education.

Abbreviations

GRT: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

GRTSB: Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boater

Methodology

This report synthesises data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Office for Students (OfS) and the UK Government, as well as secondary literature and evidence presented to two relevant Select Committee meetings held in Parliament on GRT issues. It further draws on interviews with members of the GRTSB communities; academics specialising in GRTSB access to education from the University of Sussex, Anglia Ruskin University and Buckinghamshire New University; and conversations and correspondence with GRTSB charities and individuals involved in outreach work at several higher education institutions.

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Contents

Foreword by Professor Louise Morley	7
Executive Summary	9
Facts and figures: At a glance	15
Definitions	19
Notes on data and data rounding	25
Introduction	27
1. Disrupted Pathways: from early years to secondary school	35
2. GRT students in higher education	51
3. Where are we now?	63
Conclusions and recommendations	71
Endnotes	77

Foreword

Professor Louise Morley, Emerita Professor of Higher Education in the Centre for Higher Education and Equity at the University of Sussex

I am delighted to have the opportunity to support an important and informative report on some of Europe's most deprived communities. As I suggested in the book published from the Higher Education, Internationalisation and Mobility (HEIM) project based at the University of Sussex, it is extremely challenging to write about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) in higher education without degenerating into racially objectifying discourses, hyperbole and sensationalism about material, economic, social and affective disadvantage and deprivation.¹ I believe that this report, by presenting a strong range of facts and empirical data, has been successful in drawing attention to multiple layers of discrimination while also suggesting creative policy solutions.

A finding from the HEIM project was how little is known about these communities in the UK compared to those in Central and Eastern Europe, for example. This innovative work was often catalysed by the Roma Education Fund, but we have no equivalent non-governmental organisation in the UK. This report has addressed this information gap by providing contemporary data on educational achievement, the attainment gap, and participation discussed in the context of drivers and impediments to inclusion. While the collection of ethically disaggregated data is a fraught concern across Europe, the absence of data has been a feature in the UK's higher education system, with GRT often not offered as an ethnic identity in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. Stigmatisation can also contribute to data gaps.

While highlighting the need for data collection, the report engages with the vexed issue of terminology, and the dangers of homogenising and excluding different identity categories in these diverse communities.

The story of GRT communities is one of spatial segregation, symbolic and actual ghettoisation, and the racialisation of poverty and social exclusion. We now have the opportunity to make important strategic interventions for change, and transition from abjection to inclusion.

Executive Summary

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) are the lowest-achieving ethnic groupings in the UK education system. Stark disparities in attainment are apparent from Early Years Foundation Stage results onwards. Returns in England show that GRT pupils have the worst outcomes of all ethnicities and the widest attainment gap in measures of pupils achieving a good level of development in early years education. The consequences for GRT access to and participation in primary, secondary, further and higher education, as well as employment, are clear. While between the 2009/10 and 2017/18 academic years, participation in higher education for all other White groups improved, it remained static for Gypsy and Roma groups and declined for Travellers of Irish heritage.²

Young people from Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller communities are the least likely to enter higher education by the age of 19. In England, just 6.9 per cent of Gypsy / Roma and 10.7 per cent of Irish Traveller students accessed higher education by the age of 19 in 2019/20.³

There were just 660 Gypsy or Traveller students in higher education in 2020/21. If GRT were evenly represented in higher education, then there would be 2,600 Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in higher education, as according to census data, the groups make up around 0.1 per cent of the UK population. This is feasible, given it would mean each university having fewer than 20 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students on average, or enrolling around just seven freshers from these communities each year.

There were just 30 students with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds registered at Russell Group universities in

2020/21. If they were not under-represented at these research-intensive universities, there would be more than ten times as many – around 320 undergraduate – GRT students at Russell Group institutions. These are conservative estimates as official data significantly under-represent the UK population of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Research suggests there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers, and 200,000 Roma in the UK.

This report situates poor educational outcomes for GRT students within the context of the higher rates of bullying, prejudice and racial discrimination experienced by GRT communities. The recent trend among higher education institutions to include GRT in their Access and Participation Plans is welcome; however, pressure for higher education institutions to do more for GRT students is undermined by a wider hostile environment. As one Romany Gypsy interviewed for this report stated, 'Our lives are so bad in every area, we need change in every area'. In 2004, one-third of British people admitted to holding personal prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers and in 2014, 50 per cent admitted to holding an 'unfavourable view' of Roma people.⁴ In 2022, a survey led by the University of Birmingham found that 44.6 per cent of the British public viewed Gypsies and Irish Travellers negatively, making them the UK's 'least liked' group.⁵ Negative feelings towards Gypsies and Irish Travellers were 18.7 percentage points higher than those held against Muslims (25.9 per cent), the UK's second 'least liked group'.

The hostile climate will be exacerbated by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022), which is expected to have a disproportionately harmful impact on GRT communities. Part Four of the Act changes 'trespass' from a civil to a criminal

offence, and grants police the power to confiscate homes from GRT communities where they stop in places not designated for them.⁶ An adult found guilty under the Act could be imprisoned for up to three months and / or fined up to £2,500. The Act has been met with fierce criticism from GRTSB charities and campaigners.⁷

Prejudice, discrimination and exclusion are some of the leading causes of the disrupted educational pathways – from early years to secondary schools – that GRT students often experience. More work needs to be done to support school involvement, particularly given the additional setbacks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2021, the Government announced a £1 million pilot programme to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in 150 schools with the following aims:

- reducing drop-out rates by engaging families with pre-school children and those transitioning from primary to secondary school;
- targeting young people not in education, employment or training;
- fostering better cooperation between councils, schools and families; and
- tutoring for catch-up lessons to support pupils whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic.⁸

The pilot programme is welcome, but more work is needed to address the systemic inequality experienced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK education system.

The term 'GRT' is not universally accepted. The 2011 Census was the first to include a category for 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller'.

The Census did not include a category for 'Roma'. Those who chose to write in Roma as their ethnicity were advised to define themselves, or were allocated to, the 'White Other' group.⁹ A category for 'Roma' was added for the first time to the 2021 Census in response to extensive lobbying from community groups given the conflation of the different communities and the problem of disaggregation of data which mask the discrete needs of each group.

In the 2021 Census there was also an option for Showmen to identify using their background rather than just their occupation for the first time. A drop-down box under 'Any other White background' was provided, where it was possible to select 'Showman' or 'Showwoman' in the England and Wales census. A tick-box category for Showman / Showwoman was provided in the Scottish census when asked which best describes your ethnic group or background.

In the 2021 school census, pupils could be classified as 'White: Gypsy / Roma' or 'White: Traveller of Irish heritage'. It was not possible to disaggregate Roma and Romany Gypsy populations and there was no opportunity to identify as Showman.¹⁰ The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects data only on 'Gypsy or Traveller' (which includes New Age Travellers, who cannot self-identify using current census categories) and 'Irish Traveller' students. In England and Wales, HESA does not collect data on Scottish Travellers who are a distinct ethnic group.

The inconsistent use of terminology and the grouping together – or omission of – some categories is problematic, and results in patchy data collection. This report therefore begins with a section on definitions and explores some of the limitations to the statistical measures which have been used

to analyse GRT participation in higher education institutions. The report is then structured in three sections: the disrupted pathways of GRT pupils from early years to further education; issues faced by GRT students in higher education institutions; and an overview of current schemes aiming to improve GRT access to higher education in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

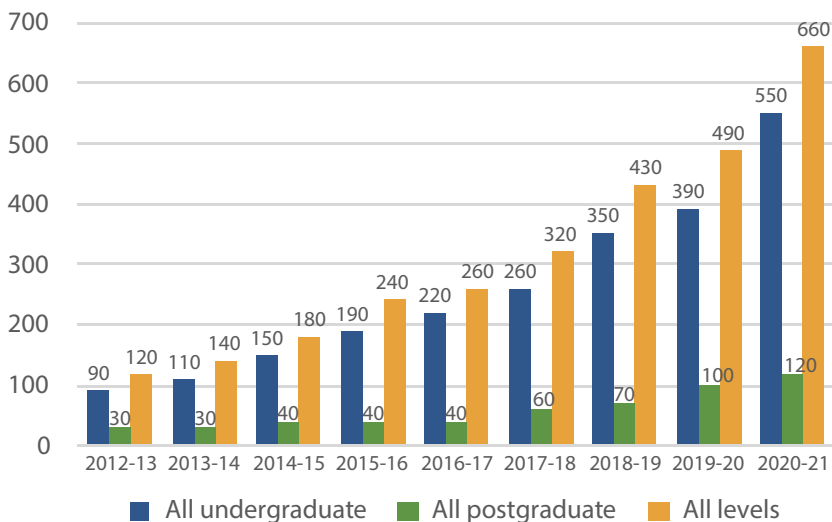
Several recommendations emerge from the findings of this report:

- Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, Showmen and Boaters should each be recognised as distinct categories when data are collected in educational settings by the Department for Education, Ofsted and HESA.
- In line with the recommendations of the co-produced 'GRTSB into Higher Education Pledge', which originated at Buckinghamshire New University and to which 11 higher education institutions in England and Scotland are signatories, institutions should monitor the number of students and staff who identify as GRT / GRTSB.
- GRTSB cultures should be incorporated into mainstream curricula through texts by GRTSB authors and references to their ways of life.
- Higher education institutions should be encouraged to recognise the histories of GRTSB communities, for example by recognising the extent of persecution against Roma in the Holocaust during Holocaust Memorial Day in January and International Roma Remembrance Day in April, and to celebrate GRTSB cultures, for example by participating in GRT History Month in June each year.

- Anti-racism training for staff and students should incorporate cultural awareness of GRTSB ways of life and issues faced by GRTSB communities.
- Higher education institutions' Access and Participation Plans should name GRTSB communities in their work.

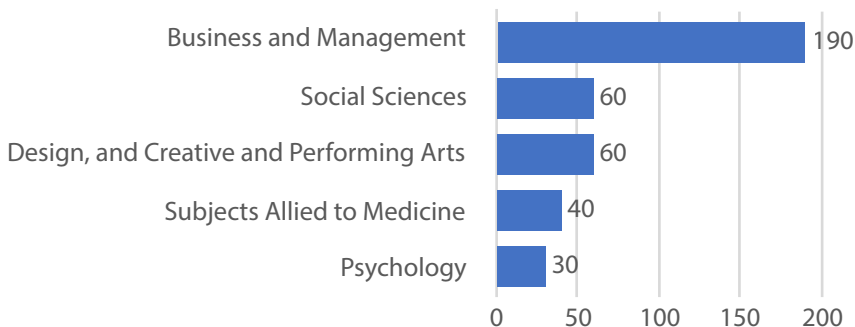
Facts and figures: At a glance

Chart 1: UK and non-UK domiciled Gypsy or Traveller students in higher education



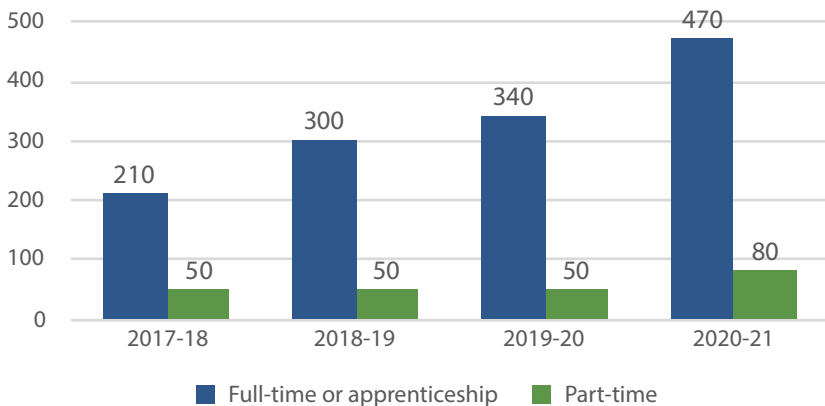
Source: Office for Students¹¹

Chart 2: Subjects studied by Gypsy or Traveller undergraduates in the 2020/21 academic year



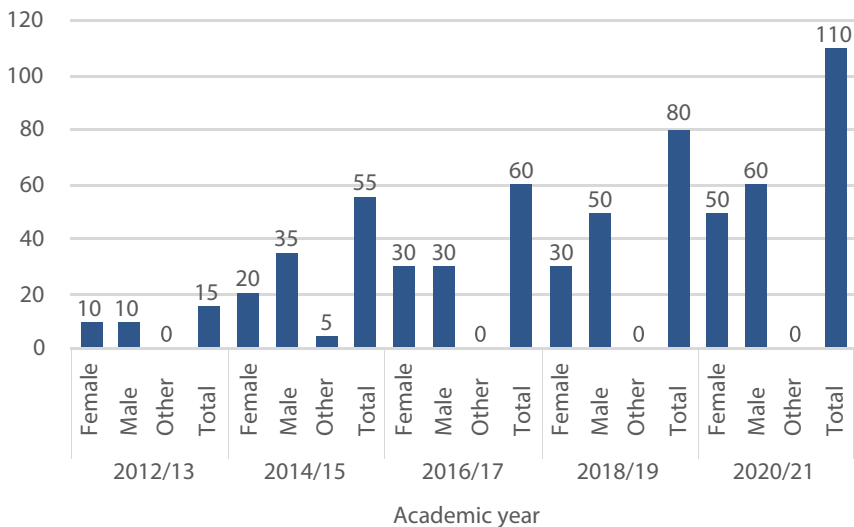
Source: Office for Students¹²

Chart 3: Mode of study of UK-domiciled Gypsy / Traveller undergraduates



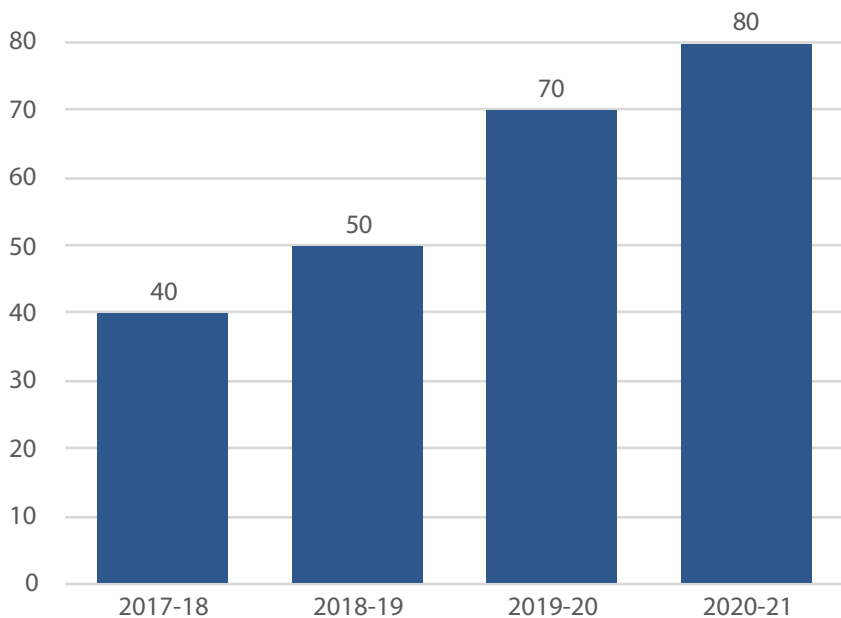
Source: Office for Students¹³

Chart 4: Numbers of Gypsy / Traveller and Irish Traveller students in higher education by sex



Source: HESA Student Record 2012/13, 2014/15, 2016/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21

Chart 5: UK-domiciled Gypsy or Traveller postgraduate taught Master's students



Source: Office for Students¹⁴

Definitions

The term 'Gypsies, Roma and Travellers' is defined by the Office for Students as:

*[encompassing] a wide range of individuals who may be defined in relation to their ethnicity, heritage, way of life and how they self-identify.*¹⁵

They include:

- English or Welsh Romany Gypsies;
- European Roma;
- Irish Travellers;
- Scottish Gypsy Travellers;
- Showpeople, such as people linked with fairground or circus professions;
- people living on barges or other boats [boaters];
- people living in settled (bricks and mortar) accommodation; and
- New Age Travellers.¹⁶

The following definitions are provided by Emerita Professor of Higher Education in the Centre for Higher Education and Equity at the University of Sussex, Louise Morley:

*Rom is the singular noun, Roma is plural and Romani is the adjective. The term Roma encompasses diverse groups, including Gypsies, Travellers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti and Boyash ... While the term 'Gypsy' has been reclaimed with pride in the UK, in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, it is still a pejorative label.*¹⁷

In a 2017 report commissioned by King's College London and written by the Centre for Education and Youth (CFEY), Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) and Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, Showmen and Boaters (GRTSB) in the UK were disaggregated into 'ethnic travellers' and 'cultural travellers'.¹⁸ Where this distinction is applied, the term 'ethnic travellers' is used to include Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish or Scottish heritage. The term 'cultural travellers' is used to include those who became travellers for economic reasons and / or may no longer pursue a nomadic lifestyle.¹⁹ Table 1 is taken from the Centre for Education and Youth report and outlines how these groupings have been made in more detail.²⁰

There are significant limitations to data collected on GRT and GRTSB participation in education. A census category for 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' was first provided only in 2011. Those who wrote in 'Roma' were allocated to the 'White Other' group.²¹ A category for 'Roma' was added for the first time to the 2021 Census. In the 2021 Census there was also an option for Showmen to identify using their background rather than just their occupation for the first time. A drop-down box under 'Any other White background' was provided where it was possible to select 'Showman' or 'Showwoman' in the England and Wales census. A tick-box category for Showman / Showwoman was provided in the Scottish census when participants were asked which best described their ethnic group or background.

In the 2021 school census, pupils could be classified as 'White: Gypsy / Roma' or 'White: Traveller of Irish heritage', with no possibility of disaggregating Roma and Romany Gypsy populations.²² The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects data only on 'Gypsy or Traveller' (which includes New Travellers who cannot self-identify using current census

categories) and 'Irish Traveller' students. In England and Wales, HESA does not collect data on Scottish Travellers who are a distinct ethnic group.

Different datasets are inconsistent in their definitions and amalgamations of the categories. Some surveys group together 'Gypsy / Traveller' and provide a separate category for 'Roma', while others do not collect data on Roma, Showmen or Boaters at all. These inconsistencies present challenges to making comparisons across datasets.

While Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are commonly recognised as ethnicities and therefore afforded protection under the Equality Act (2010), Showmen and Boaters are not currently afforded the same status. The Office for National Statistics outlines that there is no consensus on the definition as to what constitutes an ethnic group.²³ It states that membership is 'self-defined and subjectively meaningful to the person concerned'.²⁴ In law, elements which have led to legislative recognition of a particular community as an ethnic group have included 'common ancestry and elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance'.²⁵ The Office for National Statistics concludes that it is 'generally accepted' that 'ethnicity includes all these aspects, and others, in combination'.²⁶

Several individuals interviewed for this report stated that the main barriers to the recognition of Showmen and Boaters as ethnicities are the perception that they travel for economic reasons and may not share a common heritage or ancestry. It is important to note that not everyone who works on a fairground is a Showman. Showmen are a heterogeneous group, with differences between, for instance, Showmen in the fairground and circus industries.

Table 1: A possible typology of the main subgroups within GRTSB communities

Ethnic travellers	'Romany Gypsies'	English or Welsh 'Romany' Gypsies (or Welsh Kale)	<p>Sometimes referred to as 'Romanichal', these people have a long history of living and travelling in the UK. It is suggested that they originated in India, although their ancestry had been disputed in the literature. Many speak one of seven distinct languages, primarily Anglo-Romanes and Romani, as well as English.</p> <p>Though descended from the same ancestry as British Romany Gypsies, this group arrived only recently in the UK from central and Eastern Europe, following the expansion of the EU to include Eastern European countries such as Romania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Roma includes a great variety of groups, distinct in their language, culture and values. This group often rejects the term 'gypsy', preferring 'Roma'. This creates a problem of under-ascription when they are asked to identify in a group under a term which includes 'gypsy'. Generally, the European Roma have only limited interaction with other Romany Gypsies.</p>
	'Travellers'	Irish Travellers	<p>Also called 'Pavee' and 'Minceir', these Travellers often move between the UK and Ireland and are of Celtic descent. They speak Cant or Gammon, also known as Shelta.</p>
Scottish Gypsy Travellers		<p>This subgroup [which has a long heritage of nomadism in Scotland] consists of further subgroups and was only recently recognised as a separate ethnic group. They may also refer to themselves as 'Nachins' and 'Nawkins'.</p>	
Cultural travellers	Occupational Travellers	Showmen: fairground and circus people	<p>Showmen have a long history in the UK where fairgrounds have been popular for many centuries. Showmen own and work on fairgrounds and circuses and travel to different sites for seasonal work.</p>
		Bargees and boat dwellers	<p>Those who live on boats, primarily narrowboats, on canals and waterways. Historically bargees and boat dwellers travelled for employment.</p>
	New Travellers	<p>Though the term 'new' is seen as offensive to some, it is used to differentiate travellers who adopted the travelling lifestyle since the 1970s by choice. Often this group simply call themselves 'Travellers'.</p>	

Source: Ellie Mulcahy, Sam Baars, Kate Bowen-Viner and Loic Menzies, *The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education: A report on barriers from early years to secondary and beyond*, Centre for Education and Youth, King's College London, pp.10-11. https://www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_FINAL.pdf.

Future4Fairgrounds (F4F) is a Showman community group whose aims are to celebrate the past, raise awareness of the present and protect the future of Showmen communities.²⁷ It was co-founded by six Showmen, all women, in September 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it became clear that many Showmen were not granted permission by local authorities to re-open their fairgrounds according to the same 4 July 2020 timeline as other businesses that fell into the non-essential category, and according to Step 3 of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown.ⁱ Future4Fairgrounds initially set out to highlight the many Charter Fairs that were cancelled at this time and raise awareness of the negative impact it was having on the community behind the fairground industry.

Colleen Roper, co-founder of Future4Fairgrounds, reported:

I don't think the GRT umbrella term in education is helping anyone. All the travelling communities get lumped together, Showmen are not even acknowledged within the GRT acronym. While we all travel, we are all separate communities with a distinct heritage and culture, with unique attributes and differing needs.

If my child was starting school, I could identify them as 'White British' or 'GRT'. There is no way that, as a Showman, I would tick the GRT box because it's not my heritage. I am not from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background. I am a Showman. There is no formal way to identify on enrolment forms so I have always written 'Showman' in the 'Other' box ... But we become lost in the 'Other White' category and this leads to further confusion.

ⁱ Colleen Roper, co-founder of Future4Fairgrounds, explains that the term 'Showmen' is a genderless, collective term for the entire community.

The data are not collected at enrolment, so every time Showmen need to take their children out of school to travel for work as part of their business, they have to explain why. If Showmen were recognised more widely within education policy, the continuous need for explanations of our culture and way of life would not be necessary, and we would be better understood within the system.

Neither GRT nor GRTSB are universally accepted terms. Several individuals interviewed for this report mentioned calls for the disaggregation of groups included under the umbrella categories in order to acknowledge the distinct histories, cultures and challenges faced by Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, Showmen and Boaters. While it is important to note that each community has a distinct history and culture and faces a different set of circumstances, one of the common experiences they share is under-representation in mainstream education and discrimination in wider UK society. In this report, I maintain the common usage of the terms GRT and GRTSB in line with current practice in policy.

Note on data and data rounding

My main focus is on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers due to the lack of available data on Showmen and Boaters.

HESA collects data only on 'Gypsy or Traveller' (which includes New Travellers who cannot self-identify using current census categories) and 'Irish Traveller' students. In England and Wales, it does not collect data on Scottish Travellers who are a distinct ethnic group.

HESA data was provided according to the HESA Standard Rounding Methodology: counts of people are rounded to the nearest multiple of five; percentages are not published if they are fractions of a small group of people (fewer than 22.5); and averages are not published if they are averages of a small group of people (seven or fewer).²⁸ The category given as 'Traveller' includes students who identified as 'Gypsy or Traveller' and 'Irish Traveller'.

Data from the Office for Students (OfS) is rounded to the nearest multiple of 10.

Introduction

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) are among the lowest-achieving ethnic groupings in the UK education system.²⁹ The consequences for GRT access to and participation in higher education institutions are clear. While between the 2009/10 and 2017/18 academic years participation in higher education for all other White groups improved, it remained static for Gypsy and Roma groups and declined for Travellers of Irish heritage.³⁰

Young people from Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller communities are the least likely to enter higher education by the age of 19. Just 6.9 per cent of Gypsy / Roma and 10.7 per cent of Irish Traveller students accessed higher education by the age of 19 in 2019/20.³¹ In the same year, 43.1 per cent of English pupils progressed to higher education by age 19.³² The low figures do not reflect the values of what Professor Louise Morley has termed the 'huge desire' for higher education among the 'aspirational community'.³³

Several hypotheses have been proffered to explain GRT exclusion from UK higher education. Theories include: debt aversion; limited understanding of the higher education system; and reluctance to use government financial support.³⁴ As the Office for Students points out, however, the issue reflects wider problems of access to and attainment at primary and secondary level education.³⁵ A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found reasons for poor outcomes for GRTSB children in schools to include bullying, difficulties accessing funding for new pupils and a lack of expertise to provide effective support.³⁶ From focus groups and activities with young people from GRT communities, a 2022 report by Go Higher West Yorkshire identified the following key themes:

- *Perceptions of career and further education options;*

- *Role models;*
- *The impact of encouragement from family and mentors to remain in education / learn a trade;*
- *Roma youth – impact of returning to a family’s country of origin;*
- *Experiences of bullying and racism in educational settings;*
- *Creating safe and welcoming educational spaces;*
- *Gender expectations (including marriage and family responsibilities, and employment expectations for young men); and*
- *Financial barriers, emphasis on earning over study, and entrepreneurial interests.³⁷*

Issues of GRT access to and inclusion in mainstream education have gained more attention in recent years. A roundtable event on access to higher education was hosted by Baroness Whitaker of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for GRT and co-chaired with Buckinghamshire New University. It kickstarted work around a pledge to get more GTRSB into higher education.³⁸ In July 2021, the UK Government announced a £1 million programme to boost educational attainment and tackle exclusion and drop-out rates among Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.³⁹ The pilot programme, which involves 150 schools, aims to: reduce drop-out rates; target young people not in education, employment, or training; and provide additional tutoring to pupils whose education has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Individual universities, including Sussex and Strathclyde, Buckinghamshire New University (as a direct result of work around the GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge) and King’s College London have

also announced widening access initiatives specifically aimed at GRT students.⁴⁰

In February 2022, two relevant Select Committee hearings on GRT issues took place. This report draws on the Public Services Committee non-inquiry session on 'Access to public services for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' and the Education Committee inquiry into 'Education challenges facing children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds'.⁴¹ As the meetings made clear, there have been attempts to tackle issues of GRT access to and inclusion in education and wider society, but progress has been slow, geographically limited in scope, or else non-existent.

Poor outcomes for GRT students in education must be situated within the context of the prejudice and exclusion GRT individuals and communities face in wider society.⁴² Gypsies, Roma and Travellers suffer worse outcomes not only in education, but also in health, employment and other social issues, which – in turn – affect their success rates in mainstream education.⁴³

In the course of writing this report, I interviewed several members of the GRTSB community, as well as academics and organisations that work to improve GRTSB access to education. Several interviewees brought up issues such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) which makes trespass a criminal, rather than a civil, offence and grants the police the power to arrest travellers and confiscate their homes if they stop on a site not designated for them. Interviewees also brought up:

- issues of discrimination and hate speech;
- the higher prevalence of mental health issues and suicide rates; and

- negative media representation of GRT individuals and communities.

Such issues are experienced by GRT communities across Europe. A BBC report in April 2022 found that more than one-in-10 deaths among Irish Travellers are suicides, with campaigners stating that racism and discrimination has led to a 'mental health crisis' in the Irish Traveller community.⁴⁴

There is also widespread lack of understanding of the cultural barriers GRT communities face in mainstream education. Dr Carol Rogers is a senior lecturer at Buckinghamshire New University and specialises in the bereavement experiences and support needs of Gypsy and Traveller families. In her research, Rogers found that Travellers experience higher levels of bereavement than the average population.⁴⁵ Literature indicates that the populations' life expectancy is between 10 and 12 years lower than mainstream groups. The communities face high suicide rates and are at higher risk of traumatic accidents.

Rogers identified that children are traditionally heavily involved in funeral rituals and may require several weeks away from school after a family death. Given that bereavement is now recognised as a potential form of educational disadvantage, the higher prevalence of early death and illness among GRT families and communities must be considered an additional disadvantage. Adverse childhood experiences have been further exacerbated by COVID-19. The topic raises two issues for policy:

- (i) how to make mainstream education more accessible and inclusive for GRT pupils by respecting their cultural practices; and

(ii) the need to take into account the higher prevalence of experiences of bereavement and family illnesses experienced by these groups and recognise them as forms of educational disadvantage.

Bullying is frequently cited as the most significant issue affecting GRT progress in mainstream education.⁴⁶ In 2004, Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, stated that 'discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers appears to be the last "respectable" form of racism'.⁴⁷ There is evidence of historic negative attitudes towards GRT communities in the UK and public attitudes are not changing for the better. In 2004, it was found that one-in-three British people admitted to holding personal prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers and in 2014, 50 per cent admitted to holding an 'unfavourable view' of Roma people.⁴⁸ A 2017 report concluded that prejudice and discrimination against GRT peoples seemed to be perceived as 'the last acceptable form of racism' in UK society.⁴⁹ In 2022, a University of Birmingham survey found that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are the UK's 'least liked' group, with 44.6 per cent of the British public holding negative views against these individuals and communities.⁵⁰ Negative feelings towards Gypsies and Irish Travellers were 18.7 percentage points higher than those held against Muslims (25.9 per cent), the UK's second 'least liked group'.

The grouping 'Gypsy or Irish Travellers' was recognised under the Equality Act (2010), building upon earlier recognition in case law of these communities' ethnic status. The Office for National Statistics states that the groups are identified 'by government (national and local) and charities to be a vulnerable marginalised group who suffer from poor outcomes'.⁵¹

GRTSB students in schools and higher education institutions frequently employ a 'survival strategy': to avoid racial prejudice, they avoid outwardly ascribing as GRTSB. This approach has been termed by researcher and author Chris Derrington as 'Playing White' and is adopted by GRTSB in wider society as well as in education.⁵² Students who adopt the strategy believe it will help them avoid the negative impact of prejudices held not only by their peers, but also by their teachers. As a result, GRTSB participation in education and their presence in the population as a whole is significantly under-represented in official statistics and sometimes rendered invisible.

Census data

The 2011 England and Wales Census was the first to provide a tick box category for 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller'. The box was included under the 'White' category, which the Office for National Statistics explained on the basis that 'this was where most people from the "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" group wrote their response in 2001'.⁵³ In the 2011 Census, 58,000 people identified as 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller', which accounted for 0.1 per cent of the population in England and Wales.⁵⁴ Just over 4,000 people in Scotland identified as 'White: Gypsy / Traveller', accounting for 0.1 per cent of the population.⁵⁵

Official data significantly under-represent the number of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. Further research suggests there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. It is estimated that 200,000 Roma live in the UK.⁵⁶ Contrary to common assumptions, only one-third of Gypsies and Travellers live in caravans and pursue a nomadic lifestyle.

The Government conducts a Traveller caravan count (formerly known as the Gypsy and Traveller caravan count) twice a

year.⁵⁷ The total number of Traveller caravans in England on the January 2022 count day was 24,371. The figure is 658 (3 per cent) higher than the 23,713 reported in the January 2020 count.⁵⁸ It further indicates the under-representation of GRT peoples in Census data.

The highest proportion of respondents who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller in the 2011 Census were concentrated in the South East (0.2 per cent) and East of England. In Basildon, Maidstone, Swale, Fenland and Ashford, 0.5 per cent of the population identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller. In Scotland, the council areas with the most Gypsy / Travellers resident on Census day were located in Perth and Kinross, Glasgow City and the City of Edinburgh. Two councils – Perth and Kinross and Glasgow City – accommodated more than 400 Gypsy / Travellers, while seven councils accommodated fewer than 50.⁵⁹

In 2020, 11.7 per cent of White Gypsy / Traveller people lived in the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods in England.⁶⁰

In the 2011 Census, 99 per cent of those who identified as Gypsy / Irish Traveller were born in Europe, above the national average (92 per cent). Eighty-two per cent of Gypsy / Irish Travellers were born in England. Their most common language was English (English or Welsh in Wales), which was spoken by 91 per cent of the population, comparable to the figure for the whole of England and Wales (92 per cent).

Almost equal numbers of men and women identified as Gypsy or Irish Travellers (49 per cent were male and 51 per cent were female in Scotland). Gypsies and Irish Travellers are younger than the average population and face higher mortality rates. In 2011, their median age was 26 years, compared with a

national median of 39 years. Thirty-nine per cent of Gypsy or Irish Travellers were below 20 years of age, compared to 24 per cent of the national population. In Scotland, only 27 per cent were aged 45 or over, compared to 44 per cent of the national population.

Gypsy or Irish Travellers had the highest proportion of any ethnic group (60 per cent) with no academic or professional qualifications – almost three times higher than the figure for England and Wales as a whole (23 per cent).⁶¹ In Scotland, 50 per cent of Gypsy / Travellers aged 16 and over had no qualifications, compared to 27 per cent of the population as a whole.⁶²

In 2011, the Office for National Statistics reported that 9 per cent of Gypsy or Irish Travellers held a Level 4 qualification and above compared to 27 per cent of England and Wales. Young people from Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller communities are the least likely to enter higher education by the age of 19. Just 6.9 per cent of Gypsy / Roma and 10.7 per cent of Irish Traveller students accessed higher education by the age of 19 in 2019/20.⁶³

Of all groups, those who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller had the lowest proportion of respondents who were economically active (47 per cent). The average for England and Wales was 63 per cent.⁶⁴

There is evidence of change among younger generations. In 2011, while 84 per cent of Gypsies or Irish Travellers aged 65 and older had no qualifications (compared to 53 per cent of those in the same age category in England and Wales as a whole), the figure was 47 per cent for those aged between 16 and 24. While this indicates a positive shift, the figure is still well below the national average (11 per cent) of those aged 16-to-24 who have no qualifications.⁶⁵

1. Disrupted pathways: from early years to secondary school

Early years

In 2018/19, there were just 665 Irish Traveller children and 2,151 Gypsy / Roma pupils enrolled in early years provision.⁶⁶ Of these children, only 39 per cent of Irish Travellers and 34 per cent of Gypsy / Roma met the expected standard in development.⁶⁷ Although these statistics represent an increase (from 36 per cent and 24 per cent respectively) since the 2017 Centre for Education and Youth study, GRT achievement continues to fall far below the national average (67 per cent in 2016, 71 per cent in 2018/19) and remains the lowest of all reported ethnicity groupings.⁶⁸ Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller groups perform especially poorly in early years Mathematics and Literacy assessments.⁶⁹

Dr Carol Rogers stated that many GRT parents choose not to enrol their children in early-years provision for cultural reasons. Many opt to look after young children in the family home. Rogers noted that exceptions are made by parents who have a trusted relation or contact at a particular nursery. Where a nursery is known to have established a good reputation over several generations as a trusted provider for GRT pupils, some families will travel long distances to access the institution.

Table 2 gives the Early Years Foundation Stage results for 2018/19. It shows that Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy / Roma pupils are the smallest ethnic groupings participating in early years provision. It further reveals that GRT pupils have the worst outcomes of all ethnicities for every measure, and the highest attainment gap.

Table 2: Early Years Foundation Stage profile results: 2018 to 2019

	Number of eligible pupils	Percentage achieving			Good level of development attainment gap
		At least the expected standard in all ELGs	A good level of development	Average point score	
White	459,403	72	73	34.9	0.9
White British	409,675	73	74	35.1	1.7
Irish	1,551	74	75	36.2	3.4
Traveller of Irish heritage	665	39	40	29.6	-31.8
Gypsy / Roma	2,151	34	35	28.5	-36.8
Any other White background	45,361	66	67	33.2	-4.6
Mixed	41,685	72	73	34.9	1.5
White and Black Caribbean	9,814	69	70	34.3	-1.9
White and Black African	5,777	71	72	34.6	0.1
White and Asian	10,305	75	76	35.8	4.6
Any other mixed background	15,789	73	74	34.9	2.1
Asian	69,185	69	71	33.7	-0.5
Indian	20,363	78	79	35.5	7.5
Pakistani	27,141	64	66	32.7	-5.3
Bangladeshi	10,212	67	69	33.1	-2.7
Any other Asian background	11,469	69	71	33.6	-1.2

Black	31,136	68	69	33.4	-2.5
Black Caribbean	5,270	68	69	33.6	-3.0
Black African	21,432	68	70	33.4	-2.0
Any other Black background	4,434	66	67	33.1	-4.4
Chinese	3,002	76	78	35.5	6.3
Any other ethnic group	12,048	63	65	32.5	-7.1
Unclassified	22,487	58	59	33.0	-12.6
All pupils	638,946	71	72	34.6	

Source: Department for Education.⁷⁰ NB The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results in England for 2019/20 were cancelled due to COVID-19.

Schools

In the school census, pupils can be classified as ‘White: Gypsy / Roma’ or ‘White: Traveller of Irish heritage’.⁷¹ In 2019/20, there were 28,091 Gypsy / Roma pupils (0.3 per cent) and 6,578 Travellers of Irish heritage (0.1 per cent) in schools in England and Wales. Despite a small increase in the number of school pupils and the number of schools across all sectors nationally in 2020/21, the numbers of Gypsy / Roma pupils fell to 26,045 (0.3 per cent) and the number of Travellers of Irish heritage fell to 6,197 (0.1 per cent).⁷² The reasons for this, including the impact of COVID-19, are outlined at the end of this section.

In 2016, 43.5 per cent of GRT claimed Free School Meals (FSM), although the findings of the Centre for Education and Youth report indicated that many more families qualify for the benefits that would make their children eligible for FSM than those who access them.⁷³ Pupils who identify as Gypsy / Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage and who were eligible for FSM have the lowest rates of progression to higher education.⁷⁴

Table 3: Number and percentage of pupils by ethnicity, 2019/20 and 2020/21

	2019/20		2020/21	
	Headcount	Percent	Headcount	Percent
Any other ethnic group	168,758	2.0	151,175	1.8
Any other ethnic group - Arab	no data	no data	22,248	0.3
Asian - Any other Asian background	158,756	1.9	161,435	1.9
Asian - Bangladeshi	148,290	1.8	149,202	1.8
Asian - Chinese	no data	no data	37,943	0.5
Asian - Indian	268,318	3.2	275,106	3.3
Asian - Pakistani	372,699	4.5	374,031	4.5
Black - Any other Black background	64,153	0.8	64,655	0.8
Black - Black African	323,874	3.9	326,365	3.9
Black - Black Caribbean	86,543	1.0	83,712	1.0
Mixed - Any other Mixed background	192,731	2.3	200,996	2.4
Mixed - White and Asian	123,153	1.5	128,850	1.5
Mixed - White and Black African	70,403	0.8	73,202	0.9
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	128,774	1.5	130,569	1.6
White - Any other White background	558,877	6.7	565,893	6.8
White - Gypsy / Roma	28,091	0.3	26,045	0.3
White - Irish	22,443	0.3	21,898	0.3
White - Traveller of Irish heritage	6,578	0.1	6,197	0.1
White - White British	5,432,991	65.4	5,410,043	64.9
Unclassified	119,388	1.4	132,439	1.6
Total	8,312,552	100.0	8,342,004	100.0

(1) Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and pupil referral units. Does not include independent schools.

(2) Totals include pupils in General Hospital Schools; however Ethnicity and Language data is not available for these pupils. Breakdowns may not sum to totals as a result.

Source: School census.⁷⁵

GRT pupils are more likely to be identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN).⁷⁶ Evidence for GRT exclusion from mainstream schools can be found dating back several decades. In 1999, Ofsted reported that between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of GRT learners were identified as having Special Education Needs and noted that in half of the schools they reviewed, no Gypsy or Traveller child had yet sat a GCSE examination.⁷⁷

Colleen Roper, co-founder of Future4Fairgrounds, shared several instances of Showmen children being asked not to attend schools during Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs). She said that some schools are concerned that Showmen children will have missed significant lessons and would prefer they were not present so that they do not 'bring down the school's data'. The policy is informally referred to as 'off-rolling'. Roper stated:

This is not only happening to children in Year 6 but also to those in Year 2. A child should not be behind at that stage of their educational journey especially this year with the pandemic impacting on education continuity so why would a headteacher request it?

Results from Key Stage 2 SATs are used as markers for progress from Year 2 to Year 6 and onwards into Key Stage 3. Ms Roper concluded, 'Our children become invisible in the data from the start of their education and the impact is long-lasting'.

Table 4: Key Stage 4 national level destinations (percentage sustained) by ethnicity in state-funded mainstream schools in England, 2019/20

Ethnicity	Number of pupils completing Key Stage 4	Sustained education, employment & apprenticeships	Sustained education destination	Sustained apprenticeships	Sustained employment destination
White British	367,434	94	85.3	4.9	3.8
White Irish	1,657	94.7	89.7	2.2	2.8
Any other White background	27,926	92.1	89.2	1	1.9
Gypsy Roma	1,179	68.2	58.1	2.4	7.7
Traveller of Irish Heritage	127	74	59.1	6.3	8.7
White and Asian	6,081	94.8	91.2	1.4	2.2
White and Black African	3,212	93.8	89.9	1.8	2.1
White and Black Caribbean	7,300	90.8	84.5	3	3.2
Any other mixed background	9,922	93.8	90.7	1.3	1.8
Bangladeshi	9,722	96.6	95.3	0.3	0.9
Indian	15,283	97.7	96.3	0.6	0.8
Pakistani	23,099	94.5	92.5	0.8	1.2
Any other Asian background	9,163	96.5	95.4	0.5	0.6
Black African	19,465	95.7	94.6	0.5	0.6
Black Caribbean	7,308	92.4	89.5	1.1	1.7
Any other Black background	3,751	94.6	92.3	1.1	1.1
Chinese	1,978	98.4	97.9	0.4	0.2

Any other ethnic group	9,461	93.8	92.3	0.5	1
Unclassified	7,849	90.6	83.3	3.5	3.8
(1) State-funded mainstream schools include community schools, voluntary aided schools, voluntary controlled schools, foundation schools, academies, free schools, city technology colleges and further education colleges with provision for 14-to-16-year-olds.					
(2) Includes pupils for whom ethnicity or first language was not obtained, refused or could not be determined.					

Source: Destinations dataset.⁷⁸

Outcomes

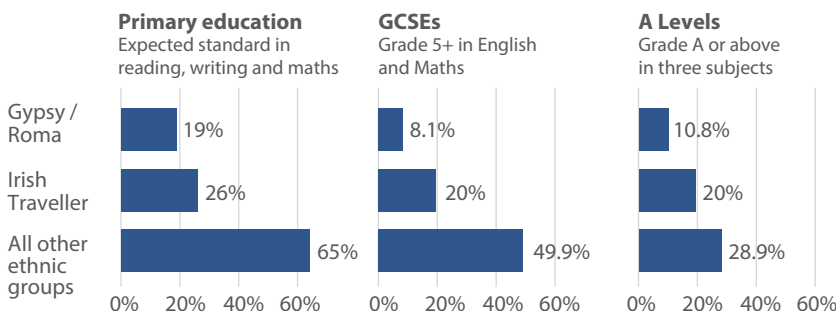
GRT students are the lowest-achieving ethnic groupings in schools in England, considerably below that of the next-lowest grouping (frequently 'Black Caribbean' or 'White and Black Caribbean').⁷⁹ Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller pupils were the lowest-performing groups at Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6) in 2018/19. Just 19 per cent of White Gypsy / Roma pupils, and 26 per cent of Irish Traveller pupils, met the expected standard in Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Mathematics.⁸⁰

Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller pupils are consistently the two least likely groups to achieve a grade 5 or above in English and Mathematics at GCSE.⁸¹ In the 2020/21 academic year, 9.1 per cent of Gypsy / Roma pupils and 21.1 per cent of Irish Traveller pupils achieved a grade 5 or above in GCSE English and Mathematics, compared to a national average in England of 51.9 per cent. While Irish Traveller pupils have poor attainment rates in compulsory education, they consistently outperform Gypsy / Roma pupils.⁸² The authors of the Centre for Education and Youth report posit that this may be due to the fact that European Roma included within the Gypsy / Roma group may speak English as an additional language and have previously completed part of their education outside of the UK system.⁸³

Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller pupils are the least likely to stay in sustained education after GCSEs or equivalent qualifications, with rates of 58.1 per cent and 59.1 per cent respectively in the 2019/20 academic year (Table 4). They are the most likely of all groups to go into employment (7.7 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively).⁸⁴ A report by the UK Government’s Race Disparity Unit notes that the percentages of GRT students in further education are based on small numbers which makes generalisations unreliable.⁸⁵

In the 2020/21 academic year, 28.9 per cent of students in England achieved three A grades or higher at A Level. Just 10.8 per cent of Gypsy / Roma pupils attained the same grades – the lowest percentage of all ethnic groupings – but the Department for Education notes that the return was based on just 37 pupils and is therefore less reliable as a result. The figure was 20.8 per cent for Irish Traveller students (based on 15 students who self-identified in the cohort).⁸⁶

Figure 1: Educational attainment among Gypsy / Roma, Irish Traveller, and pupils from all other ethnic groups, as of 31 January 2022



Source: Race Disparity Unit⁸⁷

Figure 1 provides the latest data on educational attainment among Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller pupils compared to all other ethnic groups at primary school, GCSE and A Level.

Bullying

Poor outcomes for GRT pupils in mainstream schools reflect the prejudice and discrimination they face. A recent official report found that GRT pupils have the lowest rates of attendance and the highest rates of permanent exclusion from schools.⁸⁸ Exclusion rates GRT pupils are between four and five times higher than the national average.⁸⁹

In 2020, Buckinghamshire New University carried out research into the psychological effects of hate crime on GRT communities. Bullying was cited as the most common form of hate speech or crime experienced by 78 per cent of respondents.⁹⁰ The report found that 87 per cent of respondents experienced social media abuse and 82 per cent of respondents experienced media incitement to racial hatred against GRTSB.⁹¹ It is widely noted that media prejudice has a significant negative impact on GRT pupils in schools. One respondent to the Buckinghamshire New University report stated:

*Funnily enough, in that school it was actually the head who started the bullying, because she told my daughter to get the diamond clip from her hair, saying 'This is not the "Big Fat Gypsy Wedding"' and then it escalated from there. The other children got to hear, 'Really? You're a Traveller'. And that's how it escalated.*⁹²

Failure on behalf of teachers and schools to recognise the racist nature of bullying to which GRT pupils are often victim has been found to fuel their disengagement from education and

contributes to early school leaving, exclusion and subsequent decisions not to return to education.⁹³

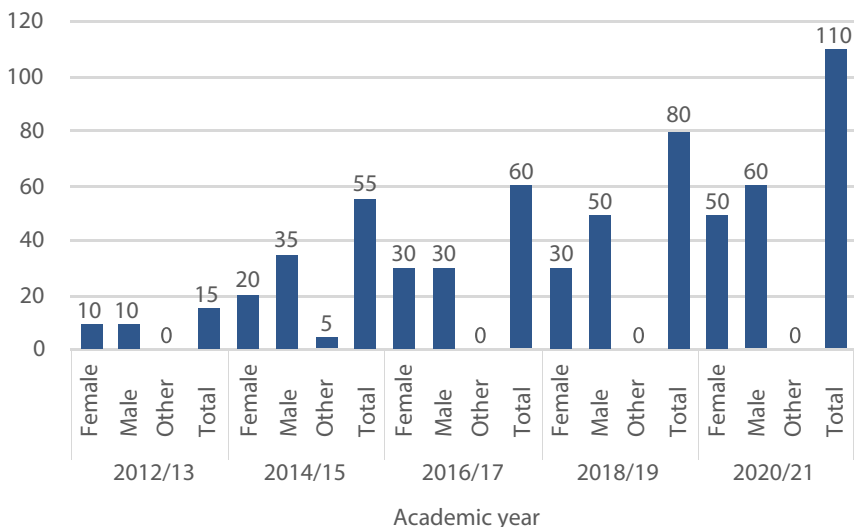
Many GRT parents and pupils avoid identifying as GRT in an attempt to avoid racist treatment in schools. Academic Chris Derrington has termed the coping strategy as 'fight, flight and playing White'.⁹⁴

- **Fight** pertains to the physical and verbal reaction to racist abuse. Many reports highlight that GRT students who respond to racism are often the ones who are excluded from school, while non-GRT pupils who initiate hate speech or violence are not.
- **Flight** refers to self-imposed exclusion from schools.
- **Playing White** describes the strategy commonly employed by GRT students to conceal their ethnicity or deny their heritage in an attempt 'to cope with deep-rooted racism'.⁹⁵

In a written submission to the Department for Education on the challenges facing GRT children and young people in education by Professor Margaret Greenfields, Professor Graeme Atherton (Director of the National Education Opportunities Network) and Sherrie Smith, it was stated:

*Male respondents (predominantly) noted that the stereotypes of GRT young people as 'hard' meant that they were not infrequently forced into situations where they became involved in fights as a result of being consistently bullied or goaded into reactions to name calling about their culture or community, were required to defend a younger relative from bullying, or responded to misogynist comments made about female relatives linked to supposed presumptions of gendered behaviours and roles in GRT communities ...*⁹⁶

Figure 2: Numbers of Gypsy / Traveller and Irish Traveller students in higher education by sex



Source: HESA Student Record 2012/13, 2014/15, 2016/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21

One Showman noted that GRT parents often prefer single-sex schools due to their traditionally more socially conservative values. It was frequently noted that mixed-sex schools and a lack of awareness of gender norms within GRT cultures contributes to early school leaving.

Gypsy / Roma girls have been found to outperform Gypsy / Roma boys at GCSE; however, on average more males go on to higher education than females (Figure 2).⁹⁷

The Go Higher West Yorkshire report found ‘a largely traditional split in aspirations’ amongst GRT young people.⁹⁸ The report stated:

The impact of gender on [further education] and [higher education] choices formed a strong theme. For Roma as

*well as Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young women, family and community expectations were typically strongly linked to a concern for morality and personal and family reputation, which were embedded into an overarching prioritisation of marriage and family responsibilities over further education or employment. However, education and employment were seen as important in ensuring financial security in the event that one's spouse became unemployed, or the marriage ended.*⁹⁹

The authors of the report found that gender norms impacted the decisions of young Traveller males about entering work, training and further education given the prevalence of expectations to become financially independent and be able to support a wife and family.¹⁰⁰ These findings correlate with statements made by individuals interviewed for this report.

Lack of representation

In their submission to the Department for Education by Greenfields, Atherton and Smith, it was stated:

*Young people in both the Traveller Movement 2020 study and our research have consistently identified a mismatch between curricula content and their own experience, lifestyles and employment opportunities.*¹⁰¹

Interviewees for this report described a lack of representation of GRT cultures and a lack of understanding of the challenges GRT pupils face within mainstream curricula. One interviewee gave the example of a question on a Mathematics examination paper referring to buying tickets for the theatre – a cultural experience with which many GRT pupils may not be familiar. Elsewhere, children might be asked to draw a picture of their house – another concept with which GRT pupils who live in caravans may not be familiar.

GRT campaigners reported that GRT ways of life are not sufficiently represented in mainstream curricula. Greenfields suggests that issues of perceived lack of representation could be alleviated by the inclusion of texts by GRT authors such as Richard O'Neill and Rosaleen McDonough.¹⁰² Interviewees noted that several derogatory books have been removed from the curriculum. O'Neill's most recent book, *The Show Must Go On*, depicts fairground culture for young readers and has been influential in raising awareness of GRTSB ways of life.¹⁰³

Given that GRT students are statistically more likely to go into employment (often self-employment, working with their extended family members), Greenfields also suggests there needs to be a more inclusive approach to careers services which recognises aspirations and delivers skills training to support the needs of self-employed tradespeople, for example book-keeping, and supporting access to relevant apprenticeships.¹⁰⁴

Home schooling and geographic mobility

It is a common misconception that GRT communities are predominantly mobile. In the 2011 Census, the most common type of accommodation of respondents who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller was a whole house or bungalow (61 per cent compared to 84 per cent for England and Wales), followed by a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure (24 per cent compared to 0.3 per cent for England and Wales).¹⁰⁵

The choice to educate children at home is therefore not mainly a result of the communities' mobility.¹⁰⁶ Many sources have instead found that GRT parents choose to homeschool their children out of fear of prejudicial treatment, a perceived lack of representation within the curriculum and / or after negative experiences in mainstream schools. The Go Higher West

Yorkshire report found:

*Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people had a strong interest in further learning, but were noticeably more hesitant to access this than their Roma peers, largely because of negative experiences in schools and early school leaving impacting literacy and numeracy skills.*¹⁰⁷

Dr Emily Danvers, lecturer at the University of Sussex and affiliated with the Centre for Higher Education and Research's Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility project, states that 'schools must represent these communities and be felt to be in the best interests of the child or young person'.

For those who choose to homeschool their children as a result of their geographic mobility, the Education Act (1996) (Section 444:6) provides for parents who do not secure regular attendance at school for their child on the basis of the child not having a fixed abode, if the parent is 'engaged in a trade or business of such a nature as to require him to travel from place to place.'¹⁰⁸

Romani author Richard O'Neill reported:

School is generally linear and Travelling people, having a nomadic culture, are generally more circular in their thinking and doing.

In order to accommodate Traveller culture and way of life, there needs to be sufficient provision of home education networks both in terms of funding and means of keeping records of pupils who move between different schools throughout the country. West Sussex County Council notes:

*There are no funds directly available for parents who decide to home educate their children. Local authorities have no legal duty to provide financial support to parents who choose to home educate their children.*¹⁰⁹

The impact of COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the number of schools and pupils has increased nationally, the number of GRT students attending mainstream schools has fallen. Individuals interviewed for this report stated that attending school during the height of the pandemic was a particular concern for GRT pupils as they are more likely to live in multigenerational households and were therefore additionally fearful about the risk of spreading COVID-19 to elderly or vulnerable family members.

During the pandemic, GRT pupils also suffered from a lack of digital access. Friends, Families and Travellers, an organisation providing advice, advocacy, information and other services to Gypsies and Travellers, gave out dongles to pupils in Sussex, but such programmes were dependent on the presence of GRTSB organisations within local authorities.

Providing tailored catch-up support for GRT pupils whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic is one of the aims of the £1 million programme which was announced by the Government in July 2021.¹¹⁰ It was broadly agreed in the Education Committee hearing on 'Education challenges facing children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds', however, that the pilot programme does not go far enough to address the structural issues which result in poorer outcomes for GRT pupils. Committee Chair of the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and Other Travellers (ACERT), Lisa Smith, stated:

*While we very respectfully are very happy to see that there's some commitment, we fear that this isn't enough to really address the systemic, historical challenges and real under-achievement going forward.*¹¹¹

Advice and Policy Manager at Friends, Family and Travellers, Emma Nuttall, stated:

Obviously we welcome the £1 million but it really is a drop in the ocean and we do need ... it to be properly embedded in ring-fenced funding for traveller education services.¹¹²

It would be good if every local authority in the country had a Traveller education service or if not a dedicated officer.¹¹³

Funding schemes should be developed in close cooperation with communities and organisations working directly with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

2. GRT students in higher education

Just 6.9 per cent of Gypsy / Roma and 10.7 per cent of Irish Traveller students accessed higher education by the age of 19 in 2019/20.¹¹⁴ Atherton, Greenfields and Smith heard from a number of young people who reported:

They had had such poor school experiences that they did not want to attempt to continue their education as they anticipated bullying, discriminatory treatment by educational professionals and ultimately educational failure if their ethnicity should be known.¹¹⁵

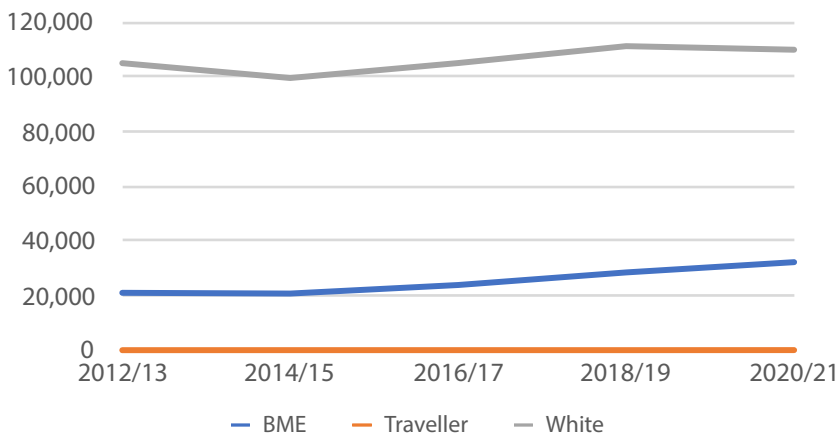
As the statistical analyses in this section make clear, the disrupted pathways for GRT, from early years through to primary and secondary schools, result in extremely low participation in higher education which should be of grave concern for the education sector. The numbers of Gypsy or Traveller students in higher education would appear to have increased year-on-year since 2012/13 to stand at 660 (550 undergraduates and 120 postgraduates) in 2020/21. However, it is important to note that the numbers may reflect a rise in self-reporting rather than increases in absolute terms.

The number of Gypsy / Traveller and Irish Traveller students at Russell Group institutions has increased over the last decade, but the groups remain significantly under-represented. HESA rounded data gives the following returns: five students (2012/13 academic year); 15 students (2014/15); 15 students (2016/17); 10 students (2018/19); and 30 students (2020/21).¹¹⁶ If GRT students were not under-represented at these research-intensive universities, there would be more than 10 times as many – around 320 undergraduates – at Russell Group institutions.

Compared to all other ethnic groups, Gypsy / Roma students and Travellers of Irish Heritage remain the least likely to enter high-tariff institutions. Figure 3 provides data on GRT entry into Russell Group higher education institutions compared to students classified as BME and White. In 2019/20, state school Gypsy / Roma pupils entering higher education aged 19 were 5.5 times less likely to progress to higher education than their White British peers, and 16.7 times less likely to enter a high-tariff institution than Black Caribbean students, who were the next-lowest performing ethnicity.¹¹⁷

These findings are an important caveat to the Institute for Fiscal Studies' 2015 headline statement that 'all ethnic minority groups in England are now, on average, substantially more likely to go to university than their White British peers.'¹¹⁸ The statement further exemplifies the status of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers as Britain's invisible ethnic minorities.

Figure 3: UK-domiciled BME, Traveller (including Gypsy / Traveller and Irish Traveller) and White students at Russell Group institutions



Source: HESA Student Record 2012/13, 2014/15, 2016/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21

Tables 5 and 6 provide data on the ethnicity and socio-economic status of students in higher education according to HESA's classifications. For students aged 21 and over at the start of their course, their own socio-economic background is recorded, while for students under the age of 21, the socio-economic background of their parent, step-parent or guardian who earns the most is recorded.¹¹⁹

Table 5: HESA rounded data returns of ethnicity categories and socio-economic classifications for 2018/19

Socio-economic classification	Ethnicity			
	BME	Traveller	White	Ethnicity total
Higher managerial & professional occupations	13,005	5	67,450	82,425
Intermediate occupations	11,540	5	38,675	51,680
Lower managerial & professional occupations	15,885	10	70,930	89,445
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	2,930	0	13,320	16,710
Never worked & long-term unemployed	700	0	1,615	2,415
Not classified	23,760	10	56,455	85,605
Routine occupations	6,740	5	17,880	25,480
Semi-routine occupations	13,830	10	29,775	45,090
Small employers & own account workers	7,705	0	16,600	24,990
Unknown	28,515	30	112,980	154,970
Socio-economic classification total	124,615	80	425,680	578,815

Source: HESA Student Record 2018/19

Table 6: HESA rounded data returns of ethnicity categories and socio-economic classifications for 2020/21

Socio-economic classification	Ethnicity			Ethnicity total
	BME	Traveller	White	
Higher managerial & professional occupations	14,565	0	67,760	84,425
Intermediate occupations	12,155	5	36,780	50,595
Lower managerial & professional occupations	16,535	15	68,925	88,005
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	3,215	5	13,320	17,050
Never worked & long-term unemployed	690	0	1,545	2,315
Not classified	24,045	20	54,150	83,445
Routine occupations	7,200	10	18,085	26,185
Semi-routine occupations	14,600	5	27,865	43,990
Small employers & own account workers	8,705	5	16,015	25,395
Unknown	32,735	40	126,230	170,510
Socio-economic classification total	134,440	110	430,680	591,915

Source: HESA Student Record 2020/21

The tables show that between zero and five Gypsy / Traveller and Irish Traveller student in higher education in the 2018/19 or 2020/21 academic years were from the socio-economic classification, 'never worked and long-term unemployed'. These data correlate with the Department for Education's statistics (Table 7) which break down higher education progression rates in England for pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). Just 4.2 per cent of students who identified as Traveller of Irish Heritage and 5 per cent of those who identified as Gypsy / Roma who were eligible for Free School Meals progressed to higher

education, compared to 20 per cent and 7.7 per cent of all other pupils in the same groupings. The data suggest that low socioeconomic status is a particular barrier for female Irish Traveller pupils: while FSM-eligible Irish Traveller girls are less likely to progress to higher education than their male peers, non-FSM eligible Irish Traveller girls are significantly more likely to progress to higher education than their male peers.

Case study 1: 'A.'

A. works for a charitable organisation supporting GRTSB access to education. His father is a first-generation Showman. As a child, A. lived on a site for two years, on private land for eight or nine years, and in a bricks-and-mortar house for 12 years. He attended a primary school where around four of his peers identified as GRTSB. Six to eight students in his secondary school ascribed as GRTSB, although A. was aware of other GRTSB students who avoided identifying by their ethnicity. A. himself did not identify as GRTSB in school.

A.'s father cannot read or write. A. was placed in a special school on account of speech problems as a child. He later graduated with a humanities degree from a university in the UK.

During his journey through the education system, A. identified four barriers which commonly disrupt GRTSB pathways into higher education:

- (i) racially motivated bullying of GRTSB pupils in schools;
- (ii) a lack of awareness on behalf of the general population of the cultural barriers faced by GRTSB pupils;
- (iii) the complexities of the student finance system in particular; and
- (iv) families preferring traditional employment options for their children.

Table 7: Higher education progression rates in England for 2019/20

Higher education progression rates in England for 2019/20 (per cent)										
		Free School Meals			All Other Pupils			Total		
		F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total
White	White - British	19.6	12.6	16.0	47.1	35.5	41.2	43.9	32.8	38.2
	White - Irish	23.5	22.7	23.1	64.5	52.1	58.4	59.8	48.1	54.0
	Traveller of Irish Heritage	2.9	5.3	4.2	25.0	15.4	20.0	12.1	9.4	10.7
	Gypsy / Roma	6.2	3.7	5.0	8.9	6.5	7.7	8.1	5.7	6.9
	Any Other White Background	44.5	35.3	39.8	54.4	42.4	48.4	53.4	41.7	47.5
	Total	20.8	13.8	17.2	47.5	35.9	41.6	44.4	33.3	38.7
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean	25.8	18.0	21.9	46.4	32.9	39.6	41.7	29.6	35.6
	White and Black African	49.6	27.0	37.9	60.3	49.0	54.7	58.3	44.6	51.4
	White and Asian	41.1	30.9	36.1	65.5	54.9	60.2	61.9	51.5	56.7
	Any Other Mixed Background	40.3	28.4	34.4	60.2	49.7	54.9	56.7	46.2	51.4
	Total	36.0	24.6	30.4	57.3	45.9	51.5	53.4	42.0	47.6
Asian	Indian	62.2	48.4	55.1	77.8	68.8	73.1	76.6	67.3	71.7
	Pakistani	53.5	41.7	47.3	65.9	54.1	59.9	63.2	51.3	57.1
	Bangladeshi	64.0	51.6	57.6	73.9	60.9	67.3	71.0	58.1	64.5
	Any Other Asian Background	64.6	48.9	56.2	77.6	65.4	71.2	76.1	63.5	69.4
	Total	58.6	45.9	52.0	72.7	61.6	67.0	70.2	58.8	64.3

Black	Black Caribbean	43.5	24.3	33.9	57.2	35.7	46.6	54.0	33.0	43.6
	Black - African	66.3	51.1	58.5	77.9	63.1	70.5	75.2	60.2	67.7
	Any Other Black Background	54.8	36.3	45.1	65.9	48.3	57.1	63.5	45.4	54.4
	Total	58.9	42.5	50.6	71.0	54.3	62.7	68.2	51.5	59.9
Chinese		69.4	70.3	69.8	85.5	77.8	81.6	84.5	77.4	80.9
Any Other Ethnic Group		60.3	49.4	54.5	65.8	54.7	60.0	64.5	53.4	58.7
Unknown		35.1	25.1	29.8	52.9	40.4	46.5	50.1	37.8	43.7
Total		31.1	22.3	26.6	51.7	39.9	45.7	48.9	37.6	43.1
(1) Note that progression rates can be volatile over time due to the very small number of pupils in some categories. This is particularly the case for Gypsy / Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils.										

Source: Department for Education¹²⁰

A. explained that despite receiving high grades, he assumed his family did not have enough money to pay for him to go to university. A.'s personal experiences correlate with wider findings that GRT pupils often lack awareness of the student loan system, while GRT families are often unwilling to rely on state support.

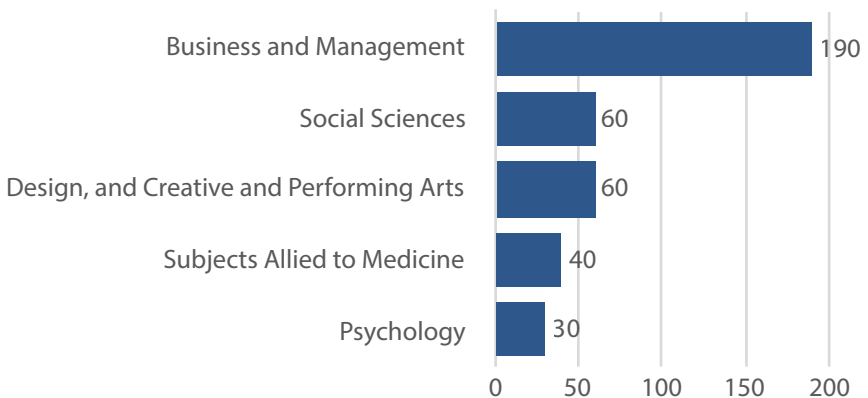
A. describes a general lack of awareness on behalf of the general population about the barriers GRTSB pupils and students face in education. While travelling on the roads, for example, families do not have access to Wi-Fi. A. described his own university experience as 'scary' but 'exciting'. He was able to navigate the cultural differences by returning home to his family every few weekends.

GRT students in higher education

Due to the exceedingly low numbers of GRT students in higher education, more granular analysis of their experiences is difficult. Anecdotally, interviewees reported that GRT students are less likely to travel long distances from their families to attend higher education institutions. It was also noted that GRT students tend to be disproportionately represented in the social sciences, choosing to study courses such as Community Development, Childcare, Early Years Education or Social Work.¹²¹ Romani author Richard O'Neill, however, states that 'the word "Gypsy" holds you back even in the arts'.

Figure 4 shows the five subject areas studied by Gypsy or Traveller undergraduates in the 2020/21 academic year for which the Office for Students has data. The popularity of Business and Management correlates with the preference among the communities for self-employment. There is also a preference for subjects such as Nursing and Social Work.

Figure 4: Subjects studied by Gypsy or Traveller undergraduates in the 2020/21 academic year



Source: Office for Students¹²²

Several academics reported that those who study STEM subjects are more likely to have parents who are settled in bricks-and-mortar housing and have more social, cultural and economic capital. GRT students who enter higher education institutions may have good oral skills but be less experienced in writing essays. These factors may give rise to a fear of formal written assessments. A paper by Sherrie Smith, Professor Margaret Greenfields and Professor Rebecca Rochon found:

*academics who choose essays as a method of assessment must acknowledge that bright and able learners may be disadvantaged if their background and educational experiences have not familiarised them with the expectations of this format.*¹²³

These findings suggest that GRT experiences of higher education could improve if tailored catch-up programmes on essay-writing skills were included in Access and Participation Plans.

Case study 2: Sherrie Smith

Romany Gypsy Sherrie Smith grew up in what she describes as a 'traditional Gypsy family'. She lived in community housing on a street largely populated by Gypsies. She attended local state primary and secondary schools. At school, Sherrie only felt comfortable socialising with other Gypsy pupils and remembers experiencing racism from her teachers. The hostility peaked when Sherrie was addressed using a racist term during an examination at the end of secondary school, which fuelled Sherrie's decision not to attend the sixth form. Sherrie left and enrolled in a photography course at a local further education college.

Sherrie worked in public houses and was self-employed for a

number of years. She describes having a 'taste for learning' and undertook a number of evening short courses in web design and accounting while her children were growing up. Sherrie's father helped her find a flower shop, which Sherrie ran successfully for 12 years. Despite the success of her business, Sherrie felt the need to hide her ethnicity. Sherrie remembers her father warning her, 'non-Gypsy customers won't trust you [if they find out your ethnicity]'. While teaching classes in floristry to other women from her community, Sherrie often found herself in conversations about the structural racism they were facing. Sherrie describes the ignorance of these conditions on behalf of the rest of the population as 'everyday'. In everyday life, to be known as a Romany Gypsy is to feel policed. Sherrie shared the following examples of discrimination experienced by Romany Gypsies:

- after finding out they were from a Romany Gypsy family, a shop assistant at a high street clothing store was searched by her manager, with the implication that the assistant might have stolen money from the till;
- a customer entering a salon had her photograph taken by the proprietor for identification purposes; and
- a Romany Gypsy was unable to make bookings online while using an email address linked to an organisation that supports GRT communities.

Sherrie has also been addressed by extremely pejorative labels, only to hear these racist incidents being dismissed as 'friendly racism'.

In 2016, Sherrie used her qualification in floristry to gain a place as a mature student on a BA in Social Science, Community Development and Youthwork at Goldsmiths, University of London. Sherrie graduated in 2019.¹²⁴

Smith reports that her successes, like those of many other GRT students, were in spite of, rather than because of, a sense of belonging.¹²⁵ It is also the case that GRT students who succeed in higher education become burdened with additional pressures to become a role model for other students.¹²⁶

Outcomes

GRT have some of the worst employment outcomes. Figure 5, derived from the 2011 Census, shows the percentages of GRT in different types of employment.¹²⁷ The White Gypsy / Traveller grouping had the highest percentage of all ethnic groups who had 'never worked or [were] long-term unemployed'.¹²⁸ One third (31.2 per cent) of White Gypsy / Travellers were identified in this socio-economic group, which was 5.3 times the national average. The group with the next-highest percentage of individuals who identified as 'never worked or long-term unemployed' was Bangladeshi (25.3 per cent).¹²⁹

These groups also experience the highest levels of labour market segregation.¹³⁰ Gypsy / Traveller people were the least represented in the highest socio-economic groups associated with higher qualifications in the 2011 Census. Just 2.5 per cent were listed in the 'higher managerial, administrative, professional' grouping.

The largest number of Gypsy or Irish Travellers who were 16 or over and in employment worked in elementary occupations (22 per cent).¹³¹ These are occupations that do not require formal qualifications and can include farm workers, process plant workers, cleaners and service staff.

The second-largest group of Gypsy / Irish Travellers in employment were those who worked in skilled trades (19 per cent). Occupations in this category may require vocational

training and include farmers, electrical and building trades. Gypsy / Irish Travellers had the highest percentage of elementary and skilled trade workers of all ethnic groups.¹³²

Figure 5: Occupational stratifications for Gypsy / Irish Traveller and all other ethnic groups, for people aged 16 and over



Source: Race Disparity Unit¹³³

3. Where are we now?

Improving GRT access to and participation in UK education requires sustained, long-term focus and solutions. At present, programmes aimed at widening access for GRT students are piecemeal and bottom-up. There are no national targets, and there is no long-term agenda aimed at fair access, combating the racism GRT communities face every day, or improving GRT outcomes overall.

International lessons

Countries throughout Europe are grappling with the issue of unequal access of Roma students to mainstream education and prejudice and discrimination in wider society. A recent collection of essays, *The Roma in European Higher Education: Recasting Identities, Re-Imagining Futures*, examined Roma participation in education in Serbia, Greece, Scandinavia, Spain and the UK. As editor Professor Louise Morley writes, 'The story of the Roma is one of spatial segregation, symbolic and actual ghettoization and the racialization of poverty and social exclusion.'¹³⁴ Morley continues:

It is easy to reel off a stream of shocking statistics (i.e. when data sets exist) about how most of the 10-12 million Roma people in Europe live in abject poverty, with the children segregated into special schools ... Or how many Roma communities live without running water, stable employment, health and citizenship rights and safe, secure environments, birth certificates or passports.

The authors of the edited volume survey several flagship programmes, including: the Roma Education Fund, which distributes up to 1,500 scholarships for Bachelor's, Master's and doctorates; *Romaversitas*, a university scholarship programme

founded by the Roma Civil Rights' Foundation in 1996, which offers tutors, tailored support for Roma children and other opportunities for Roma students at university; and the Romani Studies Programme at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna.¹³⁵

The Romani Studies Programme can be considered a case study of best practice. It aims to:

*engage scholars, policy makers, and activists in interdisciplinary knowledge production and debate on Roma identity and movement; antigypsyism; social justice and policy making; gender politics; and structural inequality.*¹³⁶

The course is divided into the Roma Graduate Preparation Program and the Advanced Certificate in Romani Studies. The Graduate Preparation Program is an intensive 10-month programme that prepares Roma graduates interested in social sciences and humanities to compete for Master's-level courses at internationally recognised universities. Since its inception, the Program has seen 169 of its 188 Roma students graduate. More than 70 per cent of its alumni were accepted onto MA and PhD programmes with scholarships. Separately, the Central European University (CEU) has enrolled seven Roma PhD students and awarded three PhDs to Roma students. One of the key benefits of linking scholarship funding with the Programme is that GRT students are incentivised to identify by their ethnicity in an environment where their history and culture are celebrated.

The CEU also: offers courses for MA and PhD students; provides summer courses for graduates and activists around the world;

hosts conferences on Roma access to education; and publishes the peer-reviewed journal *Critical Romani Studies*.

In the UK, there is no comparable cluster of degree programmes specifically for GRT students. There has been no analogous movement to establish departments for studies of GRT history, culture or languages, or a national scholarship programme for GRT students. Until recently, GRT and GRTSB students were rarely mentioned as target groups for universities' widening access work. In recent years, it has become more common to include issues of GRT access and participation within universities' Access and Participation Plans.

During the EU Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) and the formation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (2014), the UK was widely criticised by charities and activist groups for its comparative lack of attention and funding to address the issue on a national scale. For example, Friends, Families and Travellers reported the UK missed the deadline for the submission of its national strategy, undertook little consultation and proposed insufficient commitments.¹³⁷

In her work with Roma across Europe, lecturer at the University of Sussex, Dr Emily Danvers found there was a 'sense that to be educated and to be visibly Roma, moving away was significant'. Danvers points out that funded opportunities for international mobility such as ERASMUS play a significant role in promoting mobility both geographically and socially for marginalised communities. The UK's Turing Scheme must therefore take account of the potential impact of the UK's exit from the ERASMUS programme on GRT students.

The University of Sussex has been a leading institution promoting research and outreach work with GRT communities.

The Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility research / innovation project ran in the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research at the University of Sussex between January 2015 and December 2017. The project produced a training module and guidelines on reflexive and inclusive internationalisation; developed networks, resources and a Facebook Group for Roma Researchers; published academic articles and book chapters; and produced the film 'Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' Experiences of Higher Education' as well as training and development opportunities for Roma scholars.¹³⁸

In 2019, the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research launched a new project, 'Supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Educational Transitions'.¹³⁹ The project has been involved in a targeted outreach programme in East Sussex researching the experiences of GRT learners during COVID-19. The team is currently working to support schools in Sussex by providing targeted support for GRT students and training for teachers, and has developed a website and training for educational professionals wanting to focus on supporting GRT access to higher education.

In 2019, the Widening Participation Department at King's College London launched the 'Rom Belong' Programme.¹⁴⁰ The Programme aims to establish a network of role models for GRT students and runs targeted activities for GRT pupils in schools. The Programme also produced six short films about first-hand experiences of GRT students at university.

The University of Manchester hosts a website on Romani Linguistics and Romani Language Projects; Liverpool University Press publishes *Romani Studies*; and the University of Edinburgh Law School runs a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Access to Justice Clinic.¹⁴¹

The GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge

The GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge was launched at Buckinghamshire New University in January 2021.¹⁴² The Pledge was co-designed by community member graduates, academics, education policy specialists and non-governmental organisations. The Pledge is designed to:

*Support best practice in ensuring monitoring of data; inclusive pedagogy and representation in the academy, and the development of widening participation practice to support GTRSB students and potential students.*¹⁴³

A signatory to the Pledge commits to the following best practices:

- data monitoring of GTRSB student and staff numbers;
- building a supportive and welcoming culture for GTRSB students;
- outreach and engagement with local GTRSB communities; and
- inclusion, celebration and commemoration of GTRSB cultures and communities.

As of June 2022, there were 11 signatory institutions:

- Anglia Ruskin University
- Buckinghamshire New University
- Institute for Contemporary Theatre, Brighton
- Nelson College London
- Northumbria University
- University Centre Leeds

- University of Essex
- University of Hull
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Sunderland
- University of Winchester

A number of other institutions are also working towards signing up to the Pledge or have stated an ambition to do so in the coming months. Following interest expressed in the Pledge, and requests for information received from a number of early years providers and schools, an adapted form of the Pledge suitable for use in the compulsory education sector has been developed and was launched in June 2022.¹⁴⁴

One Romany Gypsy interviewed for this report celebrates the Pledge as an initiative that ‘got buy-in from the top-down and the bottom-up’. Since signing up to the Pledge, a number of institutions have reported positive change including:

- encouraging staff and students to identify as GRT;
- being able to make contact with those students and therefore identify specific barriers they are facing;ⁱⁱ
- facilitating the release of funds for targeted support such as the provision of laptops;
- extending outreach programmes to local schools to support early intervention; and
- undertaking tailored training on GRT issues and cultures.

Building on the Pledge, the University of Sunderland has put the following mechanisms in place to support GRT students:

ii ARU has a built in a feature to its enrolment system such that when a student identifies as GRT, student support services are alerted.

- a member of staff is on call 24/7 during freshers week;
- a £3,000 bursary is available for GRT students;
- students can identify as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers upon enrolment as separate categories;
- for GRT students, accommodation is guaranteed for the duration of their programme;
- there is a named contact available to support GRT applicants and students;
- GRT students are guaranteed an interview for student ambassador and mentor jobs;
- storage during the summer vacation so that Travellers do not have to sign up for 52-week contracts;
- costs incurred by graduation (such as gown hire and photography) are covered; and
- GRT students have a named contact in careers services.

A senior member of one university stated that they would not be willing to sign up to the Pledge knowing that at present they cannot realistically commit to its ambitious targets.

The targets are ambitious but welcome. Given that the Pledge was launched only shortly before the COVID-pandemic, assessing progress is difficult. The 2022 annual report on the Pledge states that signatories are noting an increase in self-identification, particularly since introducing Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boater as separate categories on enrolment forms.¹⁴⁵

Wendy Price, Head of Widening Access and Participation at the University of Sunderland, described the Pledge as a useful 'framework' for universities who are committed to cultural

change but may benefit from guidance about where to start. It is recommended that institutions signed up to the Pledge should share best practice with each other and be partnered with institutions interested in becoming future signatories but who do not yet feel they have capacity to commit to the targets.

Conclusions and recommendations

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Article 28) enshrines the right of all children to receive an education. The Convention urges states to 'take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates'.¹⁴⁶ At present, the UK is failing to provide for the educational needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller – as well as Showmen and Boater – children.

If Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were evenly represented in higher education, then, according to census data, they would make up around 0.1 per cent of all students. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers would therefore make up around 2,600 students, instead of the 660 there are today. This is a feasible aim, given it would mean each university having under 20 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students on average, or enrolling around just seven freshers from these communities each year.

GRT exclusion from education reflects their unequal access and poorer outcomes experienced in wider society. Education can 'interrupt the inferiorisation' of GRT and GRTSB children and adults given that:

- higher education is often positioned as a major pathway out of poverty and into social mobility;
- employment rates tend to be higher for people with higher education qualifications than for those with lower levels of education; and
- graduates tend to earn higher salaries and therefore access to higher education can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty.¹⁴⁷

This report has outlined the following main barriers to access to and continued participation in mainstream education for

GRT students:

- widespread racism experienced by GRT peoples in schools and wider UK society;
- prejudice and discrimination against GRT pupils, both by students and teachers;
- lack of awareness of GRT cultures – for example, the need for longer absences from school after a bereavement;
- a lack of trust in the education, health, and social services due to historic and continued experiences of discrimination; and
- the lack of a sustained national strategy to combat historic inequality.

The report has further identified limitations to drawing meaningful conclusions about GRT participation in and outcomes after higher education given the lack of raw data, inconsistent use of terminology and students' own fears about identifying as GRT.

The report concludes with four recommendations: two for Government and two for higher education institutions.

i. Data collection

We need identification, recognition, and representation. The first step towards that is a national education policy that offers correct identification at the point of admission to a school, college, or university.

Colleen Roper, Future4Fairgrounds

The current lack of data on GRTSB participation in education means that the full scale of the problem remains invisible.

Landmark reports and data returns continue to omit GRTSB students.¹⁴⁸

According to the annual report of activities undertaken by signatory institutions to the Pledge, there is work in progress with HESA through their 'Data Futures 22/23' programme to include a wider range of categories from August 2022; however, these categories would still exclude, for example, New Travellers, Welsh Travellers and Boaters.¹⁴⁹

A box for each category under the GTRSB umbrella should be provided and data for each category should be recorded and reported separately.

Higher education institutions should be encouraged to publish information on GRT access and participation in their student recruitment data.

ii. Funding

*[£1 million] really is a drop in the ocean.*¹⁵⁰

Emma Nuttall, Friends, Family and Travellers

COVID-19 has left a lasting impact on GRT pupils and families. The small increase in GRT student numbers prior to the pandemic has been lost due to COVID-19. The £1 million pilot education project is welcome, but it is insufficient to address the full scale of the problem.

The £1 million project was aimed at reaching more than 600 students in 150 schools: thus, around £1,660 was allocated per pupil. According to the 2019/20 school census, there were 28,091 Gypsy / Roma pupils and 6,578 Travellers of Irish heritage in schools in England and Wales: a total of 34,669 identified GRT students. If each of those pupils were to be

allocated the same amount of funding as outlined in the pilot project, then £60 million would make for a more reasonable target.

Funding should be delivered according to targeted interventions and in close collaboration with community groups. For example, the University of Sussex's work in building relationships between GRT communities, schools and the University at a local level has been found to be effective and helpful in building up granular-level knowledge of the communities' needs and aspirations. The model of targeted outreach is also undertaken by a range of Pledge signatory institutions (for example, Anglia Ruskin University) and should be replicated in other areas of the UK with high populations of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Indeed, outreach to communities is advocated as a requirement for higher education institutions signing the GTRSB Pledge.

iii. Access and Participation Plans

As the ethnic minorities with the worst outcomes in UK education, GRT should be referred to explicitly in universities' Access and Participation Plans. The current trend towards focusing on larger groups risks leaving GRT students behind.

The GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge is a milestone innovation both in its content and its form – as the result of collaboration between community member graduates, academics and policy specialists. Pairing signatories with institutions as yet hesitant to commit to the Pledge could be a helpful way to encourage more institutions to get involved and raise awareness of Pledge's admirable goals.

iv. Celebration of GRT culture

Higher education institutions can only do so much to address historic structural inequalities. There is a lack of understanding of GRT culture and the barriers they face throughout UK society. A 2017 poll found only 34 per cent of people in the UK viewed GRT to be an ethnic group.¹⁵¹ Lack of awareness is compounded by the racism GRT peoples and communities experience in everyday society. Schools, colleges and universities can improve awareness of GRT history, culture and ways of life by:

- including works by GRT authors and reference to GRT figures and cultures in mainstream curricula;
- embedding awareness of prejudice and discrimination against GRTSB communities into anti-racism training;
- recognising Holocaust Memorial Day each January and International Roma Remembrance Day each April, which commemorates Roma deaths in the Holocaust, and celebrating GRT History Month each June; and
- working on the basis that there are some GRT students and staff at their institution even if none has formally identified as such; and thus creating an open and welcoming environment will assist such individuals with coming forward and self-identifying as a member of the community.

Access to education is a universal right. While higher education is not be the best path for everyone to follow, every student should have the right to make an informed choice about their future. We need to level the playing field: every student must be equipped with the resources they need to pursue the best path for their future.

Endnotes

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