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More than luck:

enabling access and success
in Higher Education for Gypsy, Romany
and Traveller (GRT) communities.

Professor Graeme Atherton

Special Advisor to The Portal Trust, Widening Participation & Levelling Up

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Foreword

The changes British society has experienced since our first report was written two years ago have been profound. The COVID-19 pandemic spread through the country with alacrity, changing our lives dramatically. As it did so, the virus exposed health, education and income inequalities across some of the country's most disadvantaged groups.

As highlighted in our 2020 report, *More than luck...* the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities are amongst the most marginalised and discriminated against in society. They are consistently shown to have the worst health and lower educational outcomes than the general population. They also face high levels of resentment and discrimination, with GRT children particularly vulnerable to bullying in school.

The original report made clear recommendations that, if implemented, could improve progression to Higher Education for GRT young people; however, it is now clear that the consequences of the pandemic could, if we allow, further entrench inequalities. Now that two years have elapsed, The Portal Trust is asking what has changed and what more can be done. This update looks at the progress that has been made and the enormous task in front of us in securing the futures of these young people.

We recognise that some challenges will require long-term, strategic policy changes and we commend the House of Commons Education Select Committee for launching its recent enquiry. This will examine the educational challenges this community encounters and the effectiveness of the Government's recently introduced education programme for GRT Children. We are delighted that Professor Graeme Atherton, who has been appointed as Special Adviser to The Portal Trust, Widening

Participation and Levelling Up, has already provided written evidence to the Select Committee, along with his original report, and we look forward to its conclusions in the coming months.

It is clear that without specific targets for improving access for the GRT community, not all universities will be minded to act to improve outcomes or even collect the necessary data to improve their recruitment practices. We also recognise that change will be slow; therefore, interventions must start early in the lives of young GRT people.

The importance of starting early

Given the vagaries of the funding system and a lack of support for the younger GRT community, The Portal Trust feels it is important to support their educational needs at the primary and secondary level.

One such project at Oxford Gardens Primary School in west London, supported by the Trust, sees an outreach worker position himself as a role model and a shoulder to lean on, ensuring the school is a safe place for the GRT cohort and acting as a bridge between the school, family and the community.

This project has already seen tangible results, including improved educational engagements and attendance. It is these incremental steps that The Portal Trust believes can help to bring about meaningful change and enhance life-changing opportunities for the GRT community.

Sophie Anne Fernandes, Chairman
Richard Foley, Chief Executive
Autumn 2022

1

Introduction

In 2020 The Portal Trust published the first *More than luck: enabling access and success in Higher Education for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) communities* report.¹ This second version will look at the progress made in terms of extending access to higher education for learners from GRT communities since 2020. Consistent with the emerging evidence for this report, we extend the definition of the groups we are seeking to consider to include, where possible, Occupational Travellers (Showmen/ Showpeople). The evidence suggests they may experience considerable similarities to GRT populations, in relation to disrupted education or early school leaving, experiences of discrimination and bullying in educational contexts and (similar to some GRT children) frequent movement.

As with the first report, this update will look at the available administratively collected data on progression to HE for GRT communities and the work that HE providers and policymakers have been doing. It will update the recommendations from the first report and include additional ones to reflect the changing policy landscape and in response to the continuing need for action in this area.

¹ For more information on the work of The Portal Trust please go to: www.portaltrust.org/about-us/resources

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Access and participation in Higher Education

The increase in HE participation that followed the re-branding of many ex-polytechnics as universities in the 1990s propelled inequalities in HE onto the policy agenda. While the target introduced by the Labour government in 2001 to open up HE to 50% of all 18 to 30-year-olds² was not an access target as such, ie it did not focus explicitly on a group(s) under-represented in HE, it symbolised the new commitment to this agenda.

Through the 2000s via, in the main, a national government-funded programme called Aimhigher that brought schools, colleges and HE providers together in regional partnerships to undertake activities that would increase understanding and awareness of HE amongst young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, Labour maintained its focus on the issue.³

Into the 2010s, even though tuition fees increased to make England the most expensive place on average in the world to enter HE, the focus on who went, and did not go, to HE remained.

2 BBC News Monday 8th March 1999, *Blair wants student boom*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/292504.stm>

3 Passy, R, (2012) *Widening Participation, Aimhigher and the Coalition Government: narratives of freedom and efficiency*, *Power and Education*, Volume 4 Number 1 2012 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/power.2012.4.1.83>

Rather than government-funded activity, however, the concentration now was on HE providers via 'Access Agreements'. They outlined what an HE provider (this includes universities, colleges of higher education who do not have university status and Further Education Colleges delivering HE) was doing in terms of 'outreach' work with schools/colleges/communities such as school visits, mentoring projects, summer schools, work with parents as well as the financial support through bursaries or scholarships it offered. We have seen since 2019 a particular shift in government approaches to widening access to HE. It remains a policy priority via the work of the Office for Students, the regulatory body for HE in England, but the focus has turned now to the outcomes that graduates achieve when they leave HE.⁴ In addition, there has been a renewed concentration on how universities can help schools raise the attainment of their pupils.

⁴ For more information go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-and-further-education-minister-speech-at-times-higher-education-event>

3

Inequality and the communities of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller people

There is not a single, homogenous Gypsy, Romany, or Traveller community but rather several communities characterised by differing histories and contrasting presents. These include those of Gypsy heritage but differing Celtic backgrounds, Romany groups who have been based in the UK for many generations (it is important to recognise that there are records of Gypsy groups on the British Isles since the 16th century) but also those Romany people who descend from Europe in particular, including groups who have come to settle in the UK as part of the influx of eastern European people in the last two decades.⁵

5 UK House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, (2019) *Seventh Report of Session 2017–19: Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*, London: House of Commons 2019 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html>

In terms of the population size of the GRT communities, the 2011 census included for the first time an ethnic category entitled 'Gypsy, Traveller and Irish Traveller communities. The census counted around 63,000 people in the UK identifying as members of these groups, of which 58,000 were living in England and Wales.⁶ However, it can be said with some confidence that this number underestimates the actual size of the overall GRT community population. It is estimated by some researchers that there may be between 100,000 to 300,000 Gypsy/Traveller people and up to 200,000 Roma people living in the UK⁷.

6 Cromarty (2019) *House of Commons Library Briefing Paper on Gypsies and Travellers*, London: House of Commons

Of particular interest to this report is what the official data shows about the age distribution of GRT communities with nearly 40 per cent of the population being under 20 years old.

7 University of Salford (2013) *Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom: Population size and experiences of local authorities and partners*, p7

8 Cromarty (2019) *House of Commons Library Briefing Paper on Gypsies and Travellers*, London: House of Commons

9 BBC News (2014) *CRE examines treatment of Gypsies*, 17th October 2004 – <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/3751214.stm>

10 University of Birmingham (2022) *University of Birmingham survey reveals Islamophobia is the posh person's prejudice* – <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/latest/2022/01/university-of-birmingham-survey-reveals-islamophobia-is-the-posh-person%27s-prejudice.aspx>

11 Monbiot, G. (2022) *The UK is heading towards authoritarianism: just look at this attack on a minority* Guardian, 12th January 2022 – <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/12/uk-authoritarianism-minority-policing-bill-roma-gypsy-traveller>

To tackle inequalities in access to HE for these communities there are two other main contextual factors to consider. Firstly, there is the issue of the accommodation arrangements of GRT communities. The census suggested that the majority of the group live in settled accommodation and do not travel, or do not travel all of the time, but consider travelling to be part of their identity. As the House of Commons Library 2019 Briefing Paper on Gypsies and Travellers stated:⁸

'At the 2011 Census, the majority (76%) of Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England and Wales lived in bricks-and-mortar accommodation, and 24% lived in a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure'.

The second issue is the racism that those in the GRT communities encounter. In 2014 Sir Trevor Phillips (as Chair of the Commission for Race Equality) described racism towards GRT communities as "*the last respectable form of racism*".⁹ Since the first *More than luck...* report, research has been released finding that Gypsy and Irish Travellers are the UK's least-liked group with 44.6% of people viewing this group negatively.¹⁰

The government's new national strategy to tackle Gypsy, Roma and Traveller inequalities announced in 2019 appears not to have progressed at all and the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill, which is due to pass through the Commons in 2022, threatens the civil liberties of those in the GRTSB community and would enable the police to confiscate GRTSB community vehicles (in other words their homes) on the mere suspicion of trespass and arrest their owners.¹¹

On a more optimistic note, there has been some investment by the government in a pilot scheme to boost educational attainment, tackle exclusion and drop-out rates and improve pathways to employment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in 5 areas of the country. In 2021, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities invested £1 million in a pilot to test the feasibility of funding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Education Areas in Bradford, Central Bedfordshire, Essex, Hillingdon and Surrey and to Open Doors Education and Training to work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' priority for this funding programme is to test locally targeted interventions which focus on improving educational attainment, reducing school drop-out rates and improving the pathways to education and employment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people.¹²

In addition, the Department of Education Select Committee launched an enquiry in late 2021 into the education of those from GRT communities. The enquiry should produce a report sometime in 2022. The impact of such enquiries on government policy is limited in most cases but it should highlight some of the issues described in this report.¹³ The call for evidence to the enquiry has also acted as a catalyst to bring together evidence and perspectives from those across sectors regarding the challenges facing GRTSB learners and how they could be challenged. It also now serves as a valuable resource bringing together descriptions of work from across educational sectors focused on addressing educational inequalities affecting GRT communities.

12 For more information please go to: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/43316/pdf/>

13 For more information please seek to: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/159482/educational-challenges-faced-by-children-from-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-backgrounds-committee-launches-call-for-written-submissions/>

4

Access to HE for GRT learners – what do we know?

At this stage, neither Showpeople or Boaters (live-aboard boaters, for this comment, 'continuous cruisers' with no stable location to moor and access education or who may experience intermittent or unstable internet access) are recognised in DfE or School Census statistics. Hence the data examined below describes those from Gypsy/Roma groups and Travellers of Irish Heritage.

The Department of Education produces two sets of data relevant to HE progression. The first looks at the progression of all learners aged 15 into HE. The second looks at the progression of learners studying at Key Stage 5. The latter measure includes only those who have remained in education at Key Stage 5 so the percentage entering HE from any particular group is always higher where this measure is concerned.

In Diagram 1 the percentage of 15-year-olds entering HE from Traveller of Irish heritage and Gypsy/Roma groups is compared to entry rates for other white students from 2009–10 to 2019–20.¹⁴ It is an extension of the data in the *More than luck...* report including statistics from 2018–19 and 2019–20. As can be seen from Diagram 1, little progress has been made from 2018 to 2020 although there has been some increase in participation for Traveller of Irish heritage bringing their participation rate up to 11% which is the highest it has been since 2009–10.

The very low rates of progression are an obvious concern. The percentage of students entering HE from Travellers of Irish heritage and Gypsy/Roma groups has only increased by 2% and 4% respectively in the last 11 years.

¹⁴ Department for Education (2021) *Statistics: widening participation in higher education* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

Diagram 1

Progression to HE for 15-year-olds students from white backgrounds

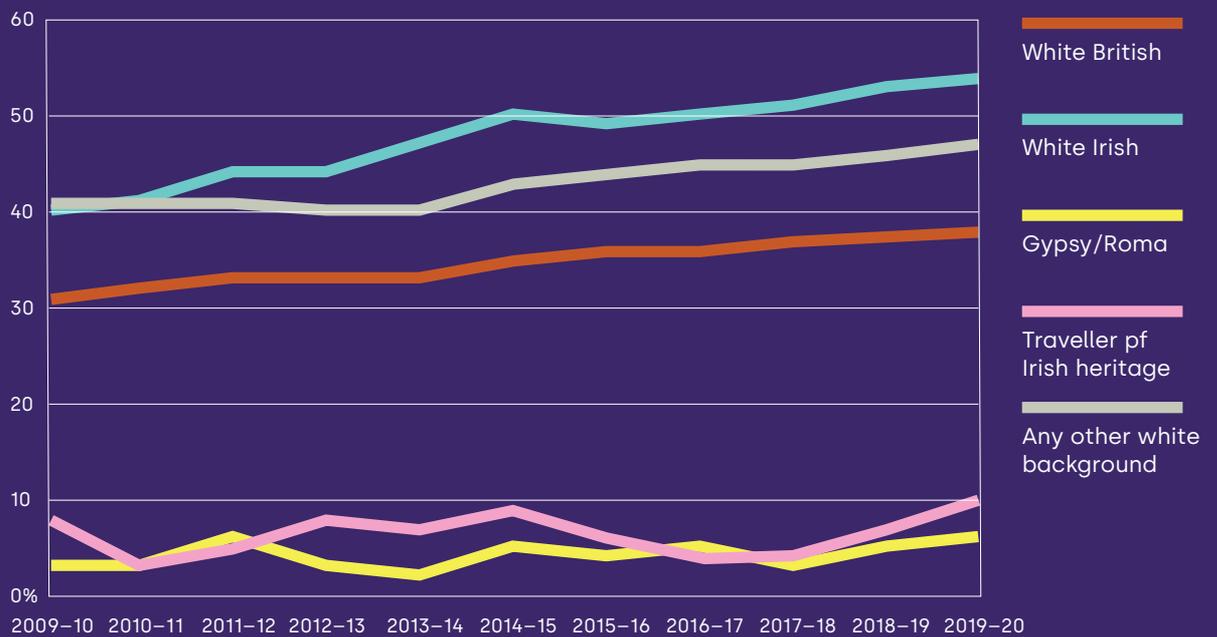


Table 1

Ethnic group	%
White – British	38
White – Irish	54
Traveller of Irish Heritage	11
Gypsy / Roma	7
Any Other White Background	48

Table 1 shows the data on progression into higher education for learners from different 'white' backgrounds in 2019–20. It shows that those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds are over 5 times less likely to enter HE than white British young people.

The most comprehensive data on who progresses to HE is collected by UCAS and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). However, while both collect information on the progression into HE of those from GRT communities, in part due to the low numbers involved, neither organisation publishes it systematically. Hence, why data from the Department of Education has been used in Diagram 1.

Data from HESA returns released in 2016 suggested that only 3 to 4% of GRT young people aged 18–30 accessed HE in 2014/15, whereas 43% of the national 18–30-year-old population did so.

UCAS does not at present have a separate category for Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller students. Nor is there a category for Roma students. Table 2 shows that while the numbers are low for applications and acceptances, they did increase over the 2013 to 2018 period.¹⁵

15 Data obtained directly from UCAS.

Table 2

Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Applicants	70	80	100	120	125	110
All acceptances	50	60	70	80	95	70

More recently in the Office for Students 'Topic Briefing' on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, published in July 2020, it was quoted that In 2018–19, only 184 Gypsy and Traveller students were registered in higher education.¹⁶

While the data outlined above are from differing sources, it points to the very low levels of participation in HE by learners from GRT communities. This picture is only partial though, and there are likely more students from GRT communities in HE than the data shows. In addition, the level of granularity required to fully capture the diversity within the GRT community is not there at present, meaning that it is not possible to say with any level of certainty the extent to which Showpeople, live-aboard Boaters and new Travellers participate in HE.

16 For more information go to: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/>

5

How Higher Education (HE) providers are supporting access and participation in HE for GRT learners

5.1 Analysis of Access and Participation Plans

To establish a picture regarding how HE providers are supporting access and success in HE for those from GRT communities, three approaches were taken in the *More than luck...* report. In this section that work is summarised alongside evidence regarding work undertaken since that report was published.

All HE providers were required by the higher education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), to submit an access and participation plan (APP) in 2019 for the period 2021–2025. This is how the OfS describes the APP and its role:

'Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for under-represented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. They include the provider's ambition for change, the targets it has set, the measures it will put in place to achieve that change and the investment it will make to deliver the plan.'

The APP is the successor to the Access Agreement which providers were required to submit to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) from the late 2000s onwards. The APP is a crucial document. It outlines the targets in access and participation in HE which shape the approach of the institution to this issue.

When completing the APP, HE providers are given guidance regarding which groups of learners can be included in the plan and those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities are specified as one of these groups. As the guidance released in 2019 states:

'...there is a wider set of student groups where the national data indicates there are particular equality gaps and support needs that can be addressed in access and participation plans. These are also included in the OfS definition of underrepresented groups:

- ▶ *Carers*
- ▶ *People estranged from their families*
- ▶ *People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*
- ▶ *Refugees*
- ▶ *Children of military families.'*

The OfS undertook their analysis of 2020–21 to 2024–25 access and participation plans and released the results in January 2020. The OfS analysis looked at the numerical targets relating to the access, participation or success in higher education of those from GRT communities. It showed that none of the 171 plans contained a target related to GRT learners.

The then Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS stated that:

'Several other issues also need closer attention. Some smaller groups are still critically underrepresented in higher education – for example, care leavers, people estranged from their families, young people from military families, and people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. There is a need for a better understanding of the very specific and complex barriers these groups face in accessing and succeeding in higher education.' (Office for Students 2020:5)

Despite the lack of attention placed on GRT communities in the APPs being recognised, little had been done by the OfS to support HE providers in placing a greater priority on GRTSB communities since the statement above in early 2020 aside from the provision of the 'Topic Briefing' in mid-July 2020.

In 2020, as outlined in the first *More than luck...* report, the National Education Opportunities Network undertook an analysis of the content of 130 APPs looking for references to GRT communities concerning four areas in which the Office for Students suggest that HE providers should provide information in these plans. Access refers to outreach work undertaken before entry to HE, attainment to work that HE providers will do to support learners to achieve their academic potential in their assessments, retention to activities to ensure that all students complete their courses and finally progression to the activity which supports students to enter graduate employment after HE. In total just under 30% of the APPs analysed included any reference to GRT communities. Appendix 1 shows the provider's plans where references were found and what the references related to. A new Director of Fair Access and Participation started his role in early 2022 and a change in approach to access and participation has already been outlined.¹⁷

17 Office for Students (2022) *John Blake sets out vision for fair access and participation* -<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/john-blake-sets-out-vision-for-fair-access-and-participation/>

It is hoped that this is an opportunity to address some of the structural barriers that are holding back potential engagement on higher education access issues with GRTSB communities.

5.2 The work of Uni Connect

Uni-Connect brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. Uni Connect partnerships support collaborative approaches by universities and other higher education providers to support young people from under-represented groups to progress to higher education.

The survey undertaken by NEON in 2020 asking Uni-Connect partnerships what they were doing concerning access to HE for GRT communities elicited 12 responses. However, only 2 partnerships described coherent activities that were being delivered at the time of the survey. There has likely been more work done by Uni-Connect since the survey was undertaken. A prominent example of this work is the research commissioned by Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) which is one of the regional partnerships that is part of the national Uni-Connect initiative.¹⁸ GHWY supported detailed research in 2020 to understand the barriers and enablers to Higher Education access, success and progression for Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GRT) young people (aged 14–25) in West Yorkshire. The research, which included fieldwork with higher education providers, community organisations and young people, identified several factors from the young person's perspective critical to higher education progression for young people from GTRSB communities:

18 Greenfields, M. (et al) (2022) Higher Education Opportunities for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Young People in West Yorkshire – Go Higher West Yorkshire – www.gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/impact/higher-education-opportunities-for-gypsy-roma-traveller-young-people/

- ▶ 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 – the 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)
- ▶ Financial barriers, emphasis on earning over study, and entrepreneurial interests

GHWY are building on this research by bringing stakeholders together from across their region to work collaboratively on improving opportunities to access higher education for those from GTRSB communities.

More work has been undertaken by the Uni-Connect partnerships with GRTSB communities, however there has been no published information on the extent and nature of this work.

5.3 Activities by Individual HE providers

To obtain more detailed information regarding what HE providers may be doing to support access and participation in HE than what could be gleaned from APPs, the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) undertook a survey of its members between July to October 2019. Of the 76 HE providers who were members of NEON at the time, there were 25 completed/partially completed surveys. Activities described included bursaries for young people from GRT communities; more multi-faceted institutional approaches including small group visits and talks and workshops for parents and professionals and work with local charities and community groups.

Since the publication of the first report, there is further evidence of a range of work being undertaken by HE providers to support access and participation. The best examples of this work are outlined below.

5.4 The GRTSB into Higher Education Pledge

In the Recommendations section of *More than luck...* the early work into a GRTSB in Higher Education Pledge was outlined. Since 2020, this project has represented the most comprehensive attempt to move forward access to higher education work for students from GRTSB backgrounds, led by Buckinghamshire New University. The pledge consists of a firm commitment by a University, College or educational Institution to undertake certain steps to support GTRSB students into and within higher education. The pledge is designed to support best practices 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.¹⁹

The pledge has been developed after consultation with GTRSB community members (graduates, students and academic staff who are members of the communities); civil society organisations, university representatives, and education policy specialists. It is underpinned by robust research findings and consideration of effective widening participation interventions in supporting members of the communities in and within HE.

The pledge sets out to deliver effective practice and also create an open and welcoming environment where members of the communities can be confident that their culture and learning needs are understood by the institution which they attend, or which they are interested in attending. The pledge is supported by NEON, ACERT, Friends, Families & Travellers and The Traveller Movement. As of Spring 2022, the universities listed overleaf are signatories to the pledge.

19 For more information please go to: <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge>

- ▶ Buckinghamshire New University
- ▶ University of Hull
- ▶ University of Sunderland
- ▶ University of Strathclyde
- ▶ University of Winchester
- ▶ University of Essex
- ▶ Nelson College London
- ▶ Institute for Contemporary Theatre | Brighton
- ▶ University of Northumbria

Box 1 opposite and overleaf describes how the University of Essex is looking to take forward its work on the pledge.

Box 1

University of Essex pledge to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Inclusion, celebration and commemoration

- ▶ Focus on GTRSB inclusion and cultures within the University.
- ▶ Develop and share case studies by members of the GTRSB staff and student communities which raise awareness of achievements and success.
- ▶ Ensure that staff recognise that visibility and awareness of the GTRSB.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to promote and celebrate GTRSB cultures within the University to raise awareness amongst students and staff.

Organisational and institutional culture

- ▶ Ensure staff based within the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service, Outreach, Recruitment, Marketing and Admissions can support students from the GTRSB community.
- ▶ Designate a key named contact for Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater students.
- ▶ Encourage the formation of GTRSB student societies.
- ▶ Promote and communicate initiatives which highlight that the University of Essex is seen as a “safe space” in which self-declaration of GTRSB identity can take place.
- ▶ Ensure GTRSB is incorporated into our institutional policies and activities for equality and diversity.

Outreach

- ▶ Encourage all staff and students to challenge prejudice, derogatory language, and discrimination against GTRSB, incorporating GTRSB experiences within our Bystander Training.
- ▶ Ensure our essential training for staff, How We Work At Essex, and annual refresher training raises awareness of and encourages inclusion of GTRSB experiences within our University community.
- ▶ Ensuring our staff education and research development frameworks include information regarding the experiences of GTRSB communities in education and provide guidance on inclusive practices.
- ▶ Identify and encourage Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater students to participate in our Student Ambassador scheme.



- ▶ Deliver a session at our annual teachers' conference in the Summer on how best to support students from the GTRSB community into higher education.
- ▶ Collaborate with the Essex-based, Office for Students Uni-Connect programme, Make Happen, to share best practice and ensure a common approach within Essex.
- ▶ Deliver strategies to encourage participation in high impact widening participation activity through collaboration with our Schools Membership contacts to signpost activity.

Data collection

- ▶ Monitoring the number of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater students and staff currently at the University.
 - ▶ Year on year evaluating trends in the numbers of self-identified GTRSB students and staff.
 - ▶ Seek ways to empower and enable students and staff to self-identify at application stage and throughout their journey within our organisation.
-

5.5 Kings College & The Brilliant Club Scholars Programme

Since 2021, King's College London has been working with The Brilliant Club (a UK-wide charity that mobilises the PhD community to help less advantaged students access the most competitive universities and succeed when they get there) on the Scholars Programme initiative focused on learners from GRT backgrounds. The Scholars Programme is a key part of the work of the Brilliant Club's programme delivered in their partner schools across the UK. In the Scholars Programme, PhD tutors share their subject knowledge and passion for learning with small groups of students aged 8–18. Students experience small-group university-style learning and complete a challenging final assignment to build the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to progress to a competitive university.

The Scholars Programme is being delivered to 24 students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds with the youngest students in Year 5 and the oldest in Year 10.

The students are studying a wide range of challenging subjects which go beyond the traditional school curriculum, including Art History: Power, Personality and Portraiture; International Relations: Peace and Gender; Arabic Literature: Reviving Traditional Stories in a Contemporary Form; and Public Health: Drugs, Social Theory and Social Change.

This is not the only work that King's College has undertaken to support the educational progression of young people from GRT backgrounds since the last report was published. During the COVID-19 pandemic, King's College London and The Traveller Movement delivered online tutoring to students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.

'Tutors for GRT' was a programme which saw Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students between the ages of 5 and 18 access one-to-one tutoring with a professional tutor throughout the school year. King's College London reached 120 students, who received tutoring between September 2020 and July 2021 from 20 professional tutors. This was the first programme to offer one-to-one online tutoring to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people across the UK.²⁰

20 The information on this work was taken from the submission from The Brilliant Club and King's College London to the Department of Education Select Committee's Enquiry into the education of GRT communities which can be found here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/written-evidence/43179/pdf/>

5.6 CIAO GRT outreach at the University of Sussex

The University of Sussex has developed what they describe as the Collaborative, Intersectional, Ambitious and Ongoing (CIAO) approach to underpin their outreach work with the GRT community. The CIAO approach is described as not a 'how to' for designing outreach, but rather a series of questions to orientate practice. The CIAO approach is shown in Diagram 2 below taken from the GRT into HE initiative housed at the University of Sussex.²¹ The GRT into HE initiative brings together academics, activists and education professionals in Sussex.

²¹ For more information go to <https://www.grtinhe.com/ciao>

In addition to the model, the website outlines additional recommendations concerning outreach to GRT communities. They include developing belief about what is possible as opposed to raising aspirations and the central role of advocacy organisations in what they describe as '*mediating knowledge and perceptions of education within GRT communities and nurturing the confidence of GRT young people to believe in their educational potential and feel pride in their own identity.*'

Diagram 2 The CIAO Model 20



6

Access to HE and the regional challenge: looking at London

Given that the focus of the grant-making work of The Portal Trust is in London, the first *More than luck...* report included a specific focus on the capital. It showed that while London is leading the way where access to HE is concerned nationally, there is less evidence that it leads the way in terms of access for GRT learners.

Almost half of the pupils eligible for Free School Meals in Inner London progressed to HE by age 19 in 2019/20, compared to fewer than a fifth in the East Midlands, East of England, South East and South West.²²

This is a huge gap – illustrating how different London is from the rest of the country where many aspects of progression to higher education are concerned. It is also by a great distance more ethnically diverse. The research was undertaken by AccessHE, the regional network for widening higher education access in London, which in 2018 showed that over 60% of learners entering HE in London came from non-white backgrounds and this is forecast to rise to over 70% by 2030.²³ However, diversity and leadership where access to HE for those from non-white ethnic groups and those from lower socio-economic groups is concerned are harder to discern where GRT communities are concerned. The data on who progresses to HE for those from GRT communities is not available publicly by individual HE providers, so it may well be the case that London HE providers have greater numbers of GRT students entering. As the first report also showed, the number of those from GRT communities residing in London is relatively high. But the residence of GRT communities by area is also hard to establish accurately. Census data from 2011 shows that London has the second-highest number of GRT community residents within it, next to the South East which has the most.

22 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education-2021>

23 Atherton, G & Mazhari, T (2018) *Preparing for hyper-diversity: London's student population in 2030*, London: London Higher

Diagram 3

GRT community population estimates in selected London local authority areas



However, as Diagram 3 shows, the census may greatly underestimate the numbers of those from GRT communities in London.

Students are far more likely to go to HE in the area in which they live than travel out of that area and there is a relatively high concentration of providers in London. It would be reasonable to assume therefore that students from GRT communities are present in London HE providers.

However, with the notable exception of King's College London, which stands as a national beacon of commitment and leading practice, there is no available evidence of widespread commitment or activity in London concerning access and participation for GRT communities. It is notable that only one London based HE provider from the over 40 that exist has, at this point anyway, signed the GRTSB in Higher Education Pledge. Nor is there clear evidence of actions taken by the organisation at a London wide collaborative level. As is discussed below, there has been no move to act upon the recommendation for the Mayor of London to establish a GRT education task force outlined in the first *More than luck...* report.

The Greater London Authority does not have responsibilities related to schooling, further or higher education. It does have responsibility however, for the adult education budget for the capital.²⁴

24 Greater London Authority (2022) *Skills Roadmap for London* – https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/skills_roadmap_for_london.pdf

London Gypsies and Travellers have been active in advocating for greater engagement from City Hall. In 2021 in the run-up to the Mayoral elections, they released the London Gypsy and Traveller Forum Manifesto which, while comprehensive, did not mention education.²⁵ Going forward, there may be potential for advocacy groups to look more directly at the adult education budget for London. This may assist in strengthening a route into HE for older learners from GRT communities. It would also build on work that the London Gypsy and Traveller Forum are doing via its Bright Futures programme²⁶ to broaden the outlook of GRT young people and support them to make informed decisions in their life choices. The programme also appears an opportunity for HE providers in London to engage with young people via their outreach work.

25 Causer, A. (2021) *Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in London demand City Hall voice* – SW Londoner 3rd June 2021 – <https://www.swlondoner.co.uk/news/03062021-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities-in-london-demand-city-hall-voice>

26 <http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/work/opportunities-for-young-people/>

7

Extending access and participation in HE from GRT communities: the key challenges

As the evidence above suggests, progress in terms of supporting GTRSB communities to progress to and succeed in HE has been very limited since the publication of the first *More than luck...* report. The development of the GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge represents the greatest collective progress, but it is also encouraging to see some individual HE providers and Uni-Connect partnerships moving their work, and that of the sector, forward. However, progress in levels of participation in HE amongst those in the GRT communities remains stagnant, further evidence of the extent of prejudice that GRT communities face has emerged and commitment from policymakers has been minimal. The Office for Students has done nothing more than produce a topic briefing on access and participation for those from GRT communities.

They have, however, invested £8m in partnership with Research England in a suite of university-led projects to improve access and participation for black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in the postgraduate research study. Funding can be found for particular projects.

This new funding is timely and much needed. Given that, as suggested in the recommendations below, progress in GRT access and participation could be moved forward for much less than this, it is hoped that a similar priority can be placed on the specific needs of those from GRT communities.

At the same time, the OfS has done nothing to address the structural problems inherent in APPs which mitigate against HE providers prioritising work with GRT communities, nor has it maximised the potential of collaborative outreach work to support access to HE for GRT learners. Uni-Connect remains the vehicle by which the OfS delivers collaborative outreach. Its funding was reduced from £60m to £40m in 2021–22 and funding for future years is still to be confirmed. It remains focused on reducing the gaps in access in HE between different geographical areas with an additional focus now on adult learners. There is no recognition of the potential for targeting specific groups of learners, nor any support offered in terms of facilitating collaboration between partnerships to do so.

8

Recommendations

Given the extremely limited progress that has been made since the original *More than luck...* report where access and participation in HE for those from GRT communities is concerned, the need to take forward the recommendations from this report, suitably updated, remains essential. The first five recommendations are taken from the first report and then updated. An additional three recommendations are included.

Recommendation 1

Ensure that GTSRB communities feature in the government's widening access re-focus

The Minister for Higher Education in November 2021 announced a refocusing of the entire access and participation regime to ensure that improvements in access for disadvantaged people also result in improvements in attainment and outcomes. This included a rewriting of the national targets on access and participation and a slimming down of these plans. It is essential that in doing this, the government addresses the in-built structural problem with the current regime that discriminates against work with GTSRB communities.

There remain strong arguments for the data-led outcomes approach the OfS is taking to improving access and participation in HE, but little has been done since 2020 to address the problem of how, in a data-driven regime, to include the learners of whom the numbers in pre-HE level and HE level education are small/hard to ascertain. It cannot be acceptable that no universities have targets related to GTSRB communities in this APP.

We would suggest that if the present data-led plan structure remains the same in the re-focusing, then as recommended in the 2019 report, a statement outlining how providers are integrating work with GRT communities into their strategic commitments to access and participation must be included in their annual progress updates to the OfS.

Recommendation 2

Establish and fund a national GTRSB HE access and participation initiative

Changes to APP alone will not be enough to increase the numbers of GTRSB learners progressing to HE. While the policy challenges outlined above are essential to provide the environment in which access to HE for GRT communities can be increased, this will not on its own lead to change. The GTRSB pledge described above is a crucial sector-led response to this challenge but it needs to be augmented by a funded national initiative in this area from the OfS. Investment of around £100,000 via the OfS challenge scheme would support an ongoing programme of work to share practice, especially in outreach between HE providers and community organisations, improve data collection and reform HE structures.

At the time of writing, funding for the national Uni-Connect programme is not confirmed beyond 2021–22. The regional, collaborative approach inherent in uni-connect remains essential to driving forward access to higher education and is essential to working with GTRSB communities. The number of young people in such communities and their nature implies that collaboration is the only way to efficiently make progress. If the Office for Students continues to fund Uni-Connect then they must also go

further than just providing a topic briefing on working with GTRSB communities. They should work with other relevant organisations working at a national level, such as the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) which is the membership body for widening access with over 100 universities as members, to support Uni-Connect partnerships to develop collaborative initiatives.

Recommendation 4

Integrate focus on GRT community learners into national strategies to tackle Gypsy, Roma and Traveller educational and broader societal inequalities

In June 2019, the government announced that they are *'launching an ambitious programme of work, to be undertaken across government, which will aim to tackle the serious disparities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.'*²⁷ As this programme develops, it is important that the issue of inequalities in access to HE features in it and links are made with any activities that are led by the HE sector in this area. As the evidence outlined in this report shows, inequalities in HE participation are a product of intersections between societal inequalities affecting GRT communities.

If the Department of Education is to build on its work exploring the feasibility of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Education Areas described above, then it should include linkages with HE providers in this work. Given that one of the new priorities for HE providers in their outreach work as part of the re-focusing described above is to raise the attainment of those in schools this would seem a very appropriate linkage to make.

27 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) Press release *New national strategy to tackle Gypsy, Roma and Traveller inequalities* 6th June 2019 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-strategy-to-tackle-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-inequalities>

Recommendation 5

Mayor of London to establish a GRT education task force

The Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, secured his second term in office since the first report was published and London has continued to excel in terms of the socio-economic and ethnic diversity of those who progress to HE. However, there has been no visible progress at the London level amongst the key city-wide stakeholders where access to HE for GRT communities is concerned. Even though the Mayor does not have responsibility for schools, colleges or HE, the GLA is still in the ideal position to convene the kind of cross-sector dialogue on GRT education which is urgently needed in the capital. London is the ideal place to drive forward education attainment and progression for those from GRT communities. The creation of a task force bringing together schools, colleges, universities, education charities such as The Portal Trust and representatives of GRT communities could act as a national example of best practice and as real evidence of the commitment of the Mayor's Office to both supporting GRT communities and social mobility.

Recommendation 6

Research to establish HE provider GRTSB access and participation work

As is clear from the description of HE provider-led activities outlined in the evidence provided to the Department of Education Select Committee Enquiry and the work of the GRTSB pledge, there is more work being undertaken in this field than when the first *More than luck...* report was published.

However, more detailed information on the nature and extent of the work that HE providers are doing is not available at present. A more systematic study of what is being done, led by the Office for Students to maximise the engagement of the HE sector in providing relevant information, would be relatively straightforward to deliver.

Recommendation 7 **Form a GRTSB Students Commission**

In 2019 the Office for Students established a Disabled Students Commission. It is an independent and strategic group that advises, informs and influences higher education providers to improve support for disabled students. The Commission identifies and promotes approaches which work well for disabled students. The Commission has been active in developing awareness regarding access and participation in HE for disabled students, producing several reports covering issues including apprenticeships; the impact of COVID-19 and post-graduate study. Such a commission, led by a senior figure from the HE sector, could have a major impact on awareness of GRT students' progression into and through HE and provide a coherent, strategic voice to help ensure that policy is developed with input from a GRT perspective.

Recommendation 8

Give universities a Levelling Up duty and include work with GTRSB communities in it

The government's White Paper on levelling up was released in February 2022. Specific actions relevant to GTRSB communities were largely absent from the white paper and work to widen access to higher education was not discussed in great detail.

To achieve its levelling up goals, as the Minister for Levelling Up acknowledges,²⁸ the government needs to give higher education an enhanced role in a collaborative, community-driven approach that connects to broader policy agendas. This implies specific policies to ensure that higher education providers engage with the broad spectrum of groups who constitute their local populations. This includes the GTRSB communities. We would recommend that universities set a goal concerning levelling up to outline how they are engaging with, and supporting, all of the groups that constitute their local populations and that GTRSB communities are specified as one of these groups.

28 Williams, T. (2022) Gove: levelling up could mean new universities for UK regions, Times Higher Education, March 28th 2022, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/gove-levelling-could-mean-new-universities-uk-regions>

Appendix 1

HE providers for whom GRT communities feature in their Access and Participation Plans – results from the 2019 NEON Survey

HE Provider	Access	Attainment	Retention	Progression	Other
Bath Spa University	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Brunel University	✓	✓			
Buckinghamshire New University			✓		
King's College London	✓				
University of Surrey	✓				
Gloucester College				✓	
City College Norwich					✓
University of Derby					✓
Essex					✓
Future Works					✓
HCA					✓
University of Hull					✓
University of Lancaster					✓
Leeds Trinity University	✓				✓
Newcastle upon Tyne					✓
University of Nottingham					✓
Nottingham College					✓
University of Central Lancashire					✓
University of Liverpool					✓
University of St Marks & John					✓
University of Suffolk					✓
University of York					✓
Anglian Ruskin University					✓

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