

**The underrepresentation
of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
pupils in higher education**

*A report on barriers from early
years to secondary and beyond*

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This report was written by the education and youth development ‘think and action tank’ LKMco. LKMco is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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Executive summary

This report explores why Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are underrepresented in higher education (HE), including the barriers that inhibit their success throughout compulsory education and the specific factors which reduce their participation HE.

The report aims to provide educators and practitioners with a thorough review of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers' underrepresentation in HE, focusing primarily on existing barriers while beginning to consider next steps and solutions for addressing these issues. The report draws together findings from: existing literature; a roundtable of practitioners, academics and members of Gypsy and Traveller communities; in depth interviews with practitioners and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and graduates; as well as pupil focus groups with Roma pupils, Gypsy pupils and Irish Traveller pupils.

The report considers six main questions:

1 How are 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' groups defined?

In the UK the term 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' is a collective term for a number of diverse groups, primarily including: British Romany Gypsies; Travellers of Irish Heritage; Scottish Travellers; European Roma; and, those for whom travelling is an occupational choice including Bargees, Boat Dwellers, Showmen, Circus people and New Travellers. Inclusion in these groups depends not only on ethnicity and heritage but on self-identification and these terms do not exclude those who no longer live a nomadic lifestyle.

However, grouping these diverse subgroups under a broad term is potentially problematic. Our research highlighted three main issues with this type of 'hard edged' categorisation including:

- the risk of stereotyping individuals
- grouping dissimilar or diverse groups in a broad category or single subgroup
- the risk of overlooking complexity and intersectionality due to an over emphasis on ethnicity

We recognise these difficulties and support efforts to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of these groups. However, we use the term 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' throughout the report for consistency with previous research and literature.

2 What are the current demographics of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups?

The 2011 census included a 'Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller' category for the first time. Although only 58,000 people in England and Wales self-ascribed under this term, this count is considered an underestimate and research suggests there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. Only a third live in caravans and continue a traditionally nomadic lifestyle. Additionally, studies estimate that there are around 200,000 Roma in the UK. School census data suggests there are 4,000 Travellers of Irish Heritage and 16,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils in UK primary schools, and 2,000 Irish Travellers and 12,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils in secondary schools. However, these figures are also likely to be a considerable underestimate as many families are reluctant to ascribe their ethnicity due to fear of discrimination.

3 How do Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people perform in compulsory education?

School data groups Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children under ‘Traveller of an Irish Heritage’ or ‘Gypsy/Roma’. Both these groups attain and progress significantly below the national average throughout compulsory education. Fewer than 10% of Gypsy/Roma pupils and fewer than 20% of Irish Traveller pupils achieve 5 GCSEs graded A* - C, compared to approximately 60% of all pupils nationally. This means that many do not leave school with the requisite qualifications for entering HE. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils also have the lowest attendance of all groups and the highest exclusion rates. However, this data must be treated with caution as the characteristics and circumstances of individuals who are willing and able to ascribe their Gypsy, Roma or Traveller identity may not be representative of this population as a whole.

4 How severe is the underrepresentation of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in HE?

UCAS data provides categories for Gypsies and Traveller but does not provide a discrete category for Roma. All groups are significantly underrepresented in HE: 3 to 4% of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers aged 18-30 accessed HE in 2014, whereas 43% of 18-30 year olds in the national population did so (Danvers, 2015). However, both the overall Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population size and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student population size are likely to be underestimates, making it difficult to accurately determine the extent of this underrepresentation.

5 What are the barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ access to all levels of education?

Barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ achievement in compulsory education, in turn, reduce their access to HE as their likelihood of gaining the requisite grades at GCSE and A level needed to access HE is diminished. Furthermore, the barriers which limit their success in school are likely to continue and possibly intensify in relation to HE. Therefore, we explore the following barriers faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in school and consider how they impact access to HE.

- Cultural barriers including: mobility; language and system knowledge; norms, aspirations and expectations; and, cultural identity
- Material barriers including: poverty; inadequate housing and homelessness; and, access to healthcare and special educational needs support
- Prejudice and discrimination including: discriminatory attitudes and media prejudice; schools’ response to discrimination; self-exclusion from mainstream education as a result of discrimination; and, discrimination in HE.

6 What are the specific barriers to accessing HE faced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers?

There are additional barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ HE progression, beyond those that exist at school level, which specifically limit or disincentivise participation in HE, even where pupils complete compulsory schooling and achieve the necessary grades and qualifications. There is limited research on these barriers, perhaps due to the scale of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller underrepresentation in HE. However, this report draws on the limited literature, supplemented by our own research, and suggests that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face the following five barriers to HE access:

- A lack of policy attention and supportive initiatives
- Issues of identity and inclusion
- The relevance of HE curricula to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture
- Pupils’ perceptions of HE
- Financial issues and attitudes to debt

Introduction

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and young people face significant barriers throughout their education, which results in them being severely underrepresented in HE. Perhaps because there is still an urgent need to address the issues faced by these groups in primary and secondary education, there is limited existing research on Gypsies', Roma and Travellers' progression to university. However, to achieve educational equality for these groups they must be given the same choice and opportunity as their peers from other backgrounds. The first step towards increasing equality in HE is to investigate how issues in compulsory education impact on progression to HE to understand and address specific barriers which reduce GRT pupils' participation in HE.

In order to work toward an effective strategy for widening participation of this group, we present a summary of the current landscape and a review of the barriers to HE faced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. We draw on existing literature and our own research with academics, practitioners, members of the GRT communities and pupils to explore:

- The definition of 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' and the various sub-groups described by this collective term
- How these groups are distributed in the national and pupil population
- Their current progress and attainment throughout primary and secondary education
- The degree to which they are underrepresented in HE
- The challenges and barriers they face in compulsory education which may impact on their participation in HE
- The specific barriers they face in entering HE.

In addition to increasing 'access' to HE, the Widening Participation agenda also focuses on ensuring that pupils have fulfilling experiences of HE once they have arrived. With so few GRT pupils entering HE, our report focuses on the issue of access, whilst acknowledging that GRT experiences of HE should be a priority for future research.

Throughout the report, we point towards potential responses to the challenges and these recommendations are summarised in a final conclusion.

Methodology

This report brings together findings from four strands of research: a literature review; a roundtable of academics, practitioners and GRT community members; in depth interviews with practitioners and community members; and case studies with GRT pupils in two schools. This approach allowed us to foreground the lived experiences of individuals from GRT backgrounds, including parents and current school, college and university students, whilst drawing on the insights of those who have studied and worked with the communities.

Each strand of the research set out to respond to the 6 research questions which structure this report:

- 1 How are GRT groups defined?
- 2 What are the current demographics of GRT groups in the UK?
- 3 How well do GRT pupils do in primary and secondary education?
- 4 What barriers do GRT pupils face during primary and secondary education?
- 5 How do these barriers impact on the likelihood that GRT pupils will progress to HE?
- 6 What specific barriers to HE access do GRT young people face?

Referencing these questions in each strand of the research – the literature review, roundtable, interviews and case studies – enabled us to triangulate different perspectives. In many areas overlapping findings emerged from the different elements of the research; in others, tensions and disagreements arose.

Literature review

This study began with a literature review examining the existing evidence on the barriers that GRT pupils face in accessing HE. The review brings together findings from over 50 items of international literature, primarily published within the last 15 years. An initial search of an academic database, and web searches for public reports, were supplemented by additional items of literature when they were revealed by the people we spoke to during the course of our fieldwork, or by references to other relevant literature which was cited. Due to the limited quantity of research in this area, particularly in relation to participation in HE, in places we have included older literature.

The literature review was conducted prior to the other strands of the research. Structuring the research in this way allowed us to target the roundtable, interviews and case studies at filling ‘gaps’ in the existing research base, as well as interrogating the validity of its claims.

Roundtable

LKMco convened a roundtable discussion, on 3rd May 2017, which was hosted by King’s College London. The roundtable included sixteen academics and practitioners including three who were from Gypsy or Traveller backgrounds themselves. Participants were invited to discuss and debate their perspectives on the underrepresentation of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in HE. Each participant was sent a copy of the literature review in advance, and the discussion itself was focused on each of the six research questions outlined above. The roundtable was chaired by Ellie Mulcahy, Research Associate at LKMco and Loic Menzies, Director of LKMco, and was attended by the following participants:

- Abigail Angus, Education and Advocacy Officer, The Traveller Movement
- Dr Brian Belton, Senior Lecturer and Director of International Education and Training at YMCA

- George Williams College, researcher, academic, author and English Gypsy
- Anne-Marie Canning, Director of Widening Participation, King's College London
- Dr Emily Danvers, Lecturer in Education, University of Sussex
- Chris Derrington, Director of the Equalities Award, researcher and author
- Steve Ellison, Executive head at Cottenham Village College
- Dr Margaret Greenfields, Professor of Social Policy and Community Engagement, Buckinghamshire New University
- Anne-Marie Henderson, Widening Participation Officer, King's College London
- Dr Pauline Lane, Reader, Anglia Ruskin University
- Dr Ken Lee, Researcher and author, Romanichal
- Dr Martin Myers, Lecturer, University of Portsmouth
- Mark Penfold, Senior teacher and EAL lead at Babington Community College and a member of the EU working group on promoting citizenship and social inclusion through education
- Kathleen Walsh, Former Trustee of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain
- Tom Weaver, Widening Participation Officer, King's College London
- Margaret Wood, teacher, member and trustee of ACERT (Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers)
- An English Romany Gypsy parent

An additional participant decided to withdraw from the research and they have not been included in our findings.

Interviews

Where possible, individuals invited to the roundtable who expressed an interest in supporting the research but were not able to attend took part in a phone interview following the event. Throughout the research numerous individuals contacted us to express an interest in contributing to the research. They were then invited to participate in a phone or face to face semi-structured interview. These interviewees included individuals from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background, academics and practitioners:

- Caroline Wynn, parent and business owner from a Showman background
- Lisa Galloway, Programme Leader at Blackpool University Centre and doctorate researcher who has Irish Traveller heritage.
- Ondrej, a Roma college student
- A law graduate of a top UK university from an English Romany Gypsy heritage

The interviews were structured around the six research questions and where new themes relating to barriers to HE emerged these were explored in detail. Interviewees were also asked if they had any recommendations for addressing these barriers. The interviews were recorded, partially transcribed and coded.

School case studies and pupil focus groups

In order to ensure that we captured the views of GRT pupils who will be making decisions about HE in the near future, we visited two schools and conducted focus groups with eighteen pupils.

In the first school, the twelve pupils interviewed were Roma and most were from Slovakia or the Czech Republic, though many had arrived in the UK early in their childhoods. The pupils we spoke to were aged between 13 and 16. These Roma pupils attended a school with a high proportion of Roma pupils as well as pupils from over 80 different nationalities.

In the second school, four pupils interviewed were Gypsies aged between 12 and 16, and two were Travellers of Irish heritage, aged between 12 and 14. The school is located close to one Gypsy site and

one Irish Traveller site. Six pupils at the school are Gypsies and three are Travellers of Irish Heritage, though the numbers on the school roll have been much higher in the past.

The school case studies were structured around three activities:

- A short focus group exploring pupils' future education and career plans. The focus group questions were semi-structured and designed to consider pupils' future plans, an exploration of how they had formed these plans and how teachers and parents supported them with their future plans.
- A group photo elicitation activity designed to explore pupils' responses to different aspects of HE from the application process to accommodation, learning environments, student life and graduation. Photos depicted different universities including modern buildings, lecture theatres and libraries as well as traditional, old university buildings and classrooms.
- An individual 'journey map' activity in which pupils were asked to write and draw representations of their present life and their future plans and the steps needed to achieve their goals.¹ Pupils were encouraged to represent their thoughts in any way they felt comfortable with but were specifically asked to think about:
 - Their current life, inside and outside school
 - Their future plans, including their 'ideal future'
 - What they needed to do to progress from their present life to their future
 - The likelihood that they would achieve their future plans and aspirations

We worked with senior school staff to identify groups of pupils who would be happy to take part. All pupils gave informed, written consent to take part in the research.

¹ The Gypsy pupils and Irish Traveller pupils took part in this element of the case study. The Roma pupils did not due to time constraints in their focus groups.

Defining ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’

1.1 Subgroups

The term ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ is a collective name for a range of diverse ethnic groups and is the term most commonly used in the UK today. Classifying an individual within this group depends not only on their ethnicity, heritage and way of life but on their self-identification as a member of a particular group and their preference to be defined by certain terms.

Current subgroups in the UK can be broadly categorised as ‘ethnic travellers’ and ‘cultural travellers’. ‘Ethnic travellers’ include ‘Romany Gypsies’, most of whom originated in India and either settled in the UK up to 500 years ago or migrated here more recently from Europe, and ‘Travellers’ of Irish and Scottish descent.

‘Cultural travellers’ include those who became travellers through occupational choices. These groups also include those who have ceased to live a nomadic lifestyle. Drawing together the range of definitions and categories used within the literature, a possible typology of the main subgroups within the GRT collective is illustrated in Table 1.

Though distinct from one another these groups share a number of characteristics both in terms of culture and lifestyle, and the significant disadvantages they face within the education system and society more broadly. Common cultural factors include:

- The importance of family and community
- A historically nomadic lifestyle (although this only applies to around one third of Gypsy, and Traveller families today. Often, although Roma people may migrate, they do not adopt a nomadic lifestyle through choice)
- An oral tradition
- A historic preference for self-employment (Ryder and Greenfields, 2012)

GRT groups arguably constitute the most marginalised ethnic group in today’s society, sharing multiple disadvantages including:

- The poorest health outcomes in the UK
- Lower than average life expectancy
- Poor educational attainment and low levels of qualification
- Considerable prejudice, racism and discrimination

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Table 1

Ethnic Travellers	'Romany Gypsies'	English or Welsh 'Romany' Gypsies (or Welsh Kale)	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 (see Okley, 1997). Many speak one of seven distinct languages, primarily Anglo-Romanes and Romani, as well as English.
		European Roma	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.
	'Travellers'	Irish Travellers	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'.
		Scottish Gypsy Travellers	This subgroup consists of further subgroups and was only recently recognised as a separate ethnic group. They may also refer to themselves as 'Nachins' and 'Nawkins'.
Cultural Travellers	Occupational Travellers	Showmen: fairground and circus people	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.
		Bargees and boat dwellers	Those who live on boats, primarily narrowboats, on canals and waterways. Historically bargees and boat dwellers travelled for employment.
	New Travellers		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'.

(Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Save the Children, 2006; Bhopal and Myers, 2008; Themelis and Foster, 2013)

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1.2 Limitations of categorisation

Although a typology of the numerous subgroups that make up Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is a useful basis upon which to appreciate the commonalities of heritage and the distinctions between the subgroups, it is also problematic to make “hard edged and simplistic categorisations” (Brian Belton, roundtable participant) of multiple, complex ethnicities, identities and communities. These issues will be referred to throughout the report but three main issues were highlighted in our research, namely:

- the risk of stereotyping individuals through a crude categorisation of complex communities
- grouping dissimilar groups under a single term to which many do not ascribe themselves
- an over emphasis on ethnicity or heritage which may overlook intersectionality

i. Avoiding stereotypes

Firstly, despite discussing these groups together and drawing out commonalities, it is important to avoid the assumption that all individuals encompassed by the term GRT experience the culture or the disadvantage outlined above. The typology we present in Table 1 captures some variation within groups, while allowing us to identify some of the key features of GRT pupils' underrepresentation in HE. We do so without implying that lived experiences, barriers and outcomes are uniform for all of the individuals within these groups, and that, as a result, the same Widening Participation strategies will necessarily work for every individual.

ii. Inappropriate grouping

Secondly, many academics, practitioners and individuals from GRT communities reject combining the subgroups mentioned in table 1 under any single title. For example, while showmen and fairground people are often included under the term ‘Gypsies, Roma and Travellers’, Caroline Wynn (interviewee), a parent and business owner from a Showman family, does not consider herself to be Gypsy, Roma or Traveller as for her, this collective term refers to ethnic groups rather groups of individuals with similar lived circumstances, such as those who travel for an occupation. This can lead to groups who do not use the collective term becoming further marginalised. The grouping of Roma and Gypsy is particularly problematic. Although Romany Gypsies and European Roma may share ancestry, their recent history and their cultures are distinct. Lisa Galloway explained that the grouping of Roma with Gypsy under an overarching title is unhelpful:

“Personally, I think it's a marriage of convenience for people that just want to put them away in one group, because they have diverse cultural identities and they are so, so different but they have just been lumped together so that's lost.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Grouping ‘Roma’ with ‘Gypsy’ can cause further challenges where Roma seek to distance themselves from the term ‘Gypsy’, which is used in a derogatory manner in Eastern Europe, and therefore do not ascribe their ethnicity accurately if ‘Roma’ is grouped with ‘Gypsy’.

The uneasy grouping of these ethnicities and identities is highlighted by the fact that few academics seek to work with or study all of these groups at once. The majority work with either: Gypsies of a particular

heritage; Irish Travellers; or, European Roma, and rarely seek to generalise conclusions across these groups, or even within these groups, as Lisa Galloway explained:

“It’s important that we only talk about the people we are working with and we are not making very bold statements about all GRT families. Families are diverse within themselves and certainly the three families I have worked with lately are completely different, I can’t apply a ‘one-size-fits-all’ which can make research very difficult because you cannot come to the kind of conclusion you might want to come to.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

iii. Intersectionality

Our roundtable discussion highlighted that continuously emphasising ethnicity or heritage when working with GRT communities can result in a failure to recognise ‘intersecting social factors’ which may have more impact on educational outcomes and engagement than ethnic background alone. Some organisations are already addressing this issue and researchers such as Crenshaw (1989; 1991) have written extensively on how different aspects of our identity become primary in different situations or stages of life and therefore all aspects of identity and other social factors must be considered. Pauline Lane explained that organisations which recognise a wide variety of factors such as gender, sexuality and socio-economic status as well as ethnicity, are more successful in supporting marginalised groups.

“I think there is learning from other organisations. Instead of taking primacy of ethnicity they are taking other intersecting social factors into account on admission. For instance, they are looking at eligibility to FSM and demographics or areas pupils come from... it’s about taking into account other factors, poverty being one of the key ones...None of us are primacy of ethnicity, I’m not just a woman, I’m not just a white woman, and at different points in our lives different identities come forward... At one point you may cloud some aspect of your identity but in another context you might subsume that to something else or bring that part forward.”

Dr Pauline Lane, Reader

However, although, like all people, GRT individuals have complex identities with numerous factors influencing their decisions and experiences, they do not have the same experience as others when they choose to reveal their ethnicity or heritage and therefore they are often unable to disclose this as freely, as Kathleen Walsh explained:

“We’ve all got multiple identities that we choose to reveal, that are important in different situations. But I think, it’s not a level playing field, I can choose when I want to have one identity to the fore but I can choose at any time to reveal any of them without too much worry that I’m going to be discriminated against and that’s not necessarily the same for everyone. The playing field is not even.”

Kathleen Walsh, Trustee of the Irish Chaplaincy

These issues and the limitations of broad categorisations can lead to a lack of understanding from mainstream communities working with GRT communities as well as considerable under-ascrption and a resistance to engage with organisations or research that seeks to categorise these varied groups as one. Nevertheless, this research and the wider literature recognise that many GRT people do experience hardship and disadvantage in a similar manner and it is imperative that this is addressed if society is to reject the marginalisation of a minority. Therefore, throughout this report, we will refer to all groups described in table 1 under the term ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ (GRT), while recognising variation between each group and discussing each separately at times.

1.3 Demographics

1.3.1 The national population

In 2011, for the first time, the UK census included ‘Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller’ (in England and Wales) and ‘Gypsy/Traveller’ (in Scotland) as ethnic categories. Approximately 58,000 people in England and Wales self-identified as ‘Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller’ forming the smallest ethnic group in the country at 0.1% of the population. However, this is considered to be a significant underestimate of the true size of the Gypsy and Traveller population, which is thought to be between 250,000 to 300,000 (Brown, Scullion and Martin, 2013). This census underestimate is due to three main factors:

- The reluctance to publicly identify as a Gypsy or Traveller due to fear of racist prejudice or discrimination
- Low literacy rates among Gypsies and Travellers affecting their ability to complete the census form
- The failure to distribute the census form effectively to those in insecure or mobile housing.
- It is notable that the census did not include ‘Roma’ as a response category, advising that people identifying as ‘Roma’ should define themselves as ‘White Other’. Grouping Roma people in ‘White Other’ in this way further contributes to the census’ underestimation of the size of the GRT population as a whole.
- A 2013 study estimated there are around 200,000 Roma in the UK (Brown, Martin and Scullion, 2013). Therefore, a conservative estimate of all GRT groups amounts to a population of approximately half a million.
- The census identified that Gypsy and Traveller households have a distinct age profile: 45% of these households have dependent children (higher than the national average) and the median age of Gypsies and Travellers counted was 26 (lower than the national average). Therefore, school age children form a higher proportion of the GRT population than they do the remainder of the British population and this is likely to continue to be the case.
- Living in houses or stable accommodation does not exclude people from identifying as GRT. Estimates, based on a 2010 caravan count, consider one third (100,000) of Gypsies and Travellers to be living on sites² or the roadside in caravans and tents (Themelis and Foster, 2013) and therefore, about two thirds (approximately 200,000) to be living in houses. Save the Children (2006) found that a third of those living in caravans had no legal place to stop. The government estimates that around a quarter of the total UK GRT population is technically ‘homeless’ as they have ‘no authorised place to live’ (Themelis and Foster, 2013, p.6).

1.3.2 The school population

The School Census categorises GRT pupils differently to the national census, and this poses specific challenges. When reporting pupils’ ethnicity, schools are presented with two possible categories for GRT pupils: ‘Traveller of an Irish Heritage’ and ‘Gypsy/Roma’. The inclusion of ‘Roma’ as separate from ‘White Other’ allows a fuller picture of GRT pupil performance, but grouping ‘Gypsy’ with ‘Roma’ means that data on European Roma children, who are likely to speak English as an additional language, is combined with data on British Gypsies who do not face this additional disadvantage. Disaggregating this data would allow a more detailed picture of these pupils’ attainment and the different barriers affecting their school performance.

School census statistics indicate that there are just over 4,000 Irish Traveller pupils and just over 16,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils in UK primary schools. In secondary schools, there are approximately 2,000 Irish Traveller pupils and 12,000 Gypsy/Roma pupils (DfE, 2016) (see Table 2). These figures are likely to

2 Sites may be council owned, privately owned or unauthorised. Council sites will be either ‘residential’: providing pitches for rent on a permanent/long term basis or ‘transit’: providing short term pitches for families to rent during their travels. Unauthorised sites are usually on land owned by Gypsies and Travellers that does not have planning permission for us as a residential or transit site.

underestimate the number of GRT pupils in the school population because families may not be willing to reveal their ethnic background. Given that approximately 60% of European Roma populations are below 18 years old, a conservative estimate of 200,000 Roma in the national population (Brown, Martin and Scullion, 2013) suggests that there may in fact be around 124,000 Roma of compulsory school age in the UK (Penfold, 2015), not including other Gypsy and Traveller groups (see Table 2). Meanwhile, a 2003 estimate, placed the number of primary aged Traveller children not enrolled in any school at around 12,000 (Ofsted, 2003). The severe underestimation of the number of GRT young people in the UK serves to underestimate the scale of their underrepresentation in HE.

Source	School Phase	Subgroup	Number
School Census Statistics	Primary School	Gypsy/Roma	16,000
		Traveller of Irish Heritage	4,000
	Secondary School	Gypsy/Roma	12,000
		Traveller of Irish Heritage	2,000
Brown, Martin and Scullion (2013) and Penfold (2015)	All phases	Roma	124,000

In order to widen participation, it is crucial that individuals who are underrepresented and face barriers to accessing HE can be identified. A lack of accurate, detailed data is the first barrier to addressing this issue, as Mark Penfold explained:

“In January 2015, there were 25,000 pupils in the DfE database ascribed as GRT and it was impossible to know out of those who was from new migrant communities, even so the figure of 25,000 is not true, the real figure is closer to 200,000. So, if you're going to widen participation in universities how are you going to do it if you cannot identify them?”

Mark Penfold, teacher and researcher

Lisa Galloway highlighted that in order to encourage GRT students to ascribe their ethnicity on official forms, staff in schools and HE institutions must build relationships with GRT communities and have conversations about ethnicity prior to asking families or pupils to ascribe as GRT.

“We are forging very strong relationships with those communities and the major factor for ascription for us is making relationships and opening up conversations before asking them to ascribe.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Recommendations: Encouraging ascription

It is difficult to assess the scale of GRT under representation in HE due to a paucity of accurate data on the number of GRT pupils in schools, HE institutions and the population. This may hamper attempts to address underrepresentation. The primary reasons that data is inaccurate are:

- Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are unwilling or unable to ascribe their ethnicity due to fear of discrimination, poor distribution of census forms among mobile groups and low literacy rates
- Often, categories on official forms group different ethnicities inappropriately or do not provide options for groups such as 'Roma' to be disaggregated from wider, sometimes inaccurate, categories such as 'white other'

Therefore, official data must allow GRT groups a range of appropriate options, as illustrated in table 1, to ascribe their specific identity. Additionally, schools and education institutions, must build links and relationships with these groups, have open conversations about ascription and reassure parents and pupils. This should be done in advance of asking individuals to ascribe their ethnicity.

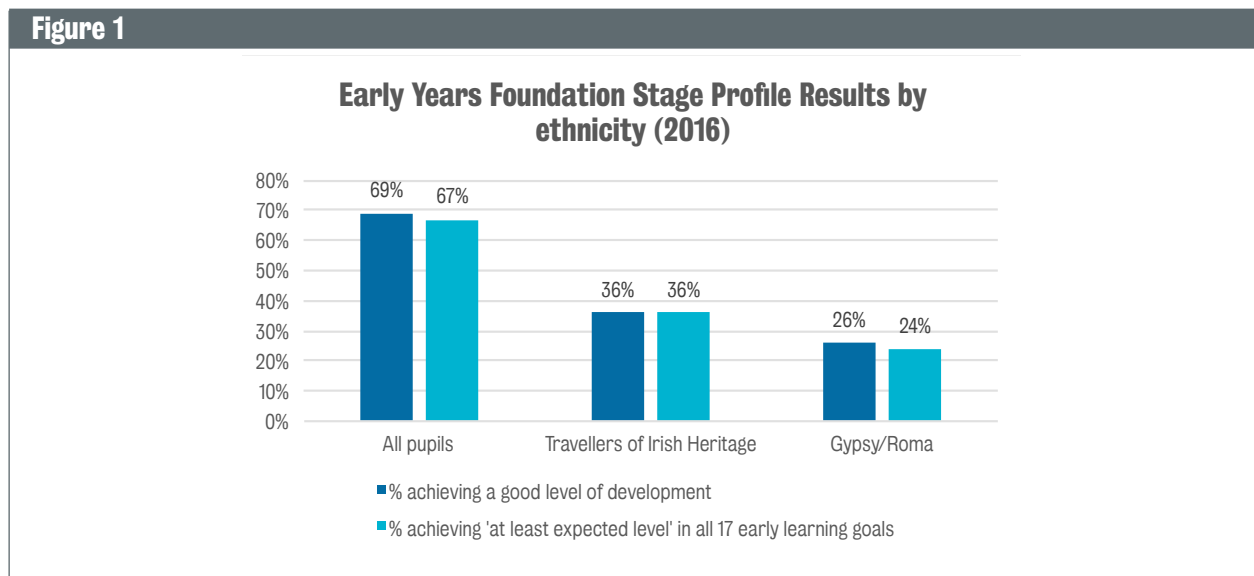
Educational attainment and progress

Solid foundations in the early years, primary and secondary school are crucial in order for pupils to progress to further and higher education. GRT children are the lowest performing groups in primary and secondary education in the UK on all measures of attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance. This data must be treated with caution, many GRT pupils are not ascribed as such and are therefore not included and those that are ascribed may not be representative of the whole GRT population. Nevertheless, the available data does suggest that many GRT pupils do not attain well at school and this underperformance should be address.

2.1 Attainment and progress in the Early Years

- In the early years, only 36% of Irish Traveller pupils and 26% of Gypsy/Roma pupils achieve a 'good level of development'³, compared to 69% of all pupils nationally (see Figure 1) (DfE, 2016a).
- Only 36% and 24% of Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils, respectively, achieve the 'expected level' in the 17 early learning areas of the Early Years curriculum, compared to a national average of 67%.
- Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller groups perform particularly poorly in the Mathematics and Literacy learning areas in the Early Years curriculum.

Figure 1



2.2 Attainment and progress at primary

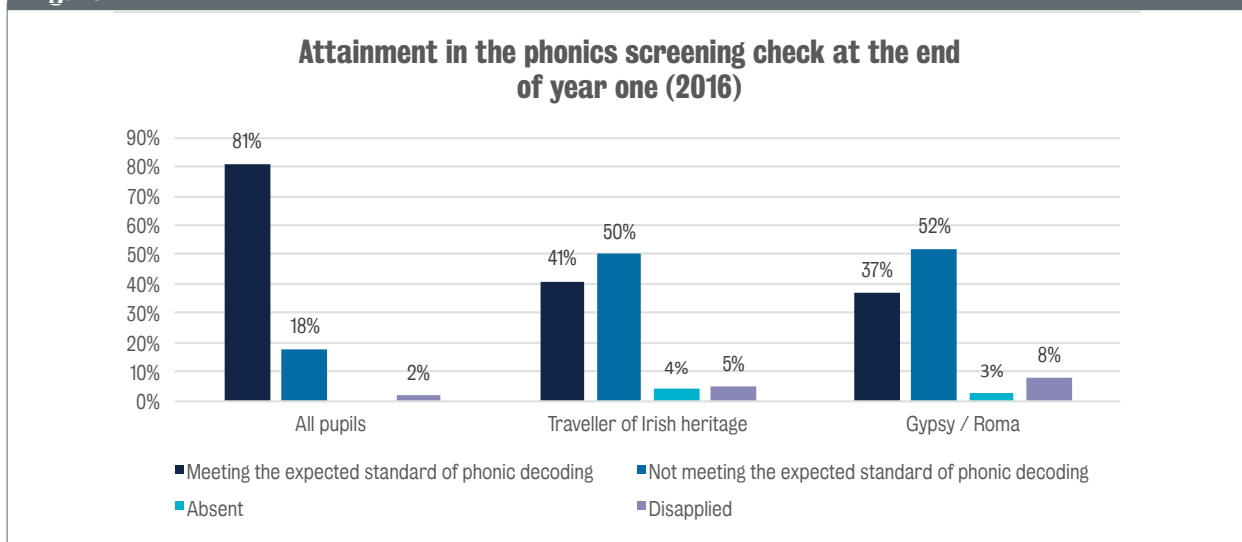
- At the end of year one, pupils take part in a 'phonics screening check' which assesses their ability to read sounds and decode words. GRT pupils perform significantly below the national average

³ Children are defined as having reached a good level of development at the end of their reception year if they have met the expected level in the three prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; physical development; and communication and language) and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

pass rate of 81%, with only 41% of Irish Traveller and 37% of Gypsy/Roma pupils meeting the expected standard (see Figure 2) (DfE, 2016b).

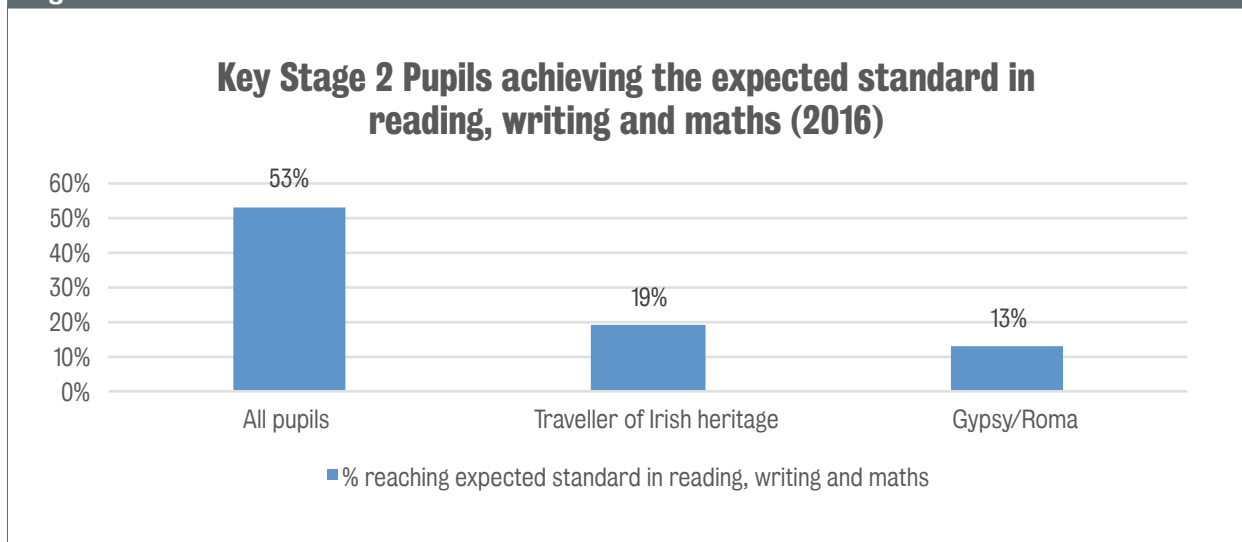
- GRT children are also more likely to be absent at time of test or to be ‘disapplied’ from taking part in the screening check by their school, meaning that they are not tested because they are working significantly below the necessary level. GRT pupils also remain less likely to pass the screening check as a retake in year two, while almost all pupils of other ethnicities do so.

Figure 2



- At Key Stage 2, 53% of pupils nationally achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths compared to only 19% of Irish Traveller pupils and 13% of Gypsy/Roma pupils (see Figure 3). Meanwhile 0% of Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils exceed the expected standard compared to 5% of all pupils (DfE, 2016c).

Figure 3



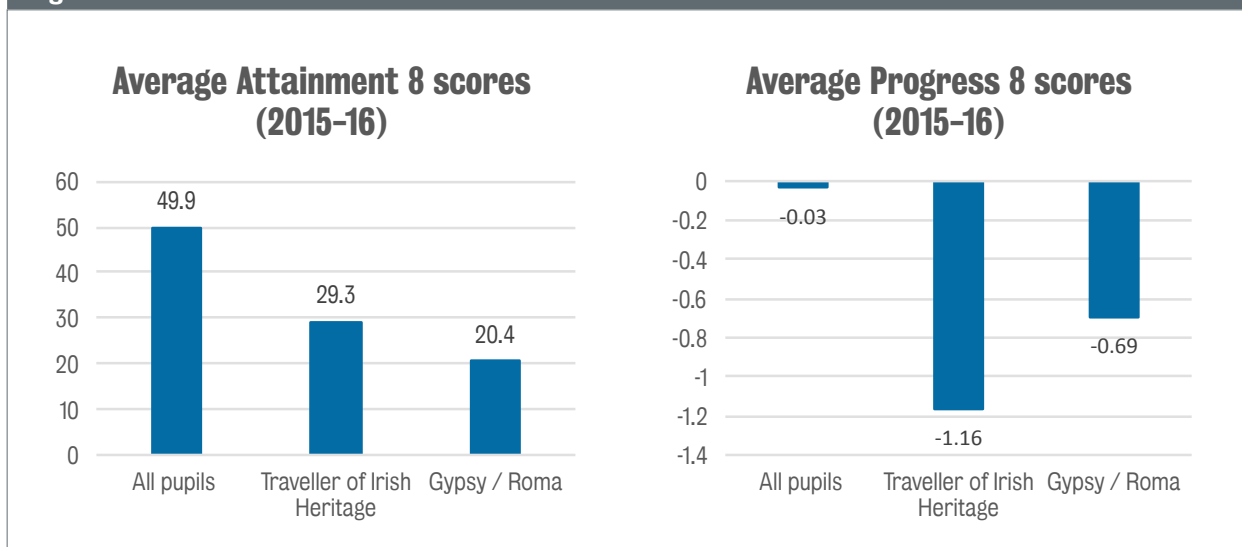
2.3 Attainment and progress at secondary

- The trend for low educational attainment continues throughout secondary education and is reflected in Key Stage 4 progress and attainment data.
- During secondary school GRT pupils progress more slowly than other pupils with the same prior attainment. The progress scores⁴ of these two groups are the lowest of all ethnic groups (see Figure 4).

⁴ Progress 8 aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is

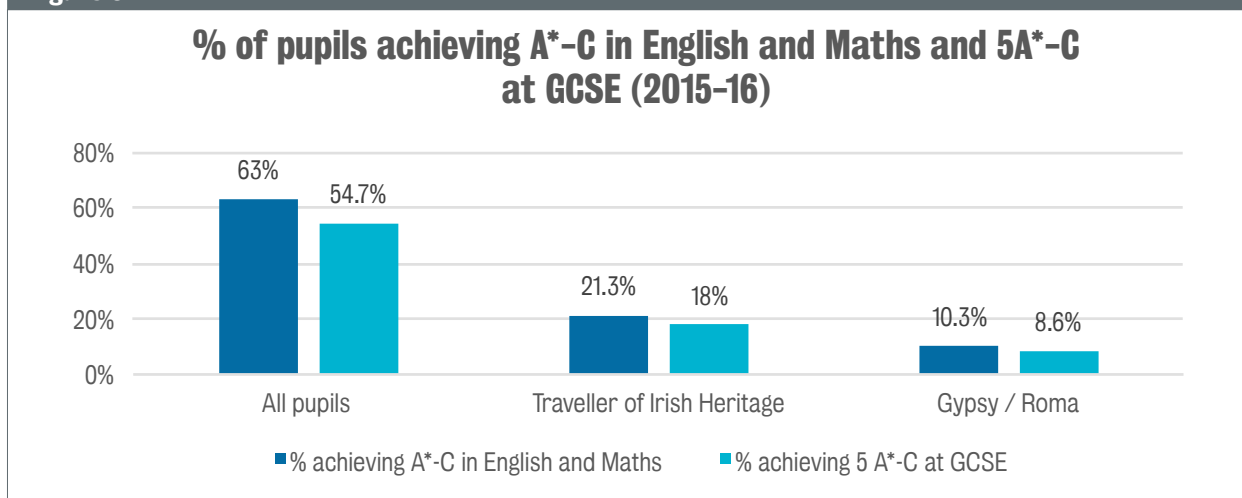
- Irish Traveller pupils make over one grade less progress across their 8 best GCSEs at secondary school than other pupils with the same attainment at primary school. Meanwhile Gypsy/Roma pupils make over half a grade less progress across their 8 best subjects than other pupils with the same prior attainment (DfE, 2016d). They therefore, not only begin behind their peers but also make less progress as they progress through secondary school, widening the gap over time.
- Gypsy/Roma pupils' average attainment score⁵ is less than half the national average of all pupils whereas Irish Traveller pupils score just over half the national average (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



- When attainment is assessed in terms of the proportion of pupils getting five 'good passes' at GCSE, the trends are stark (see Figure 5). Fewer than 1 in 10 Gypsy/Roma pupils and fewer than 1 in 5 Irish Traveller pupils achieve five good GCSEs, compared to 6 out of 10 all pupils nationally (DfE, 2016e).

Figure 5



a type of value added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same prior attainment (DfE, 2017).

- 5 Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications including mathematics (double weighted) and English (double weighted), 3 further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and 3 further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or technical awards from the DfE approved list. (DfE, 2017)

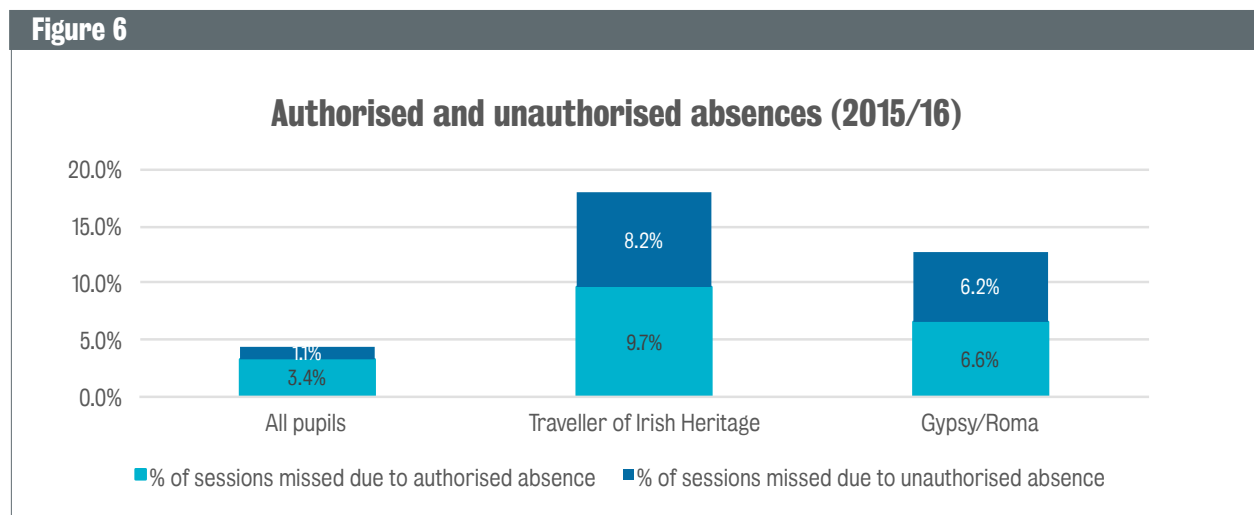
Taken together, the data suggests a stark and consistent trend of underperformance at all stages of compulsory education. GRT pupils are not only the lowest performing ethnic group but their performance is always considerably below that of the next lowest performing group (often ‘Black Caribbean’ or ‘White and Black Caribbean’).

It is notable that Irish Traveller pupils, although still attaining poorly, fare consistently better than Gypsy/Roma pupils throughout compulsory education. This is likely due to the inclusion of European Roma pupils within the Gypsy/Roma group, who may speak English as an additional language and may not have completed all their education in the UK system.

2.4 Attendance

Typically, GRT pupils have poor attendance at school (see Figure 6) (DfE, 2016f).

- Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rate of absence of all ethnic groups, with pupils absent for 17.9% of sessions on average in 2015/16, nearly four times the national average. Although Gypsy/Roma pupils have lower absence rates than their Irish Traveller counterparts, their absence rate was still nearly three times the national average in 2015/16. Both groups are also far more likely to take unauthorised absences than their peers in other ethnic groups.

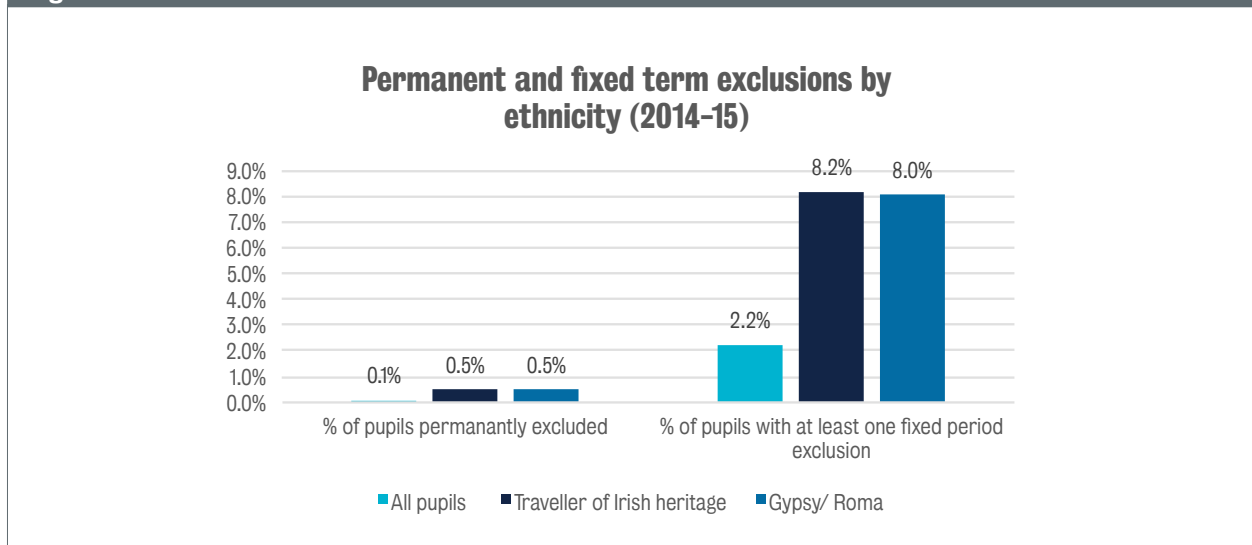


- The numbers of Gypsy/Roma pupils and Irish Travellers pupils in secondary school is consistently lower than the numbers in primary school, suggesting that low attendance and periodic absence at primary school can lead to school dropout and complete non-attendance by the time pupils reach secondary age.
- Research estimated that in 2003, only 80% of GRT pupils transferred to secondary, around 50% drop-out by the age of 16 and only 37% complete the full five years of secondary education (Foster and Norton, 2012). In Gypsy and Traveller communities boys are more likely to drop out than girls, while in Roma communities this trend is reversed. Irish Traveller pupils are more likely to drop out than Gypsy and Roma pupils (Foster and Norton, 2012).
- While official figures indicate around 80% of GRT pupils of secondary age are attending school, some research suggests that there are over 12,000 GRT pupils not enrolled in any secondary school and in some parts of the country such as Scotland and remote areas, attendance may be as low as 20% (Clark, 2006).

2.5 Exclusion rates

Permanent and fixed term school exclusion are a much more common experience for GRT pupils than for pupils from other ethnic groups (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



GRT pupils are five times as likely as their peers to be permanently excluded. The rate of GRT pupils experiencing fixed term exclusions is also considerably higher than the rate for all other pupils, at almost four times the national average (DfE, 2016g).

When compared to other ethnic groups, the rate of fixed term exclusion of GRT pupils is highest by a substantial margin: Black Caribbean pupils experience the next highest fixed term exclusion rate at 5.7% (DfE, 2016g).

GRT pupils' greater likelihood of absence and exclusion from school can be considered both a symptom and a cause of their low progress and attainment.

2.6 The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people in HE

Data describing the ethnicity of the student population taken from UCAS applications includes 'Gypsy/ Traveller' and 'Traveller of an Irish Heritage' categories, with no distinct classification of 'Roma' students.

In 2015/16, 200 Gypsy and Traveller people were registered in the student population. Including individuals aged 18-30 only, approximately 3 to 4% of the GRT population accessed HE in 2014, compared to 43% of the whole UK population (Danvers, 2015). Though Danvers acknowledges the limitations of the available data it nevertheless indicates that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are severely underrepresented in HE and are less likely than the general population to progress to HE (Danvers, 2015; CHEER, 2016).

However, underestimates of the total size of the GRT population (see section 1.3) mean underrepresentation may be even more severe than the statistics suggest. On the other hand, the recorded total of GRT students could also be an underestimate. According to one roundtable participant, some individuals from GRT communities might attend university but not be counted since they do not ascribe themselves, often because they fear they will be disadvantaged as a result.

“We individually know so many children that are in universities, doing PhDs and in professions but they will never ascribe their identity and why should they, they haven't got there through the virtue of being a Gypsy they've got there in spite of being a Gypsy.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

There is also evidence to suggest that GRT pupils have the lowest achievement of all ethnic groups in post 16 education, though these trends must be treated with caution due to small numbers (Cemlyn, Greenfields et al., 2009).

What barriers do Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people face to accessing higher education?

Despite the marked underrepresentation of GRT students in HE, research on the barriers they face in accessing these opportunities is sparse and research tends to focus on compulsory education. This is likely due to the small number applying and entering and the lack of official requirements to address the issue. There is some European literature focusing on Roma students in HE, however, it is unclear to what extent these conclusions are applicable to native British Gypsies and Travellers in UK HE. The lack of UK research and policy in this area is itself a barrier to promoting inclusion and fairer representation.

Barriers to educational success tend to intensify over time and gradually close down the prospect of progressing to further and higher education. They are also replicated and continue to influence individual choices when it comes to further and higher education. Experiences of discrimination and poverty, for example, alongside particular cultural imperatives, play an important role at school level but are also likely to play a role as pupils make choices about their future beyond the age of 18, even if the specific effects of these barriers in relation to HE have not yet received sufficient attention in the literature.

- We therefore begin our examination of the barriers to HE faced by GRT pupils by examining barriers to educational achievement more broadly. Specifically, we consider:
- Cultural barriers including: mobility; language and system knowledge; norms, aspirations and expectations; and, cultural identity
- Material barriers including: poverty; inadequate housing and homelessness; and, access to healthcare and the prevalence of special educational needs
- Discrimination, specifically: discriminatory attitudes and media prejudice; schools' response to discrimination; self-exclusion from mainstream education as a result of discrimination; and discrimination in HE.

Following our analysis of cultural and material barriers to education and the discrimination faced by GRT groups, we draw on the limited literature and our own primary research to explore five barriers that relate more specifically to GRT pupils' access to HE.

3.1 Cultural barriers

GRT pupils face cultural barriers in accessing education. Differences between GRT culture and mainstream culture can create conflicting priorities and a lack of flexibility in the education system can make it difficult to ensure that mainstream education is compatible with GRT lifestyle. Mobility; system knowledge; language and literacy; aspirations and expectations and fears surrounding cultural identity may act as barriers to educational success. Key cultural barriers include:

- Mobility
- System knowledge and language
- Aspirations, expectations and cultural identity

3.1.1 Mobility

i. Enrolment and attendance

Existing research identifies a nomadic lifestyle as a significant obstacle to GRT pupils' engagement with schooling, including the very first step of applying for a school place (Foster and Norton, 2012).

Although around two thirds of GRT families no longer live a traditional nomadic lifestyle, frequent moves can still affect children's education as some may spend a considerable portion of the school year travelling with extended family (Greenfields, 2008). Mobility is a particular challenge for the estimated one-third of families who continue to live in mobile or insecure housing. When enrolling a pupil in school, mobility is an issue both with regards to applying for a school place in a location where a family may not permanently reside, and in terms of having no official postal address to receive forms and admission post. In some instances, schools have been known to withdraw offers for a school place when no reply is received (Foster and Norton, 2012). Schools may also be reluctant to offer places to GRT pupils as the preconception that they will not attain well in a context of high stakes accountability and league tables does not promote inclusion (Cudworth, 2008).

Mobility can also be problematic in relation to consistent attendance. Even once a school place is secured, the mobility of GRT pupils continues to negatively affect their education as it can contribute to poor attendance, as described in section 2.4.

Research estimates that around one third of GRT pupils are impacted by housing problems faced by their families (Themelis and Foster, 2013). The most vulnerable families and children experience the largest negative impact of mobility as families that have no legal place to stay may be forced to move frequently and unexpectedly. Marks (2006) argues that these vulnerable families struggle to make sustainable links to schools. Ken Lee explained that for poorer families and those without a legal, permanent place to stop, accommodation is prioritised above schooling:

“We all know that it's not all Gypsy and Traveller families but for those from poorer backgrounds... particularly living on the roadside, it's more important to have somewhere to stop than to be in school, you need to have stability.”

Ken Lee, researcher, author and Romanichal

Under these circumstances, pupils can miss large portions of the curriculum and often find it difficult to integrate into class following long periods of absence. Occupational travellers such as Circus people and Showmen routinely travel for seasonal work: Showman Caroline Wynn explained how travelling during her childhood impacted on her school life, literacy and ultimately her parents' decision to privately educate her and her sister:

“Up to the age of 7, I was in and out of schools, two weeks here or there and there was no continuation. When I was 7, I couldn't read at all... my parents put us in boarding school and I really loved it... but when we were 12 and 13 we had to come out.”

Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

In schools, especially those which are oversubscribed, long periods of absence can cause a school to withdraw a pupil's place (Ofsted 1999, in Cudworth, 2008). This not only leads to many GRT pupils losing a school place, causing further interruption to their education, but could also result in a tendency to attend undersubscribed schools which may be more likely to be of a lower quality.

ii. The potential benefits of mobility

Given that the majority of GRT families are no longer nomadic, it is clear that mobility is not always the primary cultural barrier to attendance and engagement with education. For example, research has found that many instances of absence were found to be intermittent and caused by family occasions such as weddings and funerals rather than continuous absence caused by mobility (Clay, 1997).

Moreover, discussions surrounding mobility often leave aside the educational potential to be gained in travelling and in operating as part of a family business. Often, children working alongside their family, especially during term time is viewed negatively, or even as ‘child labour’ by mainstream society, however, many individuals from the community reject this notion.

“The fear is from a council perspective that when those children are out of school with their families they are working, and in that respect it's seen as 'child labour'- the idea that there is no cultural value whatsoever they are just being used to fill in gaps so the family can earn money but I can't agree with that at all. It's vibrant culture and community and children have brilliant experiences regarding business that stand them in great stead in terms of coming back into education [in later life].”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

“Some people would say it's like child labour but it's really not because if a child didn't want to do it, they wouldn't do it. It's not like they are made to do it in a forceful way, it's a family thing and it empowers them to feel that they are part of a family and they are important because they are needed and what they are doing is important. I never felt I was doing something I shouldn't have been doing, I always felt I was useful...it's an amazing upbringing.”

Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

However, other members of the GRT community we spoke with felt that while these experiences of work and travel could be beneficial, it was still important to ensure that children attended school regularly and working alongside parents or travelling happened only outside of school hours.

“If [children or young people] are working whilst under compulsory school age and are not receiving any formal education at home, then they should be in school. I learned how to look after my sisters, clean a house and a trailer and work fruit picking and in a shop outside of school hours and so have my children. I went hawking gates with my Dad in his van, and selling china with my Granny every school holiday.”

English Romany Gypsy Parent

Children and young people in mobile GRT communities could gain a significant amount of experiential knowledge through travel and business. However, the low attendance and low attainment in formal education that often follows can result in a young person being unable to meet the requirements for university entrance, despite having other valuable knowledge and skills. Furthermore, traditional university courses require an individual to stay at the university for at least three years. For young people that want to continue travelling, this limitation acts as an additional barrier to their participation. Margaret Wood called for the consideration and development of distance learning courses that may be more compatible with mobility:

“I think one thing that happens for young people is that they don't have the conventional qualifications for university and when people are moving round that makes it harder. Some people may have a certain amount of mobility in their lives even when at university so there is the consideration of distance learning. It might be relevant for HE institutions to look at those options to allow mobility and education to go side by side.”

Margaret Wood, teacher and ACERT trustee

Recommendations: Distance learning

Frequent moves can act as a barrier to school progress and attainment for GRT pupils, and may also make accessing HE difficult. Schools have attempted to mitigate this barriers by using ICT to support distance learning. The success of such programmes of support often depends on access to technology and adequate support from the base school (see Wilkin et al. 2009). HE institutions should explore and promote distance learning as an option for GRT pupils who wish to remain mobile during their studies.

3.1.2 Language and system knowledge

i. Navigating the system

Due to cultural isolation from mainstream society or, especially in the case of European Roma migrants, their negative experience within other education systems, GRT parents often lack experience navigating the UK education system (Levinson, 2007; Penfold, 2015). Many of the practitioners we spoke to who work with these families recognise that GRT parents have little knowledge of how to support their children in school, often as a result of their own brief, sometimes negative, experiences of education. Initiatives which support parents to access this knowledge can be successful but are becoming increasingly limited due to cuts to services and are often only provided to families at ‘crisis point’. As Abi Angus who works for the Traveller Education Service argued:

“The families that I work with, a lot of the parents don't know how to support their children... parental involvement or engagement and equipping parents with the understanding is really important, but not from a deficit point of view, just for those parents that faced huge discrimination in school or didn't attend school... We provide a representative service that tells parents 'these are your rights and this is what the school should be doing'. That needs to be happening across the country on a bigger scale. But with the cuts that's not happening. Ideally something would be happening before the crisis point but it's not, so realistically there just needs to be lots of stuff that informs parents: 'this is how you can support your children.'”

Abigail Angus, Education and Advocacy Officer

Mark Penfold highlighted that this lack of knowledge can be a particular problem for European Roma due to stark differences between Eastern European and the UK education systems. This problem is exacerbated by the institutionalised discrimination they face in official systems in their home country. However, his school have put resources into building trust with families and informing them of how to support their children. To do so, teachers conducted home visits and acknowledge previous experiences of discrimination in order to build trust with families. They also provided DVDs to explain the UK education system in an accessible way. He explained:

“You have to understand what they don't understand then you've got to rearrange their mental map. Then you've got to show you understand and say 'We know in your country of origin you were discriminated against and education meant nothing for you...[but] in this country you can be whatever you want, it doesn't matter if you're Roma, Somali, Bangladeshi or whatever, what you put in you will get out.’”

Mark Penfold, teacher and researcher

Recommendations: Working with and informing families

Where GRT families, especially new migrant Roma families, have limited experience and knowledge of the UK education system, schools must engage and support families to ensure pupil attendance. One school has found the following to be effective:

- Carrying out home visits to build relationships and trust
- Making a DVD with a Roma soundtrack to explain the UK education system
- Acknowledging the previous discrimination families may have experienced
- Emphasising to families that they will be given equal opportunity to succeed in this country, regardless of their ethnicity.

Lack of knowledge of the education system and the lack of cultural capital to navigate it, persists and may intensify as pupils move beyond compulsory education towards further and HE. Historically, even fewer GRT people attended HE than do so today, leaving many parents uninformed about the nature of the system or even what ‘university’ itself entails. Ondrej, the Roma college student we interviewed planned to apply to university after seeing his cousin do so, but highlighted that his situation was not the norm for many of his Roma peers:

“There’s not a lot of people that have Roma background that have got someone to speak to about [university]. It would be great if they did...I don’t think a lot have that contact with anyone to actually speak to, it’s sad because if they did they would be more encouraged to go to university. I think most of them are scared of what university will be like. I think it’s a great thing, but they might think it’s a waste of time, because they don’t have the people that I have around me to tell me differently so they might have really difficult time...Some of them might think it’s a waste of time because the way the education system is in Slovakia it would be a waste of time because even if I got in there and I got a degree at university I would not get a job after because I’m Roma and that is a fact.”

Ondrej, Roma college student, age 18

Most pupils we spoke to said that they had had few experiences of talking to parents, teachers or other people about university, especially if they had not yet reached year 11. One pupil reported that “no one ever talks of it”. This had resulted in some misconceptions about university as well as a general lack of knowledge about available options. During the focus groups, almost all pupils showed an interest in learning more about university, they asked questions and in some cases reported that they felt more positively about university as a result of discussing it during the focus group. After discussing pupils’ responses to photos of various aspects of university one pupil explained:

“When you see something, it makes you think more. When I see it, and talk about it I think better things than before...it is a good thing. I want to go see how it is and try it.”

Roma pupil, age 14

A basic knowledge of HE is also only the first step in a parent being able to support a child’s progression to university. Beyond this, there are a variety of forms of knowledge, dispositions and personal resources, captured by the notions of ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’ (OFFA, 2017; Moskal, 2014) that are conducive to navigating university admissions and some GRT families do not have access to these.

“There is that idea of transferring social capital which if you’re white and middle class it’s quite easy, you have it and transfer it to your children. It’s harder for people who don’t have that social

capital. The Traveller Education Service, they will transmit some of that, some knowledge about education...there's nothing similar to that for higher education."

Martin Myers, Lecturer

This lack of access to relevant forms of social or cultural capital can be a barrier not just to navigating a HE admission system, but to success in HE itself.

"The closed language of higher education is very difficult isn't it... In fact, part of it is that wider discourse which counts as knowledge which counts as recognised knowledge. In terms of cultural capital we have to think about how when students are in university how they go about understanding that, because compared to middle class families...understanding how to do things like internships or sponsorship or how people get into certain conferences...it's like a mystery that cannot be unveiled but if you come from a middle class family it's just part of your cultural capital and it's assumed and you step into it, and then for GRT and any other working class families and there is a big screen and you don't understand how it works."

Pauline Lane, Reader

Educational institutions can use informal open days to instigate conversations with pupils and parents about further and higher education. Lisa Galloway explained that open evenings provide an opportunity to inform and engage families as well as recruiting new students:

"We've held a friends and family evening here, we publicised it quite well in the communities and on local media and opened our doors to potential students and families, 'come and meet your tutors and sit in the classrooms'. We recognise that when families are involved they provide the best support mechanisms for the students and success is far more likely. That evening brought in a lot of families from communities and they were very keen to discuss education and what it means to be in education and we gained recruitment from that evening. It was as simple as that. Even though there are real cultural, political and social barriers to widening participation...sometimes it's as easy as walking up to somebody and having that discussion and having that understanding."

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Similarly, role models and mentors can work with families to disseminate information about HE. They can also continue supporting students as they enter university.

Recommendations: Information evenings and role models

GRT families and pupils often lack knowledge about university and the cultural capital needed to navigate HE application processes. Practitioners seeking to engage these groups and provide information, advice and guidance about HE must build trust with young people and families and given them ongoing support in navigating the system. This could be done through:

- Role models and mentors for school pupils and university students
- Information evenings which focus on family engagement

ii. Language and literacy

Poor literacy and language skills can compound difficulties navigating official systems, including schools and university admissions: GRT adults are considerably more likely than the general population to be

illiterate or to lack basic literacy skills (Liegeois and Gheorghe, 1995; Fraser, 1995; Levinson, 2007). A small-scale study, focusing on one UK local authority, estimated that 62% of GRT adults in that area were illiterate (Greenfield et al., 2007).

Accessing core public services requires functional literacy, and this is particularly the case in relation to the education system where activities like writing application forms, communicating by email and reading letters are commonplace for parents (Levinson, 2007; Derrington and Kendall, 2004). A lack of literacy may therefore negatively impact on parents' awareness of, and access to, educational support for their children.

European Roma parents and pupils, especially those that have only recently arrived in the UK, are likely to be at a further disadvantage when attempting to navigate official systems due to language barriers (Penfold, 2016; Murphy, 2013). However, this issue is also experienced by many other ethnic minorities and studies show that although pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) generally perform poorly during their first months or years in the UK, this effect gradually declines and many EAL pupils outperform their White British peers as they acquire better English (Strand, 2015; Plewis et al. 2016; Shaw et al. 2016).

Illiteracy and language barriers, as well as a lack of familiarity, can also make navigating the welfare system difficult. Although 43.5% of all GRT pupils currently claim for Free School Meals, research estimates that many more families qualify but do not access the benefits that would make them officially eligible (Ryder and Cemlyn, 2014). In addition to families not accessing the state benefits that entitle their children to additional school funding, head teachers report difficulties with accessing funding such as Pupil Premium for GRT pupils for two additional reasons (Ofsted, 2014):

When pupils arrive in schools unexpectedly, often part way through the year, schools must address needs and provide support immediately. Yet securing funding and benefits is a lengthy process (Ofsted, 2014). If pupils pass through several schools in a short space of time, pupils may never receive the additional funding they are eligible for.

European Roma migrant families face further barriers due to restrictions placed on nationals of countries that have recently joined the EU⁶. This can affect this group's employment and their benefit entitlements (Foster and Norton, 2012).

For GRT pupils who have high level needs, including SEND and needs associated with having English as an additional language schools must provide appropriate support. Despite the difficulty faced in obtaining the necessary funding, schools still incur the cost of providing extra resources and support (Ofsted, 2014) which can potentially leave schools with a high proportion of GRT children exposed to financial risk. This may affect schools' willingness and ability to enrol and support these pupils especially in a climate where funding is limited.

3.1.3 Norms, aspirations and expectations

i. Employment aspirations

GRT families are often keen for their children to take on traditional employment or continue a family business as they reach adolescence (O'Hanlon, 2010; Levinson and Hooley, 2013; Harding, 2013). These expectations may not be compatible with the priorities of formal schooling, particularly in regard to the curriculum beyond reading, writing and basic arithmetic at primary school. Where young people are expected to continue a family trade, many parents and young people feel that working alongside their parents from an early age will better prepare them to be successful in this trade. In turn, this can result in them valuing schooling less.

When considering conflicting priorities and the value placed on education, it is important not to conflate

⁶ The two countries that joined the EU on 1 January 2007 are Bulgaria and Romania.

the perceived value of formal schooling or ‘mainstream education’ with the overall perceived value of education itself (O’Hanlon, 2010; Levinson and Hooley, 2013). Many GRT families value education highly and recognise and prioritise children and young people’s need to develop knowledge and skills. However, the skills and knowledge valued in GRT communities can differ considerably from the knowledge and skills valued and taught in mainstream education (Harding, 2013; Wilkin et al., 2009). Ultimately, this can lead to some families believing that their children are better educated in the home where the content of the education can be aligned to the communities’ priorities. As Harding (2013) draws on Bhopal’s research (2004) to explain: “many Travellers see school as an institutional learning environment for a sedentary culture, whereas they see home as an unrestrained learning environment for an active culture.” This effect is most prevalent in families or communities that have a specific family trade, the skills for which are not taught in mainstream education. Caroline Wynn explained that once she had learnt literacy skills, both her and her parents stopped valuing the education and curriculum on offer:

“From their point of view and my point of view we weren't learning anything at school we didn't already know or anything we needed to know. At the time we didn't need philosophy or history or English Literature...as far as our parents are concerned we are just going to carry on doing what we are doing. It's historic business, like a blacksmith 100 years ago, the father would teach the son to take over the trade. We were at the point that we had learnt enough, we had what we needed and the rest you are going to learn just by doing it.”

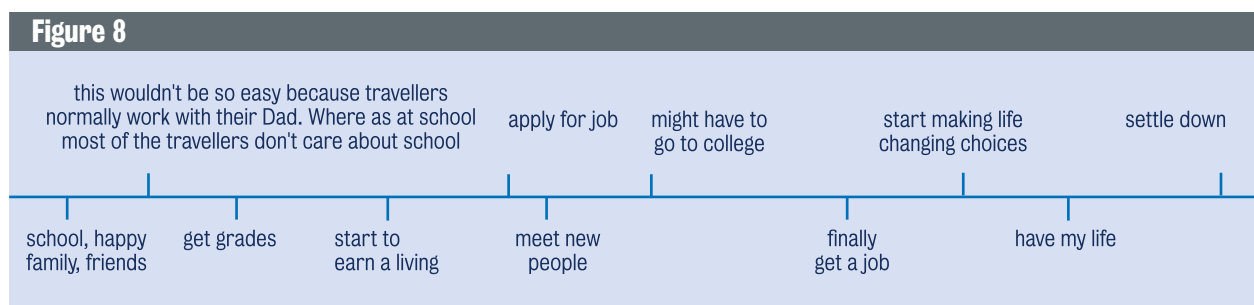
Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

Chris Derrington explained that her research had shown that while young people had aspirations to work in a varied range of professions, these aspirations would gradually fade over time in the face of the expectation that they would work in the family business.

“Particularly with boys the age 14 did seem to be key. When we interviewed the children and the parents we found that in year 7 and year 8 some of the children were saying they wanted to be doctors, lawyers, teachers and parents were saying 'yes but they will probably follow dad or uncle of brother into a particular trade of vocation'. By year 9, it was almost like family or parental expectations had almost over ridden whatever it was that had set them up in a different direction.”

Chris Derrington, Researcher and author

One Gypsy pupil we spoke to depicted the potentially different aspirations of parents and young people in their life map (see Figure 8). They explained that it “won’t be so easy to like get the job you want cos normally travellers work with their dad and all that.” The pupil did demonstrate their aspiration to finish school and potentially go to college if they “have to, to get the job”, but they did not hold aspirations to go to HE.



However, research has detected a shift in attitudes, with an increasing number of GRT parents feeling that formal education is necessary in the modern world (Bhopal, 2004). The literature suggests this is likely due to two factors:

- Increased mechanisation/automation reducing the need for traditional GRT occupations such as seasonal agricultural work, (Myers, McGee and Bhopal, 2010)
- More positive relationships with mainstream communities developing over time alongside improvements in some schools' strategies for supporting GRT families (Levinson, 2015)

GRT parents have recognised the growing importance ICT as key for their children to respond to 'an ever-changing labour market' (Padfield, 2005, p. 138) (Myers and Bhopal, 2016; Myers et al. 2010;). This attitude was reflected in our own research in which the many of the Gypsy and Traveller young people reported that their parents had particularly encouraged them to gain skills in this area:

"My parents have seen how I've used computers and I think they want me to do like computing type stuff, like if I go work for a business or something like that I can do computers there."

Gypsy pupil, age 15

"My parents have said 'you have to get on computers because the world needs more techy things in the future.'"

Irish Traveller pupil, age 13

In some cases, highlighted in our roundtable, parents particularly recognised the benefits education would bring their children when they had not benefited from high quality education themselves:

"When my grandfather enlisted in the army in the first world war he couldn't read and write, when he came out and could read...so he saw the value of education. When I passed the 11 plus...he said [to my father] 'This education you will get for free from the gaujos is a pearl beyond price, grab it while you can.' and he did grab it for me."

Ken Lee, Researcher, author and Romanichal

Discussions in our roundtable and interviews with Roma pupils also revealed that Roma families often value UK education due to the level of discrimination they experienced in their home countries where Roma children would often be sent to 'special schools'.

"The group of Roma I'm currently working with, their families have a very high opinion of education, in the past ten years they have gone from being the failures in school to groups of them being achievers. Because the family value education for nothing because they come from places where education wasn't attainable...the two things people are concerned with for their children are access to work and access to education, so education seems to me to be highly valued in some groups and there is high achievement in those groups."

Brian Belton, Research, author and English Gypsy

Despite this, parents' concerns about the mainstream school system remain especially in regards to the relevance of the wider curriculum and concerns about children's wellbeing (Bhopal, 2004).

ii. Higher education aspirations

Furthermore, it is unclear whether a shift in attitudes towards valuing education extends to valuing HE. The pursuit of education beyond secondary level can seem at odds with the goal of swiftly entering work. Not all parents and young people see a degree level qualification as necessary for young people to fulfil traditional expectations and roles. Given parents' expectation that boys should begin to contribute economically to the family and the community in mid-adolescence and that young couples should start a family relatively early (Foster and Norton, 2012), the timing of HE can be problematic.

However, there is a growing trend for GRT pupils and parents to express aspirations to continue with education, and where some individuals have done so, research identifies that their achievements have been met with pride rather than rejection (Levinson, 2015).

Caroline Wynn (a parent from a showman background), explained that in communities such as travelling showman communities, which have ‘readymade’ businesses for their children to take on, the value of HE is gauged based on potential future employment options. Parents are keen to understand how a university education will affect a child’s employment prospects, however, they may have limited knowledge of these opportunities if they themselves have not completed higher or even secondary education.

Schools and HE institutions should seek to inform parents and pupils about the opportunities offered in HE and the impact that HE may have on an individual’s career options. Our roundtable discussion and interviews consistently highlighted that ‘starting outreach early’ before some aspirations become ‘closed off’ is key: information and advice about HE options should be offered during primary school.

“It would be better if [universities] were going into primary schools and speaking to parents of year 6 pupils and saying this is what university looks like and this higher education and this is exactly how we structure it. It's about the wording too instead of 'this is an evening about higher education' it's 'this is an evening about your child's options after compulsory education...I think that would need to be done in primary because by secondary I know a lot of parents all have ideas about what will happen after that and there are limitations that they've seen being put on their child.’”

Abigail Angus, Education and Advocacy Officer

Recommendations: Early, primary school based intervention and outreach

Aspirations and expectations are formed early, often during primary school, and GRT pupils face conflicting priorities between traditional, cultural expectations and mainstream education in early adolescence. HE institutions should work with primary schools to provide information and guidance about HE to GRT pupils.

This is especially important for addressing GRT access to HE as the transition to secondary school is so often problematic and thus outreach and intervention that begin in the secondary years are likely to be ‘too late’.

iii. Young people’s aspirations

Research has found that positive attitudes towards school and education are widely held by GRT young people. A study of 44 Gypsy Traveller children found that 37 had positive expectations of secondary school, however, negative expectations were highly predictive of early drop out (Derrington and Kendall, 2004; Wilkin et al., 2009). Research on Travellers’ aspirations found that young people aspired to gain material wealth, be self-employed, follow a family trade and, in the case of Irish Traveller girls, to look after a home and a family (Bowers, 2004).

The young people we spoke to had varied aspirations, with some keen to attend university, supported by their parents, and others believing that work and earning money were more important than continuing their education. When asked if they had ever thought about university, there were a wide range of responses: some viewed university as a positive experience though very few expressed a strong belief that they themselves would go, whereas others saw it as ‘boring’ and ‘long’ and actively expressed that they would not like to go.

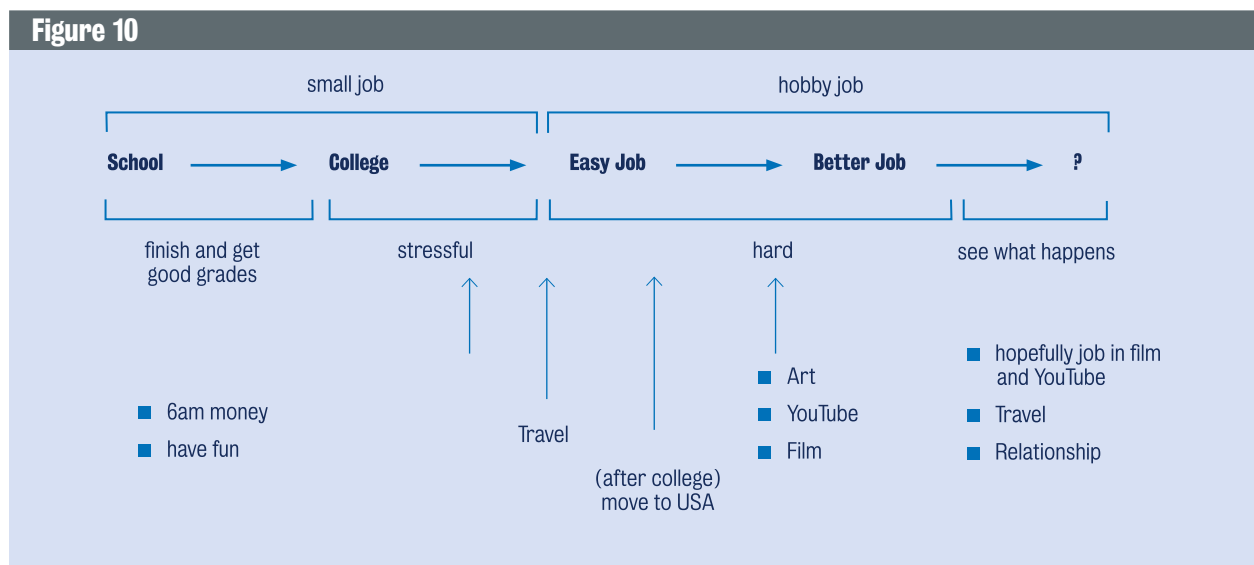
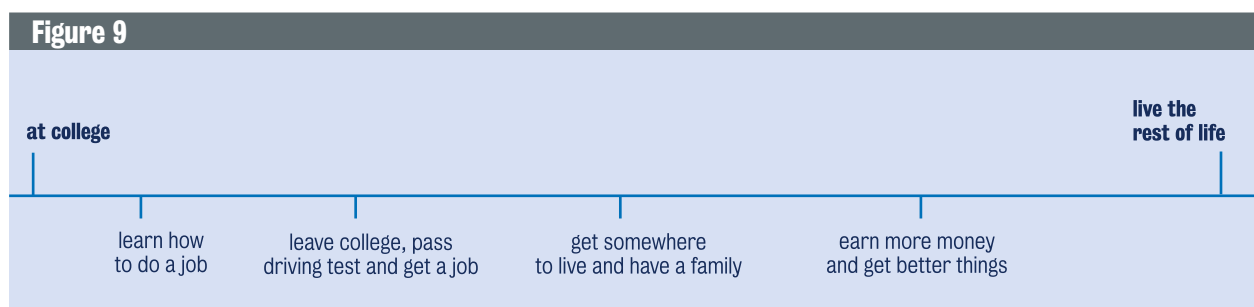
"Not really no, because all the time that you spend at university, really, if you know what you're doing, you could be out earning money."

Gypsy pupil, age 14

"I think it's [university's] boring. After you leave college you then have to study for another three years when in those three years you could have a job and get some money instead of going university. If I'm older and I have a family then to provide for them you have to have a job."

Roma pupil, age 13

No pupils who took part in the life mapping activity included university on their life map, though most included college (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). When asked what the most important part of their future plans were, most said to “get the job and earn money” and to “get a job to make sure you’re financially set up to live the rest of your life”.



One Irish Traveller pupil did not aspire to go to university as they said that they would expect to leave school permanently: ‘very soon, in about year 8’, though they were not sure what they would do after that.

One pupil expressed that while they understood the benefits of higher education, they did not feel that they were similar to the people that went there.

"I do feel different I'd say. I'd say they can probably do more to the impact of the earth or to like civilisation. They're gonna get a better job, better pay, better lifestyle than probably us if we don't go to university I'd say."

Gypsy pupil, age 14

iv. Teacher aspirations and expectations

Teachers have a profound considerable influence over pupils' aspirations. Where teachers have low expectations of GRT pupils, this further reinforces disengagement and low aspirations within the communities. Low expectations of GRT pupils among teachers has been widely documented with some research finding that teachers felt GRT pupils were 'inherently disadvantaged because of their cultural background' (p. 22) (Wilkin et al., 2009; Derrington and Kendall, 2007; Ofsted, 1999; Lloyd et al., 1999). Some roundtable attendees suggested that a tendency to direct GRT pupils towards less well-regarded qualifications was symptomatic of low teacher expectations, which in time, create a barrier to HE.

“In an environment which is very results driven you can see how teachers and head teachers and government might advise these pupils from these communities to take up certain more vocational qualifications or perhaps BTEC exams and it might be seen as a win-win. But when you look at the criteria, especially for highly selective universities the real things they are looking at are A levels and high scoring A levels especially. So there seems to be a missing gap between what they are getting at school and then beyond if they want to look at higher education.”

Chris Derrington, Researcher and author

In some cases, vocational qualifications may be more appropriate for some learners, however, they can have a considerable impact on a young person's options for further study. Decisions should therefore be made in conjunction with pupils and parents and should not be based on pupil background or accountability pressures.

In summary, despite evidence of shifting attitudes, and of varied aspirations and expectations among pupils and families, an attitude persists among parents and teachers that secondary and higher education is not valuable to these young people. This results in many GRT children failing to complete compulsory education, and consequently, to access HE.

v. Gender-based expectations

Parents' and young people's aspirations are heavily linked to culturally-based gender expectations (Myers and Bhopal, 2016; Cemlyn et al. 2009; Wilkin et al., 2009; Levinson, 2008). While boys are often expected to carry on a family trade, girls, especially Irish Traveller girls, are commonly expected to marry and start a family early. Housekeeping skills are therefore highly valued and girls are often expected to focus on learning these skills at home. These expectations have been found to negatively impact attendance and engagement with school (Reynolds et al. 2003). However, as Margaret Greenfield explains, it is important to note that sometimes young women share their parents' aspirations in this respect:

“A lot of the girls were saying you know ‘I don't want to do this, why would I want to work all my life, go to university, I'm going to be looked after by a nice guy, I don't want to be like you.’”

Margaret Greenfields, Professor

In other cases, housekeeping and childcare responsibilities which prepare girls and young women for their later roles can negatively impact on their ability to attain in education. As Mark Penfold explained, schools must communicate with parents to ensure young female students are given time, and an appropriate environment, to study:

“We have a system at school where you do mock exams...and the results come up... I went looking for my crew and I found Laura in floods of tears... she'd failed French, she'd failed maths and she failed art. I went around to the house and I said to mum 'Laura is the oldest in the family isn't she?', 'yes', 'She's coming home she's doing chores and she's looking after the little ones isn't she?' 'yes'.

I said 'That's a problem'... 'I want you to find a quiet space in this house that she uses for the next 6 months, she's off chores when she comes home and she's doing two hours of revision every night.' And she passed, she passed everything. But we had to tell the family how to do it... understand what they don't understand and then help them."

Mark Penfold, teacher and researcher

vii. Early onset adulthood

Furthermore, 'early onset adulthood' – the view that GRT children are seen as adults in their communities at around 12 to 13 years of age – has specific implications for pupils' education: firstly, they are often expected to contribute economically to the family and secondly, pupils may find it difficult to accept the authoritative role of the school when they find themselves treated differently in different realms. This can lead to behavioural issues (Myers, McGee and Bhopal, 2010) as Kathleen Walsh explains:

"One of the things that came up that was quite significant in one of the schools was that when you get to 14 in the school you're still a child but when you get to 14 in the family you're an adult and just the dissonance between the way you're treated in two different contexts was a major thing for them."

Kathleen Walsh, Trustee of the Irish Chaplaincy

3.1.4 Cultural identity

i. Cultural dilution and corruption

A widespread hope that children and young people will continue traditional trades, and a desire to protect young people from mainstream values and culture, can act as barriers to HE progression. This can, in part, be fuelled by fears of cultural dilution and a desire to avoid corrupting the communities' cultural identities. Levinson and Sparkes (2006) suggest that parents experience conflict between these fears that the education system will 'tarnish' their children's behaviour and values and their desire to see their children educated.

Fear of cultural 'dilution' or 'erosion' is driven by a concern that if young people are not educated in the way of their community, or if they leave the community to pursue mainstream education or careers, the community's culture and tradition will not be maintained and passed through future generations (Myers and Bhopal, 2016; Harding, 2013; Levinson, 2007). This is subtly different to fears of cultural identity becoming 'corrupted', which is more likely to arise when mainstream values or culture do not align with the values of GRT communities and are seen as negative or harmful. Therefore, if young people assimilate to mainstream values their cultural identity is damaged (Marks, 2006; Lloyd and McCluskey, 2007; Bhopal and Myers, 2008; Foster and Norton, 2012).

Levinson (2007) highlights GRT families' desire to maintain lifestyles and occupations that are separate from mainstream society and the fear that if young people were to stray from such expectations it would cause 'fragmentation' of families and communities. This places pressure on pupils themselves to reject education, as Levinson explains: "Children seeking to remain at school for longer than the group norm run the risk of jeopardising their Gypsy identities; indeed, opting for work outside the spectrum of normal Gypsy jobs is liable to be viewed as betrayal of heritage."

One Romany Gypsy graduate interviewee explained that this fear extends, or possibly intensifies, when it comes to HE as many parents and young people lack any experience or knowledge of university. They may also hold concerns about the dilution of their culture.

"Imagine that for a lot of people they've never set foot on a university campus and there's a lot of fear; fear that they'll go there and be 'de-gypsified', becoming a 'gaujo' and a fear that people will leave their values and their culture will dry out."

Romany Gypsy graduate

Anxieties are also prevalent among parents and families with regards to interactions with peers at school where the influence of mainstream values and morals are perceived as a threat (Bhopal 2004; DfES, 2003; O'Hanlon and Holmes, 2004). Some GRT parents are concerned that particular elements of the curriculum, especially sex education, and prolonged exposure to non-GRT peers will corrupt their children's cultural identity and values such as chastity (Marks, 2006; Lloyd and McCluskey, 2007; Bhopal and Myers, 2008; Foster and Norton, 2012). This issue is particularly common with female pupils (Levinson and Sparkes, 2006). In our interviews, one Romany Gypsy suggested that Gypsy girls are "very much wrapped up in cotton wool" and teenage girls mixing with boys is not permitted in some cultures. This can, in some cases, lead to girls being withdrawn from secondary education in their early teens, especially if schools are unaware of this culture, as one Romany Gypsy interviewee explained:

"When I was in year 9, so 13, there was an academic mentor at a parent's evening and she was talking to another girl from the community and her dad. The teacher said to her dad, 'but we know you've been hanging around with boys because other girls have told us'. And I don't think it's coincidence that a couple of weeks later, she never came back to school. So it's things like that not to say to people, especially the gypsy girls, one of the things not to say to those girls if you want them to stay in school is 'you've been going around with boys', especially with gaujo boys... the way I was brought up, hanging out with boys was not a thing. There are teachers that have said to me that they would really appreciate training on how to work with the community. Just training on the sensitivity of the culture."

Romany gypsy graduate

Recommendations: Teacher training

Teachers and schools staff lack understanding of GRT culture and values and may be unaware of cultural sensitivities. In particular, the way staff engage with parents over GRT pupils' behaviour may reinforce fears of cultural corruption. Teacher training on cultural sensitivities and effective engagement of GRT communities should be widely available and should be prioritised in schools with a high proportion of GRT pupils.

ii. Cultural identity in HE

Families' fears about a young person's physical safety and cultural identity are likely to intensify when HE is considered as young people may move out of the home into unfamiliar environments. Lisa Galloway explained negative perceptions of mainstream society results in Gypsy and Traveller communities rejecting mainstream further and higher education due to fears of cultural corruption and dilution.

"In mainstream community, especially in this area, we have huge disproportionate issues of drug and alcohol abuse and really significant issues with STIs, plus violence is on the rise, all key issues for young people. GRT families know this and for example one of the families I work with, for the head of that family his absolute chief concern is that young people will be tainted in this system, particularly females, and there is no need for college or university because they have readymade businesses. So there is a concern that if they go [to college or university] will that ancestral life be lost? Will the culture be made into something it shouldn't be, or will that young person move away and what will it mean for the family if that young person leaves?"

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Chris Derrington highlighted that this could be particularly problematic in large cities such as London and the Romany Gypsy graduate we interviewed described how her family was particularly concerned about her leaving for university as she is female.

“I think one of the issues you've got here in London... is that safety and trust is a real key thing with parents and some of the things that came out were that they wouldn't let a child go on a day trip to London because bad things happen there, so you can understand the feeling about children leaving the community to go to the big bad city.”

Chris Derrington, researcher and author

“Also, [there's issues with] living away from home, for girls especially, girls are very cosseted, and the families are very tightly knit...I remember telling my grandad, 'I got into [university]' and his face went right white, for him, thinking about his 18-year-old granddaughter going to live in [a big city], it's a big deal, especially for girls to be going away.”

Romany Gypsy graduate

In summary:

Mobility can be an important barrier to GRT pupils' educational engagement. Regular travel for work or insecurity due to a lack of legal sites pose challenges for both school enrolment and attendance. However, given that attendance is poor despite many families now living in stable, permanent accommodation, it is clear that mobility is not the sole cause of low attendance.

Low literacy levels; language barriers and a limited knowledge of official systems make it hard for GRT families to navigate the education system. This can further limit educational engagement and make it difficult for families and young people to navigate higher education applications.

Finally, a clash between community and school or HE norms, aspirations and expectations can result in ongoing tensions and strain and a sense of an impossible choice. Gendered expectations and fears that young people's cultural identity may be corrupted by mainstream values can also result in GRT pupils being withdrawn from mainstream education. These challenges are likely to continue if a young person progresses to higher education. Fears of cultural dilution increase if the young person is to move away from home and fears that a young person's cultural identity will be corrupted are especially pertinent in relation to universities in large cities.

3.2 Material barriers

Some researchers argue that an excessive focus on cultural barriers as a cause of poor attendance and low educational attainment can lead to 'cultural pathology', with the role of material barriers and discrimination being under-emphasised or even over-looked (Derrington and Kendall, 2003). In this section, we consider the material barriers to GRT pupils' engagement with education: specifically, their access to well-paid and stable employment, good housing and healthcare.

3.2.1 Poverty

There is comparatively little research or data on the extent of poverty experienced by GRT children in the UK. A review of Roma communities across Europe found that on average 60% live below the poverty line as measured in their home country (EU-MIDIS, 2016). Meanwhile the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlight 'low employment' and high rates of poverty among UK Gypsy and Traveller communities (Cemlyn, Greenfields et al. 2009).

Unemployment and insecure employment levels are high in GRT communities. Between 15% and 20% of Gypsy and Traveller adults are unemployed (ESRC, 2013) and many who do work do not have a steady and reliable income. This is due to a number of factors:

- low qualification levels
- a decline in traditional manual occupations
- a preference for self-employment which results in sporadic or insecure employment and periods of time where income is limited (Netto et al. 2011)
- restrictions on the employment of individuals from certain European countries which particularly impact on European Roma (Foster and Norton, 2012)

As a result, GRT families can experience both temporary and more prolonged periods of poverty, further compounded by difficulties navigating the benefits system as highlighted in section 3.1.2 (Foster and Norton, 2012).

Poverty has well-documented impacts on children's mental and physical health and research has consistently linked household poverty to pupils' attainment at school (Knowles, 2015; Shaw et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2017; Gadsby, 2017). Poverty also impacts on families' ability to provide the necessary equipment and resources required for children to attend school (Foster and Norton, 2012). In the case of GRT communities, poverty may also reinforce the expectation that children must contribute economically to the family from around 14 years old which has significant implications for attendance and drop-out rates at secondary school (Derrington and Kendall, 2003).

However, some roundtable attendees expressed concerns that national data on poverty and unemployment in GRT communities presented a "skewed picture". For example, individuals who experience hardship may be disproportionately represented in data as they are more likely to be ascribed or identified when they seek support, whereas families who do not experience poverty may not be ascribed and included in the data. As one English Romany Gypsy explained:

"Those members of our community that tend to come into contact with the Traveller Education Service tend to be those families that have issues that have made them come into contact with them. The academically successful and the 'middle class' (in the gaujo sense, not in our sense because we don't have true distinction in our community) but those that would be recognised as successful, as middle class...I don't think that this literature attempts in any way to understand that picture. It's a skewed picture because these are families that will have been ascribed or somebody has ascribed them for them so we are not seeing the different picture."

English Romany Gypsy parent

Chris Derrington's research found that factors which are unrelated to poverty such as participation in extra-curricular activities and self-confidence were more influential in determining whether children would remain in school. Moreover, participation in extra-curricular activities and confidence could, in some cases, allow pupils to mitigate the difficulties caused by poverty. As Chris explained during our roundtable:

"We also found that the children that did go through and went on to Higher Education were the children that engaged in extra-curricular activities, who had that social capital within the school, who felt that they belonged there and were almost treading a bicultural path where they could be quite comfortable, they had a mixture of gaujo and traveller friends... it wasn't the kids that did the 'passing'... they are quite maladaptive strategies... they were just very confident, strong personalities that were able to do that... a couple came from quite poverty stricken backgrounds who were just very, very confident people who had broken away from what their parents expected, compared to some from affluent families who ended up not following their dreams."

Chris Derrington, researcher and author

3.2.2 Inadequate housing and homelessness

It is estimated that around 25% of the GRT population in the UK are legally homeless. Around 3,000 to 4,000 families live in caravans on unauthorised sites, mostly due to the chronic undersupply of legal, authorised sites. These families face repeated evictions resulting in children moving school unexpectedly (The Traveller Movement, 2014). This can cause substantial disruption to education as well as being damaging to children's physical wellbeing (Lloyd et al. 1999, in Wilkin et al. 2009).

Living conditions on both legal and illegal traveller sites also pose risks to children's educational outcomes (Greenfields and Brindley, 2016). Research has found that up to 50% of legal sites were classified as having 'environmental problems' due to the surrounding area or activities on adjoining land, for example being near to sewage and waste sites, while 18% have evident vermin problems and 10% have amenities judged 'not fit for purpose' (Niner, 2002). The poor health caused by inadequate living conditions, even on legal sites, impacts on GRT pupils' school attendance: illness is the most common reason for absence. Furthermore, high pitch rents and electricity bills charged at a commercial rate exacerbate poverty and force more families into illegal sites, further disrupting education (Netto et al., 2011).

Despite the extensive literature on this topic, there were few references to issues of inadequate housing during our roundtable and interviews. Instead discussions focused more on cultural barriers, discrimination and issues with knowledge and perceptions of HE.

3.2.3 Access to healthcare and special educational needs support

GRT populations have the poorest health outcomes of any ethnic group in the UK including: higher rates of miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death; higher rates of child mortality; higher rates of ongoing health problems, illness and pain, and lower life expectancy (Parry et al., 2004; Richardson et al., 2007; Greenfields and Brindley, 2016). This is likely to be due to a combination of poor living conditions and limited access to healthcare. In turn, this is driven by cultural barriers to navigating the healthcare system and experiences of discrimination within these sorts of systems. Again, this topic was rarely mentioned in our own research and it is important to avoid the assumption that all GRT families live in poverty or have inadequate access to housing and healthcare.

Nevertheless, poor health is a key barrier to pupil attendance and attainment at school. The Traveller Education Service recently found that poor health (largely due to inadequate living standards) was still the primary reason for school absence. Poor health can also delay early child development, meaning that GRT children are less likely to enter education 'school ready' (The Traveller Times, 2014).

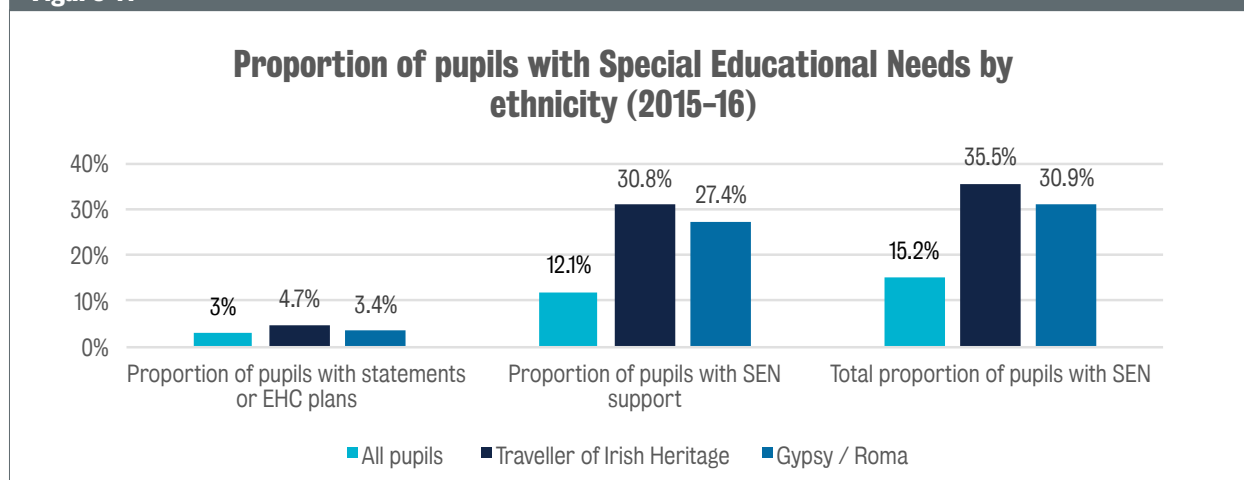
Poor access to healthcare also causes problems when children have special educational needs or disabilities requiring support. GRT pupils are more likely than pupils of any other ethnicity to be identified as having a special educational need or disability (SEND) (see Figure 8) (DfE, 2016h). The literature is unclear about the reasons for this trend, although there is evidence to show that the prevalence of SEND is linked to poverty (Shaw et al., 2016). On the other hand, heightened prevalence of SEND remains even when socio-economic disadvantage and gender, factors associated with rates of SEND, are controlled for (Cemlyn, Greenfields et al., 2009). The high rates of SEND shown in the data may also be due to pupils who experience difficulties, or have special education needs, being more likely to be ascribed as GRT than their peers, as the Romany Gypsy parent who attended our roundtable explained:

“There is no inherent reason why a GRT child, given the same access to education and support systems that non GRT children receive, could not achieve academically. Furthermore, pupils that ascribe, are more likely to be those that have SEN and came to the attention of the TES because they required extra support. Those that are academically able will not need to openly ascribe their ethnicity.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

We must avoid the view, commonly held in Eastern Europe with regard to Roma, that GRT pupils are naturally less able, as this is not the case, however, it is nevertheless important to recognise that support is needed for the large numbers of pupils who do have a SEND need.

Figure 11



Although the proportion of Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils with SEN support is over twice that of all pupils, the difference in the proportion of those with a statement or Education Health Care (EHC) plan⁷ is less marked, though still considerable at 10%-55% higher (3% compared to 4.7% or 3.4%) (see Figure 8). This may suggest that GRT pupils often have low level, rather than severe needs and therefore do not meet the threshold of need required for an EHC plan. Alternatively, it could be that some GRT pupils with severe difficulties do not access the support they require. Where parents are less likely to take a child to a doctor and less able to negotiate the complex SEND statementing system they may be less likely to secure a statement or EHC plan for their child.

Summary:

Poverty has a well-documented negative impact on children and young people’s educational attainment in both compulsory and higher education. Research on the prevalence of child poverty experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups is limited, but unemployment is high in these communities and many individuals prefer self-employment in trades which are in decline. This results in a large proportion of families in these communities having intermittent, sporadic and unreliable income.

As a result of elevated poverty rates, teenagers may need to leave school early to enter paid employment and contribute to the family income. Poverty also causes and exacerbates issues of insecure and unsafe housing: there is a shortage of legal, authorised sites and those that do exist are often poorly maintained and do not provide adequate facilities.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience the poorest health outcomes in the UK and may have difficulty accessing adequate health care. While these material barriers are likely to negatively impact on educational attainment and progression to further or higher education, it is also important to recognise that not all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families experience this disadvantage. Other barriers may therefore play a more important role in hindering these young people’s progression to higher education.

⁷ EHC plans and Statements are both legal documents that identify a child’s SEN needs and focus on the support required to meet agreed outcomes. However, EHC plans go beyond considering the educational elements covered in Statements, to also outline the child’s health and social care needs, outcomes and support (SEN magazine, 2014).

3.3 Discrimination, bullying and self-exclusion

Prejudicial attitudes towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers remain common: between a third and a half of the UK population admit prejudice against these groups. This prejudice is reinforced by negative portrayals of these groups in the media and leads to widespread discrimination. Experiencing discrimination in school can result in self-exclusion or school exclusion where pupils retaliate. Some GRT young people may avoid university due to a fear of continued discrimination and the perception that universities do not address discrimination effectively.

3.3.1 Discrimination and media prejudice

50% of British people admit having an ‘unfavourable view’ of Roma people and 1 in 3 admit personal prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers (Pew Research Centre, 2014; Valentine and McDonald, 2004). In 2004, the chair of the Commission for Race Equality, Sir Trevor Phillips described prejudice and discrimination directed at GRT groups as “the last respectable form of racism” due to the lack of social stigma surrounding prejudice against this group (Foster and Norton, 2012).

Unsurprisingly this widespread prejudice against GRT communities can have a negative impact on children’s schooling. It can also contribute to parents’ motivations to keep their children out of school. Some researchers have suggested that fear of discrimination is the primary reason for Gypsies and Travellers self-excluding from the education system, and that the perception of parents’ disinterest in education conceals a fear of discrimination (Bhopal, 2004).

Prejudice may be reinforced by the media and this can affect parents and pupils’ attitudes toward and experiences of education. UK headlines and popular shows such as ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’ and ‘Gypsy Child Thieves’ (2009) perpetuate negative stereotypes and are symptomatic of the ingrained prejudice against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. During our round table one Romany Gypsy explained the negative impact that ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’ had in Gypsy communities, and how it ultimately undermined efforts to encourage ascription:

“The government has spent a significant amount of funding and resources to get Gypsies to ascribe themselves in the last census and to engage families in schools ...[they] went out there and knocked on doors and said ‘you must ascribe yourselves’. And then my Big Fat Gypsy Wedding happened and all those children that had ascribed were being bullied. My own children were bullied remorselessly. There is a price to ascribing your identity...until we can rein in the media and the press you will not get people like me ascribing themselves because the price is too high.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

Fears of racism and bullying were among the most common concerns held by GRT parents considering whether to send their children to school. Parents who have previously experienced discrimination themselves are more likely to fear that their children will also experience prejudice at school (DfES, 2003; Derrington and Kendall, 2004). During the roundtable, Chris Derrington explained that children’s happiness, which is closely linked to experiences of discrimination, is more influential than mobility or aspirations in parents’ decisions to keep their children in school and HE:

“Although mobility is an important issue we’ve got to look beyond that... and we found essentially that it’s psycho social factors...it’s the overriding thing, even more than the academic aspirations, it’s all about their psycho social wellbeing. As long as the children were happy they would go a long way with it. If the children aren’t happy for whatever reason, if it’s cultural dissonance, racism, feelings of otherness, whatever it is if they are not feeling comfortable or happy in school they won’t get to do their GCSEs and so how are they going to get to university?”

Chris Derrington, researcher and author

A longitudinal study of GRT pupils in schools found that 80% reported having been bullied or called racist names (Derrington and Kendall, 2004) and The Children's Society reported that 63% of young Travellers have been bullied or attacked (Ureche and Franks, 2007). During our interviews with young people, when asked about whether they talk about their background to other people, some revealed that they had experienced racist name calling and discriminatory attitudes.

"[It's] terrible... oh in every way I think, yeah. Um...you know, how people look at us and think threatening and dangerous sometimes... I've heard that someone say that oh you're a traveller, you should be fighting and stuff so..."

Gypsy pupil, age 14

"I always hear jokes about like... I can't remember it now, but, I hear jokes all the time about us and it's just annoying."

Gypsy pupil, age 13

Fear of discrimination may be particularly severe in Roma communities due to their history of persecution and the continued institutional discrimination experienced in Eastern Europe (Penfold, 2016). Estimates of the number of Roma murdered in the Holocaust range between 500,000 and 1,500,000 (Milton, 1991; Hancock 1988) and discriminatory attitudes continue today. Many have suffered recent discrimination in their home countries and in other schools. Memories of mistreatment can exacerbate distrust and make it more difficult to engage Roma parents in the education system. The Roma young people we spoke with often cited discrimination and school segregation as a primary reason their families had emigrated to the UK.

"If I was in school in Slovakia I would be encouraged to go to a special school... I know some parents who have fought against that and said 'why would he go to a special school?' but it's really hard to fight that because as a parent you can't change it... the Slovakian government won't help you and the mayors are really discriminatory, literally racist to you as well."

Ondrej, Roma college pupil, age 18

"We basically moved here because there were no jobs there and the racism... They put all the Roma in one class and the Czech people in one class for every single class, all Roma people are together... it's not like that here."

Roma pupil, age 14

Racist name calling and bullying results in many GRT pupils rejecting school (Kendrick and Bakewell, 1995) and their parents have been found to be reluctant to encourage pupils to attend school if they are unhappy, (Clay, 1999).

3.3.2 Schools' response to discrimination

Research suggests that GRT pupils do not feel that schools address discrimination effectively (Bhopal, 2009; Cudworth, 2008). Of those pupils who reported bullying to researchers, almost two thirds had not reported the incident to staff, nearly half had received punishment following a physical retaliation to bullying and over a third believed that teachers held racist attitudes towards them (Derrington and Kendall, 2004; Bowers, 2004). This view is perhaps reflected in some GRT parents' assertion that their children do not receive the same quality of education or educational provision given to non-GRT pupils, (Bhopal and Myers, 2008).

Lloyd and McCluskey (2008) draw attention to the challenges that schools face in overcoming GRT pupils' fears of prejudice and discrimination: attempts to minimise the sense that these pupils are 'different' may undermine the cultural experience of these children and the discrimination they face.

3.3.3 Self-exclusion from mainstream school

Fear of discrimination or the experience of bullying or racist incidents can prompt parents to take their children out of mainstream schools and home educate them or send them to private schools (Wilkin et al., 2009; Levinson and Sparkes, 2003). This self-exclusion from mainstream schools may act as a barrier to HE progression. In circumstances in which home or private education does not limit HE access itself, it nevertheless highlights how GRT parents and pupils may have to make difficult choices in order to avoid discrimination.

i. Home education

Ivatts (2006) found that Elective Home Education is becoming increasingly popular among GRT families, estimating that between 16% and 35% of home educated children were GRT pupils. Parents may feel this course of action gives them more influence over the curriculum their child will be exposed to, and will reduce the risk of exposure to bullying and discrimination. As Lisa Galloway explained in relation to her own childhood:

“I was perceived as different in secondary education and so I felt isolated, I felt marginalised, I felt I guess bullied...I was then home educated. It wasn't traditional home education whatsoever. I was being educated in terms of business, a lot of what I did was working in the family business but I also must stress I was given incredible access to reading materials, I was doing philosophy at fourteen, reading about psychology and exploring that with my father. I was given an extraordinary opportunity to do both practical business skills and academia.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

However, research has found that appropriate support from Local Authorities is severely lacking (Ivatts, 2006), and barriers discussed earlier in section 3.1.2, such as low parental literacy rates, have raised concerns about whether all parents have the necessary skills to deliver appropriate elective home education. Currently, there are no legal requirements or formal guidelines on how home education should be conducted and parents and carers need no official qualifications to home educate their child. Ivatts concludes by recommending that local authorities monitor and assess home education more closely as well as providing information and clear requirements, such as a clearly defined curriculum, to help support parents.

Myers and Bhopal (2016) found that the success of home education among GRT families was closely linked to each families' own economic and financial success. Those with successful businesses and resources to supplement home education with tutoring felt that they were providing high quality education for their children. Those without these resources expressed frustrations about the cost of tutors and some suggested that their children were 'not being educated' (p.10) but nevertheless avoided mainstream education due to discrimination and the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, (Myers and Bhopal, 2016).

Discussions during our roundtable raised concerns that, in the face of accountability pressures, some schools may be encouraging GRT families to home educate their children. Bhopal et al. (2000) reported similar concerns and found that where schools considered Gypsy and Traveller children to be low performing, (particularly if they were nomadic), they could be reluctant to enrol them. This was driven by a fear of 'consequent slippage in league tables' (Bhopal, 2004, p.4). Mark Penfold called for home education to be abolished for all young people to avoid systematic issues which lead to some schools pressuring families to home educate their children.

“There are systematic issues in the system that mitigate against GRT students achieving... happens all the time. I'm aware of schools that do it with Eastern European Roma and tell them 'you'll avoid the next attendance panel, you won't get a fine if you go for home education' or where a family asks for

home education to avoid prosecution for non-attendance, so then you might have people who couldn't read or write who are going to be responsible for home education. The school has a script to persuade the family to take home education... it's those systematic pressures and those that lose out are the GRT children and that's got to be wrong when it's just about pressure from league tables...and I think the first thing that needs to happen in that home education needs to be abolished."

Mark Penfold, teacher and researcher

Where effective home education is delivered to GRT young people, their academic capability to progress to HE may be unaffected, however, they are less likely to be exposed to school based activities, such as careers guidance and university, open days which inform pupils about HE options. Where home education is not effective it is likely to act as a barrier HE progression.

Recommendations: Supporting effective home education

Where GRT families choose to exercise their right to home educate their children, schools, local authorities and universities must act to ensure home education is delivered effectively and benefits the child or young person.

- Schools must ensure that any recommendations for a pupil to be home educated is driven by the best interests of the child rather than accountability and league table pressures.
- Local authorities must support all parents, including GRT parents, that choose to home educate their children, through effective monitoring and advice to guide parents' education provision.
- Universities must extend outreach and the provision of information, advice and guidance to include parents and pupils that elect home education.

ii. Private Education

Many GRT families choose to privately educate their children. This, as with all families who choose private education, is likely to be due to a range of factors. Some members of the GRT community we spoke to suggested they choose private education as private schools work more flexibly with the family and provide more tailored support for the pupil. A notion of having more input because 'you pay' was key. The showman parent we spoke with also explained that she felt private education was more tailored and individualised which she felt was necessary for children from non-mainstream backgrounds.

"I really valued my private school education... The reason I value it is because they don't put you in a box, they make a box to fit you and as a showman we are not a standard fit."

Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

A Romany Gypsy parent explained that many GRT parents chose private education to escape discrimination and because private schools offer more flexibility in terms of attendance which allows families to make sure their children can attend school, whilst also allowing time for travel.

"I know many Romany Gypsy families whose children were educated at private schools, primarily because they believed they would escape the prejudice and discrimination they themselves encountered at school, and secondly because these schools have a shorter academic year and are often more flexible with holiday and term times and circumventing the attendance regulations than state schools."

English Romany Gypsy parent

Whilst private education is unlikely to be a barrier to university entry itself, and indeed may facilitate it, not all parents can afford this choice, and, the fact that some parents feel the need to make this choice may be symptomatic of discrimination or inflexibility in some mainstream state schools. This, in turn, is one of the factors that make it difficult for GRT children to achieve and progress to HE.

3.3.4 Discrimination and access to higher education

Fear of discrimination is likely to impact on young people's decisions about HE. Our research revealed concerns that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers will face discrimination during university applications and during their time in HE. A Romany Gypsy at our roundtable explained that negative stories about discrimination in universities, via the media or word of mouth, can exacerbate fears of discrimination.

“Part of it is about what the institution will be like when they get there...what it is like and what people think it will be like. Reports in the media of one British university where students held a 'pikey party' and if you heard about that you might think that that was what's going on in all universities. People have told me about being in class where the lecturer himself was negative about 'pikeys' or when other students' comments are not challenged by lecturers.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

Where students do want to apply to university they might be concerned about facing, or indeed may face, discrimination during the application process. This may lead to GRT pupils feeling unable to ascribe their identity during application, or may create a negative impression about the levels of discrimination in HE institutions. The Romany Gypsy graduate we interviewed described how she had been dissuaded by teachers from discussing her Gypsy identity in her personal statement.

“I was drafting my personal statement and I put in a passage about how I wanted to go into [my career] because of the discrimination that the community faced and I wanted to do something about it. But my tutor at college...said 'If I'm honest, I think you should take this passage out.' It wasn't her prejudice but she said 'other people are prejudiced'.”

Romany Gypsy graduate

She also referenced her experiences of discrimination at university and the way this affected her, despite the fact that most of her university experience was positive.

“While I had a fantastic experience at [university] and I'm really pleased I went there... at the same time I did sit in a lecture theatre and have a lecturer make a joke about 'pikeys' and had 200 people around me actually belly laughing while I sat there knowing I'm from that community and actually 'pikey' is derogatory term. It's the fear of things like that, it's one of the reasons that people pull kids out of school and why they are scared of university...so if universities are seriously committed to helping to raise aspiration and attainment they've got to also be making sure that when the kids get there, things like that aren't happening. [That lecturer] probably didn't know it was derogatory... it's just that ignorance, but the flipside of that is maybe he didn't think that in a million years anyone from that community would be sat in his lecture theatre.”

Romany Gypsy graduate

Lisa Galloway highlighted that educational institutions must address this discrimination directly and ensure that prejudice, racism and derogatory language is challenged because it is difficult, when working in these communities, to reassure families in relation to these fears if you cannot be sure that racist incidents or discrimination will not occur.

“It’s very difficult...to reassure families that their most prized young people are not going to be treated badly because how do you promise when you can’t be 100% sure about what might happen? It’s about the attitude you have and what happens at classroom level, also, the confidence to challenge a comment is very important.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Margaret Greenfields highlighted effective practice in her own university where specially appointed ‘Diversity Champions’ mean that students who may fear discrimination understand that staff are available to support them and address any instances of discrimination. Ken Lee explained that a recognition of the historical discrimination and ‘injustice’ inflicted on Aboriginal communities in Australia alongside a ‘massive injection of money’ and a lot of ‘good faith and goodwill’ had allowed the Australian government to make progress addressing the marginalisation of this group. Therefore, a similar approach could work here to address the discrimination faced by GRT groups.

Recommendations: Addressing and eliminating discrimination

The fear and experience of discrimination forms a considerable barrier to GRT groups engaging with HE and this must be addressed. Our research and roundtable discussion identified the following as potential avenues of effective practice to address discrimination:

- Prejudice, derogatory language and discrimination must be directly and explicitly challenged ‘Diversity Champions’ or similar should be appointed to ensure that support is available for students and discrimination is always challenged
- The discrimination faced by GRT groups in the past must be widely recognised and acknowledged as unjust by HE institutions
- The above steps will contribute to a culture where discrimination against GRT groups or individuals is not tolerated which will begin to reassure families and young people considering HE.

In Summary:

Discrimination against GRT groups remains widespread and media depictions of Gypsy and Traveller culture have propagated stereotypes and negative perceptions. The majority of GRT adults and children have experienced bullying or discrimination and fear of or experience of discrimination is a primary cause of parents withdrawing their children from schools.

In some cases, parents may choose to home educate or privately educate their children to mitigate this issue, and a disproportionate number of GRT pupils are home educated. While this may be appropriate and beneficial for some, it is problematic if schools, due to league table pressures, encourage parents who are not able to adequately support their children to educate them at home.

Fear of discrimination or the need to hide their identity to avoid bullying is likely to act as a disincentive to GRT young people considering higher education. Our own research revealed some instances of discrimination in higher education, highlighting the need for universities to address and challenge prejudice and discriminatory comments as a first step to widening participation.

3.4 Barriers to higher education access

In addition to factors that affect pupils throughout their education, there may be additional barriers which prevent GRT young people from progressing to higher education, even when they do leave school with the requisite qualifications. Where research has discussed the specific barriers to GRT young people's access to higher education it has focused mainly to the following factors (Danvers, 2015; CHEER, 2016):

1. the relevance of university curricula to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture;
2. issues of identity, belonging and inclusion;
3. a lack of policy attention and supportive initiatives.

Our roundtable discussions and subsequent interviews and case studies revealed further barriers to higher education participation, including:

4. financial issues and attitudes to debt;
5. perceptions and knowledge of university.

3.4.1 Relevance of higher education

A conference held by The Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) in 2016 encouraged GRT students within HE to share their experiences and the issues they face. These students felt that GRT issues and culture were not present or were even 'silenced' in university curricula leading to feelings of isolation and a view that course content was less relevant to them. Students also highlighted that university staff have extremely limited experience and understanding of GRT culture (CHEER, 2016). The sense of exclusion that GRT students feel within the university learning environment is unlikely to change if staff do not possess a good understanding of the challenges faced by these groups. A lack of understanding may lead to instances of discrimination, as discussed in section 3.3, as well as exclusion of GRT culture from curricula.

Emily Danvers explained that despite some efforts to include students of all backgrounds in university curricula, by discussing marginalised groups, this often did not extend to GRT culture. Improving practice in this area could allow HE institutions to improve inclusivity with a small change.

“The notion of decolonising curricula is a really important debate in higher education. This is essentially the idea that experts on your reading lists and theory modules are western, white males and that’s about it. And I think that it does send really strong messages about who and whose knowledge is included and who isn’t. When we talk about different kinds of marginalisation or the experiences of those with different ethnicities in the classroom, we don’t talk necessarily refer to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. But we should. They have a right to be there. So that’s a space where academics could make real practical changes - in their curricula and in their classroom examples – to think about inclusion in the everyday classroom stuff, as well as the bigger issues of access in the first place”

Emily Danvers, Lecturer and researcher

Some GRT individuals who do enter HE are motivated by a desire to address issues in their communities or more simply, to work in their communities once they set out on their chosen career path. However, Lisa Galloway raised concerns about whether university courses prepare them to do so and furthermore, whether communities are open to working with various professionals. These difficulties can leave GRT students and graduates struggling to fulfil their aspirations once they complete HE:

“Are degrees fit for purpose in giving young people what they need to tread that line [between their communities and culture, and, mainstream culture and communities] a couple of issue with our student are saying they might feel a bit lost about when they get that degree. They’re thinking ‘Where do I go?’

What do I do? I want to be a social worker but I want to take that back into my community but they don't want their privacy invaded so where does that leave me when I want to be working with cultural difference? There are those internal dialogues going on with students themselves not just the family in terms of identity and place in society and we need to address that."

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

3.4.2 Identity and inclusion

Given that pursuing HE remains an extremely unusual choice for GRT young people, the decision to progress to HE can lead to an 'identity clash' and feelings of marginalisation. HE, though representing various forms of opportunity, also represents a new experience of exclusion and marginalisation both in HE institutions and in home communities. This can mean that 'leaving' to study distances individuals from their home communities whilst simultaneously leaving them not fully included in the 'mainstream' cultures of HE and professional employment due to their background. Small scale research focusing on Roma HE students in Europe found that many Roma students experience feelings of 'un-belonging' in both HE and, later, in professional employment (Danvers, Hiton-Smith and Jovanonic, 2016). Roma women were found to face a 'double disadvantage' as becoming educated could lead to rejection from their community and even marriage difficulties.

Promoting individuals from these communities as role models for younger individuals may be one approach to encouraging participation. In time, this could lead to better inclusivity. On the other hand, such an approach could also place extra burden on individuals who already face pressures on their identity from both education institutions and their communities and families. Emily Danvers explains how this is the case with some Roma students she has worked with:

"I worked with the Roma education fund who provide scholarships for HE in Europe...they ask you to self-identify as Roma... which is obviously really positive but also relies on a lot of social and cultural resources to make that happen. Following that what happens is the students talked about feeling a real burden of responsibility that they have to be a shining light of 'romanness' instead of just being themselves. There is a balance to be struck between getting that scholarship and the support that comes along with it, but also that they don't want to be defined by that through any initiative they decide to take up."

Emily Danvers, Lecturer and researcher

Some GRT pupils hide their identity in school and other educational settings; a strategy known as 'passing' (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008; Derrington and Kendall, 2004; Hancock, 1997). There is some evidence that Roma students in Europe adopt this strategy in HE suggesting that hiding their ethnic identity is a necessary condition for inclusion (Danvers, Hiton-Smith and Jovanonic, 2016). Harding (2013) highlighted that 'maladaptive' strategies such as Travellers hiding their identity in order to deal with the cultural dissonance between home and mainstream education had 'detrimental effects on wellbeing' (p. 7). The prospect of hiding their identity is likely to act as a disincentive to many GRT young people considering progressing to HE.

3.4.3 Attitudes to finance and debt

Attending HE incurs a considerable cost both in terms of fees and living costs. While there is very little existing literature on GRT attitudes toward the cost of HE, in our research, knowledge of financial systems and attitudes to debt was consistently revealed a key consideration for GRT families and young people. Four main themes were identified:

- cultural debt aversion
- a lack of knowledge regarding the cost of university and financial support systems

- reluctance to engage with government financial support or loans
- young people's perception that university was highly expensive and in some cases unaffordable

i. Debt aversion

A number of individuals we interviewed, primarily those from Gypsy and Showman backgrounds, highlighted a reluctance to get into debt as a disincentive to university participation. This debt aversion was also consistently linked to the fact that the high cost of university may reinforce the view, among some families, that HE is not valuable in comparison to paid work. This feeling is also likely to be more intense with regard to London based universities as living costs are so high, as a Romany Gypsy interviewee explained:

“If you are talking about incentives, the primary disincentive for coming here is the nine and half grand and the cost of keeping a child in central London. To a community that doesn't necessarily see the value of coming here for that education because we have been economically successful for so long without it, the cost is a huge barrier.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

Individuals from GRT communities who have accessed HE found the issue of cost and debt problematic when they decided to progress to university. One Romany Gypsy graduate explained that her family's debt aversion was so significant that her mother had paid for her tuition outright. However, for families that are unable to do so, especially due to the 2012 increase in tuition fees, incurring large debts is likely to discourage participation.

“There are a few things about university, about university life that are quite difficult to sell to the Gypsy community. Financially, my family's attitude to debt was that we don't have debt, my mum's family, you know, we don't have debt. I'm very lucky, my mum scrimped and saved and sent me and I came out of university with no student debt, but that was on three and a half grand, so imagine gypsy parents who would think it's okay for kids to be getting into, with maintenance as well, 14 grand of debt a year. Debt aversion aside, people don't see the value of mainstream education so 14k of debt a year is not going to incentivise them.”

Romany Gypsy graduate

Debt aversion in relation to university fees was also found to be prevalent in showman communities. However, this reluctance to incur debt specifically for university study was more problematic than incurring debt for resources which would aid traditional business life. As Caroline Wynn explained:

“When I said to my parents, [my daughter] was going to university... I told them it cost a lot of money and I said you can get a loan and over the course it's at least £45,000. My mothers and sisters thought it was crazy. But it's a bit interesting because at 18 most showmen children will get a piece of equipment and most of them will have a loan to pay for it... But that's okay, our logic tells us that that is the thing to do but because it's education and you can't see it then it's not the same. It's just lack of knowledge to understand why you would do this with university just like another person might wonder why you would spend all that money on rides and go round the country with it.”

Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

ii. Lack of knowledge

Both parents and pupils from GRT communities reported that they had limited knowledge regarding the cost of university and the financial support systems available. In some cases, parents sought this knowledge in order to access HE for their children, demonstrating the importance of schools' role in

informing parents, however, it was clear that this knowledge was not part of their cultural capital.

“One of the biggest things is the financial side of it, when [my daughter] said to me she wanted to go to university I had no idea of cost funding or anything, I took myself off to the school and said ‘I need you to give me as much information as you can’ and they did.”

Caroline Wynn, Showman and parent

None of the pupils we spoke to in the focus group appeared to be aware of student loan systems despite being aware that “university is expensive”. The Irish Traveller pupils were particularly surprised that they were able to receive financial support if they did want to go to university.

iii. Reluctance to use government financial support

Beyond debt aversion and a lack of knowledge about the cost of HE, a further issue for some GRT communities accessing financial support to fund HE is a reluctance to use a government system for such a purpose. This is due to both mistrust of the government and a reticence to disclose financial information about parents’ income. An inability to provide official documentation may exacerbate this problem. Lisa Galloway explained:

“Getting into debt is something that's discouraged and when you're talking about getting student finance then you are talking about exploring parent's incomes and that's something that can be a real problem because the levels of privacy... so it can be about not wanting to disclose that and about the perception of debt... they see it as government loan and there can be this issue that they are not supportive of the current government and their attitude to GRT so anything that is seen as state controlled is not seen in a positive way... the families I'm working with do not certainly do not agree with any kind of state imposed loans. Even very basically sometimes just registering income is a problem and young people can't get those loans because there is no proof of income.”

One Romany Gypsy parent expanded on this to explain that some families may be reluctant to use loans because of a culture of self-reliance.

“The communities are adverse to taking government money...They are anti welfare state, taking great pride in their independence and self-reliance.”

English Romany Gypsy parent

iv. Pupils’ perceptions of higher education costs

The Roma pupils we spoke with mentioned the expense of university as problematic and in some cases perceived it as something that ‘people like me’ could not afford. When Roma pupils were asked what they had heard about university, their responses included some concerns about finances.

“That it's hard to get there and it costs lots of money. If you have money you can go, they're rich guys, but if you don't have, if you don't have, you have to be responsible to get your own money.”

Roma pupil, age 14

“I think that Roma people would struggle with the money.”

Roma pupil, age 15

Pupils also had some concerns about the impact of the UK leaving the European Union and how this would impact on the financial support they could access for university.

“It costs a lot as well... and now people are saying that you can't get a loan to go to university because of the thing that's uh, that's happening now because of we're leaving the EU... It makes it more difficult to get into university as well”

Roma pupil, age 13

3.4.4 Perceptions of university

We found that pupils' perceptions of university were a mixture of positive and negative expectations often characterised by fear of social isolation, a preference for modern universities and a positive perception of people that go to university alongside a feeling that it 'wasn't for us'.

Pupils had a range of aspirations for their future careers and some suggested they would like to go to university. Some pupils spoke about how university could improve your life:

“It's a place where you can turn your whole life around, it can change your whole life for the better and you can learn things and you can do more things.”

Roma pupil, age 13

However, pupils also had some negative perceptions of, and misconceptions about, university. For some this was primarily about a fear that university would be too hard or beyond their ability, for example one pupils said it was “too much work” and they weren't sure if they “would be able to do it.”

“You can go to university after college...sometimes I think about it...sometimes I think no...because it's too much work. It depends cos' in university it is hard and you have to learn new things. I'm not sure if I would be able to do it.”

Roma pupil, age 14

“No [I wouldn't go to university]. It's like too far forward for me like it's too much. I'd have to be smarter to go to a place like that...probably a normal college like I would learn it at...I visited [my brother's college], he does construction there. I'll probably just go there.”

Gypsy pupil, age 14

Others believed it would be boring, saying

“To be entirely honest, I'd say it's a bit boring...it's just like I can barely make it through this school, I doubt I'll make it through university for another four two years...like when I'm getting bored out of my mind and sleeping in lessons or something like that.”

Gypsy pupil, age 15

During the discussion of photos, pupil compared and contrasted photos of modern university campuses with photos of older universities such as Cambridge. In each group, pupils were generally more positive towards universities that looked modern and explained “new is better”, despite being impressed by older universities. Pupils' said that older, traditional universities and lecture halls looked “scary” and “like you would just get lost if you were alone”. They also suggested that older universities would be more expensive and you would have to be cleverer to attend them. When looking at pictures of old university buildings, including Cambridge, pupils said:

“The building makes it's look scary, if you go there you might get lost and you might not know what to do.”

Roma pupil, age 14

“I think the teachers might be stricter in that old building because of how it looks.”

Roma pupil, age 13

“That would be harder to get into because it looks so posh...the expectations of you are quite high, you have to be clever.”

Gypsy pupil, age 14

When discussing pictures of busy lecture theatres, some pupils expressed that they would feel nervous or scared.

“You might not be as open and you might be more nervous. Like there are lots of different ages, you wouldn't talk to a man who was like 40 because he is older than you and might know more things and so you might get nervous and say the wrong thing.”

Roma pupil, age 14

“If you said like the wrong thing, people would look at you. They would look like you just killed someone.”

Gypsy pupil, age 13

In one case a pupil who had previously considered university had changed their mind because they would have to be there for “a long time”. For other pupils, concerns about how long they spent in university was linked to a fear of missing out on time that could be spent working.

“It takes time to go to university and the time to me it means nothing really because I just want to get into [work] straight away. There's no point in waiting.”

Roma pupil, age 15

Pupils also had concerns about not knowing anyone and about getting ‘teased’ though it was not clear whether this was general social anxiety or as a specific result of being from a GRT background.

“It looks scary, the building, say it's scary because if you go to university there are all people you don't know there and you have to make friends some people might not like you and might tease you.”

Roma pupil, age 15

As discussed in 3.1.2 talking about HE during our focus groups made some pupils more positive about university and addressed some of their misconceptions. This highlights that the opportunity to ask questions and receive information about HE can impact pupils’ perceptions. The Roma college student we interviewed suggested that Roma pupils do not usually have someone to ask about university. They suggested that pupils’ aspirations would be raised by hearing about the benefits of HE from graduates and that this would be more successful if Roma graduates work with Roma pupils.

“The first thing I would do to encourage Roma to go to university is to explain what it brings, but it would probably have to be a Roma to speak to them. If I saw a Roma who had been to university and then got the job they want and he was happy and motivated in life then that would motivate me more than anything else. Because when people tell us this and that you can't see it but it's much easier for people to believe in what they can see.”

Ondrej, Roma college student, age 18

Recommendations: Information, Advice and Guidance regarding the benefits of HE

Our research with GRT young people found that despite aspiring to do well in education and describing a range of career plans, many young people held misconceptions about HE resulting in very few considering university as an option for them. They also highlighted that few people had ever discussed university with them, with one pupil reporting “no one ever talks about it”.

Schools and HE institutions should ensure GRT pupils are given information, advice and guidance about HE options. Guidance on HE may be more effective if the individual supporting students and providing information was from a GRT background themselves. Role models may raise young people’s aspirations and self-belief (discussed in section 3.1.2) but they also provide a potentially effective method of disseminating information about HE. HE institutions should identify GRT graduates who would consider acting as mentors in schools, and work with LAs/MATs to enable schools to access graduate mentors.

3.4.5 Lack of policy attention

CHEER (The Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research) highlight GRT groups as the ‘UK’s forgotten higher education minority’ and call for a clearer, stronger agenda for tackling this issue (CHEER, 2016). OFFA’s current guidance requires institutions to ‘consider’ targeting underrepresented groups such as ‘students from Gypsy and Traveller communities’ in their Access Agreements (OFFA, 2015 as cited in Danvers, 2015). However, this may not constitute a ‘strong enough impetus’ to affect change (CHEER, 2016). Lisa Galloway echoed this as she suggested that weak and tokenistic policies are insufficient to deal with the disadvantages faced by people from Gypsy and Traveller communities. She also highlighted that communities may not be aware of policies designed to support them or promote their inclusion in HE and that even when they are aware, such policies may not address the fact that they do not value mainstream education.

“There is a lack of understanding sometimes when it comes to policy in the thinking that it can solve everything and that if there is a policy of inclusion it automatically ‘includes’. It doesn’t. While it’s important that we get policies right, if we assume that the families know anything about that institutional policy and university’s policies then we are kidding ourselves. So it’s about how we implement and negotiate with the families and bring out real lived experiences. We also have to accept the views of some families who do not want their children to come into mainstream education, we have to acknowledge that we do very little to support those young people, what we deem as good education is not always the right education for all children.”

Lisa Galloway, researcher, Irish Traveller heritage

Moreover, our roundtable discussion highlighted that while educationalists and practitioners working with GRT communities are supportive of policies that will widen participation, current cuts to funding and services in other areas are likely to undermine the value of any such initiatives. In 2008, the ring fencing of the traveller achievement grant was removed and funding was absorbed into non-specific ‘Area Based Grants’. The loss of this specific funding, alongside wider cuts to public spending in recent years has reduced the national network of Traveller Education Services by half (Themelis and Foster, 2013). Head teacher Steve Ellison expressed concern about cuts to services which currently support vulnerable pupils:

“There is a danger that as things like extra-curriculars, and things like careers guidance decline in

school, we all know that it's pupils from the most vulnerable backgrounds that will be most affected by those cuts that's my worry in a lot of this. Will we be pushing doors further closed?"

Steve Ellison, Executive head teacher

In Summary:

Research on the barriers to HE access faced GRT young people has focused on:

- The relevance of university curricula
- Issues of identity, belonging and inclusion
- A lack of policy attention and support initiatives

Our own research found the following to act as further barriers to GRT access to HE:

- Financial issues and attitudes to debt
- Pupils' perceptions and knowledge of HE

University curricula

GRT students often feel that GRT issues and culture are absent from or 'silenced' in university curricula, despite efforts to include and discuss other marginalised groups. This issue is likely to pose a greater barrier to potential GRT students who want to study with the aim of later working in their community as a curriculum that does not acknowledge GRT culture is unlikely to prepare them to do so.

Identity, inclusion and belonging

GRT students are likely to be in a small minority in most HE institutions. This can lead to feelings of isolation and identity clash, or the need to hide their ethnicity, and the prospect of this acts as a disincentive for GRT young people considering accessing HE. Where students access HE, despite these issues, they may become isolated from their home community and would therefore be in need of additional support from their university. Whilst GRT students or graduates could act as role models to support prospective students, it is important to avoid placing extra pressure on those current students who may be experiencing identity issues.

Financial considerations and attitudes to debt

We found that the cost of HE and the prospect of needing student finance support could act as a barrier to GRT young people accessing HE. The following attitudes and perceptions were important:

- Cultural debt aversion
- A lack of knowledge regarding the cost of HE and the available finance support
- A reluctance to use official government financial support or loans
- A perception among young people that university is expensive and perhaps unaffordable

Pupils' perceptions of HE

Despite pupils' understanding that university could be a positive and beneficial experience, few aspired to go themselves. Furthermore, some pupils held misconceptions or negative perceptions of university. Some pupils felt that university would be 'boring', 'too much work' and would 'take a long time'. Pupils had differing attitudes to pictures of modern and old universities and tended to

describe older universities as 'strict', 'expensive' and 'scary'. However, during the focus groups, pupils became more interested in, and more positive about, university, highlighting the need for GRT pupils to talk about and be informed about HE.

Policy attention

CHEER suggest that GRT groups are the 'UK's forgotten HE minority' and current guidelines requesting that HE institutions 'consider' targeting underrepresented groups such as GRT do not provide a 'strong enough impetus' to galvanise action (CHEER, 2016). Our own research also highlighted that even when policies are in place, they will not promote inclusion if initiatives are 'tokenistic' or if the GRT community is not aware of these policies. Furthermore, wider policy influences such as cuts to public spending are likely to undermine efforts to widen participation. Therefore, the under representation of GRT groups in HE must be considered in the context of national and institutional policy.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are significantly underrepresented in higher education. In 2014, only 3 to 4% of the GRT population aged 18 to 30 accessed higher education, compared to 43% of the same age group in the general population (Danvers, 2015). The numbers of GRT young people attending HE are staggeringly small with only 200 Gypsies and Travellers registered in the student population in 2015/16 and no option for 'Roma' students to accurately ascribe themselves.

4.1 Barriers to educational success at school

GRT pupils have the lowest attainment in compulsory schooling of all ethnic groups. Poor attainment in school gradually reduces a young person HE options and barriers to educational attainment in school are likely to intensify in relation to HE. Therefore, to understand and address underrepresentation in HE it is necessary to explore barriers to school success as well as specific barriers to HE access.

i. Cultural barriers

Cultural differences in values, norms and lifestyle act as a barrier to GRT families' engagement with mainstream schooling and HE. Travel for work or forced evictions due to inadequate legal site provision make enrolment and regular attendance at school problematic. The requirement to remain in one place for an extended period during university study may act as a barrier to HE access for young people who wish to maintain a mobile lifestyle.

GRT cultural norms, aspirations and expectations differ from those in mainstream culture. Although GRT families value education, mainstream schooling and HE may not be considered effective preparation for young people to fulfil traditional, sometimes gender specific, expectations and swift entry to paid employment is often prioritised. Families may discourage HE options due to fears that mainstream education, including HE, will dilute or corrupt young people's cultural identity.

Finally, language barriers and a lack of experience with official systems creates significant barriers to GRT families' engagement with schools. Low literacy levels amongst the parents of GRT pupils may also reduce their ability to engage with schools and HE institutions.

ii. Material barriers

Poverty, insecure housing and inadequate living conditions negatively impact children and young peoples' physical and mental wellbeing and their subsequent attainment in education. Poverty may also act as an incentive for adolescents to enter work at a young age to contribute to family income. Poverty therefore limits GRT young peoples' aspirations to access HE. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers also experience the poorest health outcomes in the UK and children have disproportionate rates of special educational needs. Both factors are likely to act as a barrier to educational success in school and HE.

iii. Discrimination

Prejudicial attitudes and instances of discrimination against GRT communities and individuals remain widespread and common. Fear of discrimination and bullying is the mostly commonly stated reason for withdrawing a child from school. Many families seek alternative education through home education or private education to reduce the likelihood of children and young people facing discrimination and

bullying. Discrimination may also be present in HE with some families and schools believing that prejudice against GRT groups could affect application processes. The motivation to protect young people from experiencing discrimination, especially whilst living away from their families acts a significant barrier to entering HE.

4.2 Barriers to higher education access

Limited existing research combined with our own findings suggests five factors that specifically reduce GRT young people's access to HE, including:

- The limited relevance of HE curricula to GRT culture and a scepticism among GRT young people that HE study will prepare them adequately for paid employment, particularly employment based with the GRT community
- A lack of recognition of GRT culture in HE, and fears amongst GRT young people that their identities will not be respected and that they do not 'belong' on campus
- Concerns that HE does not offer a solid return on financial investment as well as cultural debt aversion
- Perceptions among GRT pupils that HE study is not engaging or is beyond their ability
- A lack of policy attention and initiatives aimed at addressing barriers and increasing participation.

4.3 Recommendations

Our findings highlighted several avenues to pursue in overcoming the barriers explored in this report and both schools and universities have an important role to play.

4.3.1 Recommendations to schools

Addressing and eliminating discrimination

Schools must address discrimination by ensuring that:

- The discrimination and prejudice towards GRT groups is acknowledged, and publicly stated to be unacceptable
- Prejudice, derogatory language and discrimination must be directly and explicitly challenged by all members of staff at all levels
- To avoid pupils retaliating to bullying, schools must encourage pupils to report incidents to staff and respond appropriately when pupils do so.

Encouraging ascription

Schools' admissions procedures (whether in-year or during enrolment) should include processes to encourage ascription. When schools enrol new pupils, they should have open, honest conversations with parents about ethnicity and ascription, reassure parents that their children will not be subject to discrimination and build relationships with families.

The school censuses should include appropriate categories for GRT people to ascribe to. This will require expanding the total number of categories available and ensuring that certain terms e.g. 'Roma' and 'Gypsy' are not combined.

Early school based information, advice and guidance in primary and secondary schools

Both primary and secondary schools should talk to pupils and parents about HE options on a regular basis. In primary schools these conversations may focus on general information, discussions about careers and further study including HE, and broadening aspirations. Secondary schools should then provide specific, detailed information about universities and progression to HE and should begin these activities when pupils join the school in year 7, rather than waiting until year 9 or 10.

Information, advice and guidance schools should be tailored to GRT families' specific concerns which may sometimes differ from other parents' concerns.

High teacher expectations

As well as providing information about HE to all pupils and families, teachers and school leaders should ensure that they hold and promote high aspirations and expectations for all.

Supporting effective home education

Schools should end the practice of encouraging home education where it is not in the best interest of the pupil and the parents. These decisions and recommendations should not be influenced by school based accountability pressures.

Schools should provide support to families who choose home education during the transition from school to home.

Teacher training

Schools with GRT pupils should ensure that at least one senior member of staff receives training and CPD that increases their understanding of GRT culture, norms and values. Their learning should then be disseminated internally to all staff members and embedded in school policy and practice.

Schools should ensure that classroom teachers and support staff are trained to communicate sensitively with GRT parents.

Engaging and informing pupils and families

Schools should ensure they engage and inform any GRT families who are deemed "hard to reach" for example, by translating resources and working with experts and specialist services such as The Traveller Education Service. This information should include general information about school processes and ways to support pupils, but must also recognise previous experiences of discrimination and reassure families that any instances of discrimination will be addressed and dealt with appropriately.

Information from schools should also reference university progression and direct pupils and parents to sources of more detail information provided by HE institutions (see section 4.3.2).

4.3.2 Recommendations to HE institutions

Addressing and eliminating discrimination

- HE institutions must address discrimination by ensuring that:
 - The discrimination and prejudice towards GRT groups must be recognised and acknowledged, and deemed unacceptable
 - Admissions and applications processes should be reviewed to ensure they do not discriminate against GRT applicants
 - Prejudice, derogatory language and discrimination must be directly and explicitly challenged by all members of staff at all levels
 - 'Diversity Champions' or similar should be appointed to ensure that support is available for students and discrimination is always challenged

Encouraging ascription

- HE institutions should have conversations with students and families about ascription during open days, visits, welcome talks or student orientation. Where possible they should build relationships with families before asking them to ascribe/identify their ethnicity.

- UCAS and other university forms should include appropriate categories for GRT people to ascribe to. This will require expanding the total number of categories available and ensuring that certain terms e.g. ‘Roma’ and ‘Gypsy’ are not combined.

Early, primary school based intervention and outreach

- HE outreach initiatives, both those aimed at families and pupils, and those aimed at raising aspirations or providing information, should focus more on primary school level.
- Universities should identify GRT graduate role models who may be able to provide mentoring in schools.

Supporting effective home education

- Where families choose home education, a concerted effort between schools, local authorities and HE institutions is needed to ensure that parents are supported to deliver effective home education and pupils are given access to HE outreach initiatives.
- Widening Participation teams should actively target pupils who are home educated to ensure they are included in outreach which seeks to promote HE and inform pupils about their future options.

Staff training

- University staff should receive training to help them understand which groups and ethnicities the term ‘GRT’ refers to and how these groups’ culture and experiences impact on their perception of HE.
- Teaching staff should include GRT issues and culture in curricula, where relevant.
- Widening participation teams should understand the barriers to HE access faced by GRT groups in order to better address these issue in their policies.
- Admissions staff must be trained to recognise any conscious or unconscious prejudice against GRT applicants to ensure GRT applicants are treated fairly.

Information, advice and guidance for pupils and families

- Outreach initiatives and mentors should aim to disseminate information to ensure that GRT pupils and families are well informed about university.
- As with schools, universities must engage and inform any GRT families who are deemed “hard to reach”. Information that explains HE and its potential benefits should be translated where necessary and universities should work with specialist organisations such as ACERT and The Traveller Education service to disseminate these resources to GRT families.
- Outreach initiatives should inform parents about financial support and loan systems, as well as anti-discrimination and inclusion practice and the pastoral support offered to students at university.

Distance Learning

- HE institutions should promote distance learning as a flexible HE option for GRT students. They should ensure that distance learning students are adequately supported in terms of their access to technology and their contact with and inclusion in the university community.

4.3.3 Recommendations for future research

Larger scale research

- There is limited research focusing on GRT groups access to HE. Though this report has contributed to the research base, and crucially, includes the voice of experts and practitioners working with GRT communities and individuals from the communities, there is an urgent need for further research. Future research should seek to include input from these groups but should work with larger numbers of GRT community members and parents to add to the research base and further interrogate the findings of this report.

- Quantitative research and longitudinal studies should be undertaken as these would make a valuable contribution to current research.

Beyond access

- This report has focused on the issue of access, however, we recognise the important role of widening participation practice in ensuring that students are supported and successful in HE. Therefore, as research and access initiatives move towards including GRT groups in HE, research should go on to consider which factors improve GRT student success in HE.
- European research on Roma students in higher education could offer insights that help improve support for GRT students in the UK.

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This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' **LKMco**. We believe society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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