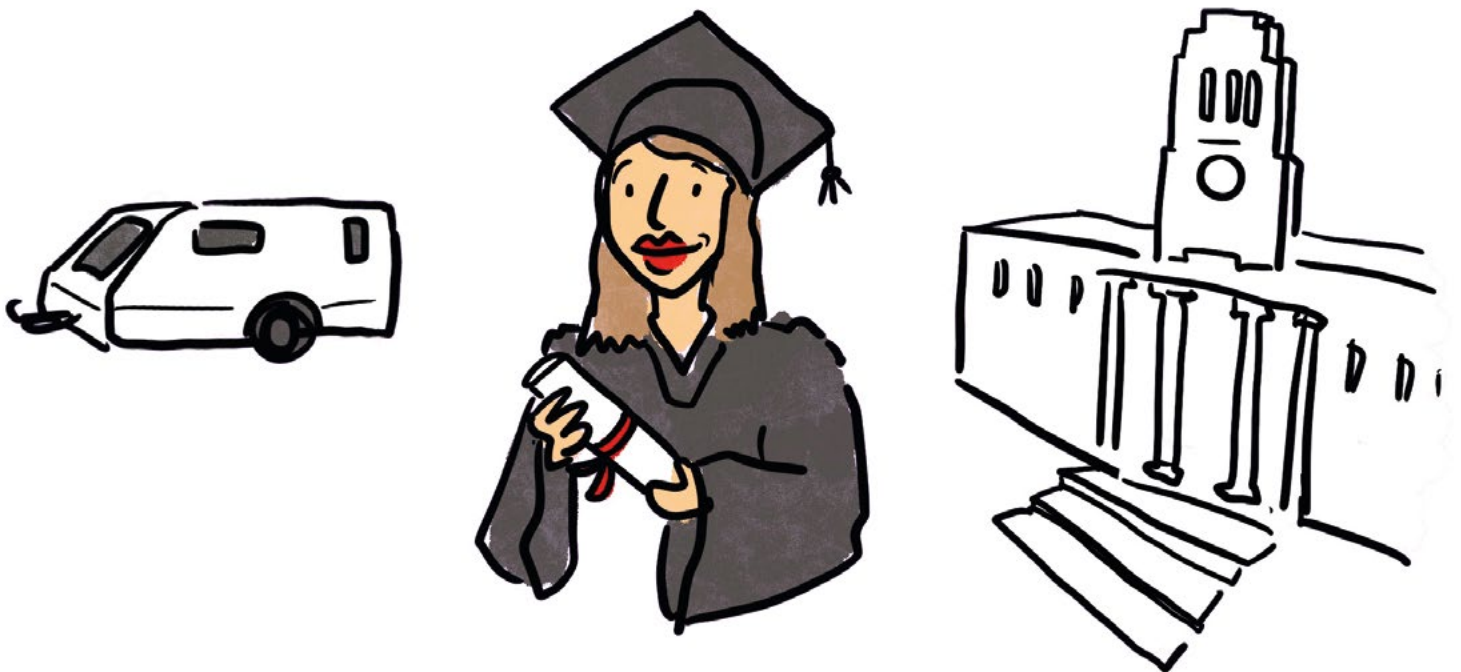




Higher Education Opportunities for Gypsy Roma Traveller Young People in West Yorkshire





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Foreword

Awareness of the inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in the UK has been growing exponentially in the last couple of years, albeit from a poor starting point. This is particularly true in the higher education (HE) sector, within which attention on GRT educational outcomes and access to HE is currently under the spotlight. Students from GRT backgrounds have been designated a high priority under-represented group by the Office for Students, with around 30% of HE providers referencing GRT students within their 2021-25 Access and Participation Plan.

This increased visibility of GRT students is largely thanks to dedicated individuals in the sector working hard to ensure this previously overlooked community is firmly on the policy agenda. One of those individuals is Professor Margaret Greenfields who, along with collaborating colleagues, has pioneered the [GTRSB into HE Pledge](#), which launched in 2020. Margaret has a longstanding academic career researching the experiences of GRT communities; Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) was therefore delighted to commission her and a richly diverse research team to investigate the educational landscape for GRT learners in West Yorkshire.

GHWY's keen interest in learners from GRT backgrounds and their educational experiences has largely grown out of utilising Uni Connect resources for this under-represented group, working closely with one local school in particular with high numbers of Roma pupils. This research, therefore, was designed to complement our emerging learner engagement and provide us with detailed contextual insight about these learners. We sought to develop a better understanding of their experiences and needs, existing support mechanisms and whereabouts in our region they tend to be located.

The research team brought together by Margaret was exceptionally well placed to deliver these goals. Consisting of academics working in multiple HE settings as well as representatives from specialist local and national community organisations, the team has generated rich community insight, all the while conducted in highly challenging (Covid-19) circumstances. The research has been a truly collaborative endeavour (which sits at the heart of GHWY principles) and we are delighted with the resulting outputs.

The full report is highly detailed and puts voices from the GRT community at its centre, echoing the community engagement approach to the research fieldwork itself. It's uncomfortable (but very necessary) reading at times, presenting learners' experiences of racism in schools. However, the report also illuminates the findings of bright, ambitious and reflective young people from GRT communities, as well as many professionals' interest in helping them achieve their potential. As well as an exploration of the barriers to HE, the report presents important strategic gaps, including the need for collaboration and improved data monitoring. A distinct summary report is available for readers seeking a quick overview, but a deep dive into the full report is recommended for readers wishing to develop an in-depth insight into the findings and context behind the recommendations.

In the intervening period since the research was commissioned, and indeed even since findings were initially presented to local stakeholders, huge strides have been made nationally and locally. 11 HE providers have already signed up to the GTRSB into HE Pledge, with many more pledges in progress. Evidence is continuing to grow, through parliamentary call for evidence as well as the publication of the [Sir John Cass Foundation's insightful data analysis report](#) in late 2020. Locally, GHWY is proud to have already acted upon specific recommendations in our report, most notably through our development of a GRT network forum in collaboration with local community organisation, Leeds GATE. We are committed to continuing this progress for our GRT communities, HE partners and wider local area as our knowledge and experience in this area of work grows.

Huge thanks must go to the whole research team, including Margaret (formerly of Buckinghamshire New University and now of Anglia Ruskin University), Sherrie Smith (Buckinghamshire New University), Dr Natalie Forster (Northumbria University), Prof Graeme Atherton (Director of [NEON](#)), Lisa Smith ([ACERT](#)) and of course all the team at [Leeds GATE](#). Further thanks go to my dedicated colleague at GHWY, Janet Brown, who has put many hours into editing the report to get it ready for publication.

I hope you enjoy reading the report and find many useful insights within it. If you would like to discuss the research further, including bespoke dissemination opportunities, you can reach the GHWY Data, Evaluation and Impact team by contacting ghwy@leeds.ac.uk.

Natalie Aldridge

GHWY Data, Evaluation and Impact Manager

A note from Helen Sykes, Manager of GHWY

Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) is a genuine and equal partnership between a diverse group of Higher Education (HE) providers who are united in their desire to understand and reduce inequalities in access to, success in and progression from HE. Across our member institutions we have a huge range of subjects and specialisms, qualification types, modes of study, learning environments and resources; we do not privilege a particular kind of HE and want to support individuals to make an informed choice about their own future.

Our member institutions are all themselves committed to reducing their own inequalities and all undertake their own activity to achieve this. Where GHWY adds value to their work is through the range of connections that we can enable and support – that includes connections across our institutions, but also with external stakeholders. In our partnership, we see in practice that a diverse range of voices and perspectives is what is required to make us more effective and impactful, and the research activities that we undertake help us to increase that range of voices that we not just hear but actively listen to and incorporate into our practice.

As an organisation, our institutional ethos is that we work with and alongside communities so that we can better understand their contexts and their needs. If we are going to have a genuine and lasting positive impact through our work, and effectively reduce inequalities in access to, success in and progression from HE, it's up to us to reflect on and challenge our assumptions so that we can better serve a more diverse group of students and prospective students. Our commissioned research activities present an excellent opportunity for us to do this.

My thanks to Natalie, Janet and GHWY's Data, Evaluation and Impact Team for their commitment to, and passion for, ensuring that as a collective, we listen to and properly hear as wide a range of voices as possible.



Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research project commissioned by Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) which set out to understand the barriers and enablers to Higher Education access, success and progression for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) young people in West Yorkshire. The report has been co-produced¹ by a consortium including academic partners, community members and education experts (see Appendix 4). The report has been commissioned in order to inform both outreach and support activity undertaken by GHWY and to support the emergent evidence base on GRT experience in HE which is under development at a national level.

This report consists of:

- an outline of the aims and research questions underpinning this study,
- a discussion on the multi-factorial research methods used to support this study
- an illustrative literature review of the key issues impacting rates of higher education participation amongst the GRT communities nationally (which can be extrapolated to West Yorkshire)
- Survey data on demographics of GRT pupils in schools, and university's WP engagement (or plans) to work with the communities, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and average number of participants of each educational establishment/agency responding to the survey
- Empirical qualitative data (disaggregated by ethnicity of communities, where possible) on barriers and solutions to HE participation in the West Yorkshire area.

The qualitative data gathered via interviews, focus groups and interactive workshops focuses on the perceptions both of young people from the diverse GRT communities in West Yorkshire, and educational professionals working with young people in the locality in order to map and understand the pathways to higher education, and more general educational and social terrain impacting the expectations and opportunities of engaging with HE providers (HEPs) for GRT youth.

¹ Although we discuss the methodologies used to produce this study later in this report, we utilise the terminology of co-production to broadly define research which is based upon principles of collaboration and empowerment, where academic partners work in partnership with communities, mutually sharing knowledge and strengths, learning from each other to jointly devise knowledge and solutions to pressing issues which impact communities of interest (see further, Durose, et. al., 2012).



The report concludes with a number of policy and practice recommendations to enhance GRT young people's engagement with education and to strengthen collaborations between communities, NGOs and HEPs in the study location.

Project Aims and Research Questions

This report sets out to address the following research questions, as outlined in the research brief:

1. What do GRT communities look like within West Yorkshire and its educational landscape (i.e. how are they comprised, where are they located, and which schools do young people from these communities attend)?
2. What are the potential barriers to HE progression for these young people and how might HE providers address these?
3. When GRT young people do go on to Further and Higher Education, what is their experience of these institutions and how might that intersect with their individual and/or cultural identities?
4. Do young people from these communities self-identify as GRT in educational contexts, and if not, why not?
5. What kinds of educational practice are at play within GRT communities, and how might pedagogical strategies within HE be developed to be more inclusive?
6. How can pre-entry activity support the retention and success of these young people when they do progress to Higher Education?
7. How has Covid-19 impacted GRT communities' access to education and have their needs changed because of this?
8. What understanding do GRT young people have of their future educational options and choices?

Covid Impacts/Challenges to Undertaking the Research

Almost inevitably, given the context in which the team were working, the research was delayed and impacted by the pandemic. Despite the researchers' best efforts and considerable attempts to reach out to participants (potential survey respondents from statutory agencies, schools, colleges, universities and NGOs as well as young people); engagement proved very difficult and subject to considerable delays or last minute postponements or cancellations. Education staff experienced unprecedented challenges in their working lives, and many young people were disengaged even from youth activities which they previously attended on a regular basis, with both professionals and young people impacted by multiple stressors including bereavements, poor IT access and caring responsibilities.

Indeed data collection was only possible as a result of the strength of networks and trust generated by Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community partners, and predominantly obtained access to professionals who were already working with Go Higher West Yorkshire, the National Education Opportunities Network or who were members of special interest groups who agreed to disseminate information for the research team.

Accordingly this report has been unable to thoroughly address all aspects of the research questions.

Nevertheless, the findings are robust and valid and substantially endorse and replicate knowledge gained from literature, research or community outreach activities undertaken by the research team in other localities, albeit in the current case with a clear West Yorkshire focus. Undertaking this research has moreover generated considerable local interest in the study and forms the ground-work for local networks of practice, such as is proposed in the penultimate section of this report (policy and practice recommendations).

Methods and underpinning philosophy of the research

As a consortium of academics, educational policy specialists and community activists the research team have foregrounded in the methodological approach a commitment to enhancing collaborative opportunities and knowledge exchange between research partners as well as wider stakeholders/commissioners e.g. GHWY and individual universities/UniConnect networks. Accordingly, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and co-production techniques have been utilised to guide all aspects of the study, enabling a 'virtuous learning cycle' which enhances knowledge development and upskilling of all partners and research recipients in line with the consortium's ethical commitment to power sharing (AHRC/Durham Community Research Team, 2014). This approach is underpinned by principles of equity, empowerment, enhancing agency, inclusion, and full partnership in the design and operationalisation of the study, including in data ownership, production of outcomes and dissemination of findings and recommendations. Such a philosophical underpinning also emphasises the importance of 'action' and change arising from findings.

The study has throughout utilised a combination of methodological approaches (detailed below) which have been flexed and operationalised as required to meet the challenges of research in the context of the Covid pandemic. In keeping with the principles of PAR/co-production, participants (in this case members and representatives of GRT community members) have actively shaped the process and collaborated as equal partners on outcomes of the study (Greenfields and Ryder, 2012). Such a model also emphasises the importance of reflexivity and flexibility in the precise data collection techniques and questions used (aligned throughout to the ethics approval granted for this project).

In turn, this approach is designed to strengthen and sustain longitudinal relationships between the commissioning agency (GHWY), GHWY's partner HE providers, and specialist NGOs: Leeds GATE and ACERT so as to support future work with, and in support of, GRT young people in the local study area. This mode of practice is fully aligned to the underpinning values of the GRTintoHE network of practice² (co-convened by Greenfields and Smith) which explicitly layers, calibrates and triangulates

findings and requests from NGOs, GRT community member graduates, and universities engaged with GRT students, to formulate a localised model of engagement (Greenfields and Smith, 2020). Thus when future widening participation and access activities are developed following delivery of this research report, the recommendations speak to local need and knowledge, availability of local assets and GRT community demographics; so as to incrementally increase the knowledge base of commissioners, academic and policy/NGOs partners, for the benefit of local young GRT people.

A participatory action, co-production approach to knowledge generation is particularly appropriate given the collaborative and applied nature of the project, which has brought together GRT community members, HE providers, civil society organisations and widening participation specialists. Indeed at the time of writing we are aware that LeedsGATE has, as a direct result of publicity and networks generated by this programme of activity, already experienced increased rates of enquiries and engagement from West Yorkshire HEPs and FE colleges as well as experienced an increase in enquiries from schools,

community groups and academics enquiring about the services they deliver and potential to support in-reach activities to young GRT people. Presentations on interim findings from this study at a GHWY event (May 2021) and a national conference on supporting GTRSB students (June 2021) provided a further opportunity for gleaning practice based information and validation of findings and recommendations which fed back into this report.³

Accordingly the action-oriented nature of PAR, supported by the specialist local knowledge of LeedsGATE and underpinned by ACERT's expertise in school (and out of school) based educational engagement, ensures that the project is not simply generating abstract recommendations for practice, but continues the initial exploratory processes commenced during this study, to as to reflect on and implement activities to engage GRT young people in conversations around education (for example, through the traction afforded by the pre-existing Leeds GATE youth group activities). Thus the model contributes real-time insights to support GHWYs ongoing work to develop HE outreach for GRT families, whilst aiming to create a lasting impact by further strengthening partnerships between HEPs and GRT community members and organisations in the area.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Northumbria University in October 2020 (Reference 120.2081) in line with standard academic procedures, with the application supported by staff from Buckinghamshire New University and input from community partners in relation to design of topic guides, recruitment materials, etc. Approval was then also subsequently checked and noted as approved and adequate for the purposes of this study, by Buckinghamshire New University's Research and Enterprise Department Unit.

Methodological Phases:

Underpinning Literature Review

A brief literature review which considered recent (and older, pertinent) literature pertaining to school experiences of GRT pupils, pathways to FE and HE, national level data on school progression and Key Stage outcomes was undertaken, led by team members from ACERT, to underpin the empirical data gathered in concurrent and subsequent elements of the study.

Scoping HE outreach provision for GRT young people

In order to assist GHWY in their objective of reviewing the opportunities and outreach currently provided to young people in the study area, we set out to scope the demographics of the resident GRT communities and existing activities aimed at promoting HE access and participation for GRT young people in West Yorkshire.

In the context of this project we focused on young people between the age of 14-25, to enable us to capture the experiences of both young people of secondary school age and young people who may consider access to FE and HE as mature learners. The upper parameter was consistent with the tendency for many young GRT students to leave school early – or to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at age 16 – but to then potentially access educational support and advice through NGOs leading to consideration of educational opportunities in their early 20s (Greenfields, 2019b; Atherton, 2020; Mulcahy et al. 2017, Forster and Gallagher 2020). Inclusion of this wider age range thus enabled capture of whole educational journeys and the role of diverse agencies engaged in widening participation and access. Indeed in two focus groups, which took place in LeedsGATE, the presence of further and higher education experienced staff members who were slightly outside of the designated upper age assisted in generating dialogue with young people on 'return to education' as mature students.

This element of the research involved a number of activities, e.g. reviewing the limited number of reports and grey literature pertinent to the locality/study area, and also drawing on the introductions made between the team and GHWY network members and seeking engagement with local educational authorities and other relevant stakeholders such as GRT liaison officers or NGOs who were then invited to cascade information about the study to their contacts and share their experiences with the research team.

Named individuals/agencies who were sent the survey were accessed via a variety of methods (e.g. through GHWY, ACERT, LeedsGATE and NEON networks and known contacts, as well via the auspices of specialist NGOs such as the Roma Support Group in London, the largest and oldest such organisation in the UK who hold a list of relevant national contacts including in West Yorkshire). Further outreach was attempted through the

² Jiscmail list: GTRSBINTOHE@JISMAIL.AC.UK see further: <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge> (see 'the network' at this page)

³ Further, in July 2021 as the report was being finalised the research team presented these findings at a Go Higher West Yorkshire specially convened interactive workshop enabling a further round of exploratory discussions and input from education professionals from schools, colleges and universities in the West Yorkshire area who are working with, or hope to work with GTRSB young people.



GTRSBintoHE online network who were asked to disseminate information to their contacts. Initial outreach was undertaken by email, followed up by phone calls where no response was received. In addition LeedsGATE colleagues recorded two short videos inviting participation by both education stakeholders and community members in the study, and these recordings were disseminated widely via Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets.

Recipients of information about the study were invited to complete and share an online survey with contacts in the study area, with a particular focus on accessing relevant secondary schools (e.g. those which return an identifiable number of self-declared GRT pupils in the school census or where NGOs are aware of a body of GRT pupils), FE and HE providers, as well as relevant civil sector organisations in the region.

The online survey was designed so as to ensure that respondents could select pertinent questions tailored to their organisation but which included questions on: key contextual characteristics of organisations (e.g. type of school/service provider); demographics of student/service-user populations; and current and planned widening participation activities (if any) targeted toward GRT families, as well as asking for examples of good practice and selection from a drop down menu (including scope for 'write in text') on key challenges and suggested improvements for future provision. Respondents to the survey were also asked if they would be willing to be approached for inclusion in subsequent interviews or focus groups.

Although the survey was distributed to a large number of potential respondents, there was a low response rate. Accordingly, the findings from the 14 useable survey responses can only

provide an indicative response to student/pupil numbers and trends within the study area. From discussions in follow-up interviews and with a range of stakeholders, and in workshops with diverse participants at the follow up report launch event in July 2021, we however have a relatively high degree of confidence that the findings are valid and reflect local conditions and trends.

The online questionnaire was shared via email with all secondary schools, colleges and universities in the region and GHWY network members were additionally notified of the survey in addition to the more 'generic' approaches made to individuals in identified pertinent roles (n=40). Where possible, named individuals were identified and approached to encourage their engagement. As noted above under methodologies, email were sent and follow up phone calls made to institutions to encourage responses.

Four of the 14 professionals who responded to the questionnaire agreed to participate in interviews although in practice we were only able to access three respondents for follow-up interview given the time pressures staff were experiencing at that point in the academic cycle, and in the light of the Pandemic and waves of lock-downs in early 2021.

Community and educational assets mapping exercise

It had been intended that a relatively complex community mapping exercise would be undertaken to understand the composition and location of GRT communities in West Yorkshire and their experiences of educational provision in the area, thus supporting the identification of locations where outreach activities developed subsequently to this report could be concentrated and how they should be tailored to meet the needs of particular demographics.

It had been anticipated that this exercise would have drawn on two strands of data collection activity: firstly, administrative data available from local schools, colleges and universities, School Census and data gathered by local NGOs in relation to demographics of service users – e.g. youth group members of LeedsGATE or Roma NGOs which enables identification of populations from different countries of origin.

However, given the paucity of data we were able to obtain from schools, universities and colleges (see further below re survey responses and impact of Covid disruptions on this element of the project) this activity was not able to provide a robust enough

evidence base for these activities, although it is recommended that future work emerging from this study explores the demographics of young people in individual settings, so as to design activities with service providers, based on the suite of recommendations presented later in this report.

The second element of the community and educational asset mapping exercise consisted of a participatory mapping exercise, led by Leeds GATE and undertaken with Gypsy and Traveller community members, including participants in their youth groups, a number of whom are NEETs or early school leavers and thus typically 'hard to reach' as out of the formal educational system. Although successfully completed, this element of the mapping exercise was not able to take place in the format initially envisaged as a result of the challenges of gathering young people together in one place in the numbers we had expected.

However one highly successful session took place with a small number of participants, alongside two LeedsGATE staff members who are FE and HE experienced (returning as mature students) and who themselves, although slightly outside of the upper age-range identified for participation in the study are still relatively close in age to the anticipated 'cut-off' point for this study. Where appropriate, or serving to illustrate key themes, a few comments made by these staff members have therefore been included in the textual analysis within this report.

The illustrations produced through this activity are incorporated into this report to visually record barriers and solutions to engagement with further and higher education, as reported by young people. Findings from this event validate comments captured from young people who took part in other group discussions (and also have strong synergies with professionals' interviews) and as such the illustrations produced are pertinent to both the community mapping exercise and the other qualitative discussions with GRT community members.

The community mapping exercise used an asset-based community development approach, engaging young people via creative methodologies (production of visual images based on interactive discussions captured by a professional cartoonist, which can then be presented back to young people to facilitate further discussion) to share their thoughts on education, learning and employment aspirations. This exercise used the Leeds GATE's Roads, Bridges and Tunnels methodology (Leeds GATE, 2017⁴) to draw out discussions on internal community and family assets, 'common knowledge' and personal experiences

4 <https://www.leedsgate.co.uk/roads-bridges-and-tunnel>

around the themes of further and higher education, as well as identifying where and how participants had links to wider systems, services or individuals.

This activity was designed to capitalise on LeedsGATE's existing community connections and engagement methods, and was delivered as part of their suite of regular youth activities which enable young people to explore and express their experiences and those of their families through creative art and writing. The results of this exercise include a series of individual cartoons and the visual asset map containing young people's ideas, thoughts and work which are not only of value to this research project, but will act as a tool for young people and their communities in having conversations about education into the future, as well as supporting and mapping the success of future work undertaken by the GHWY consortium.

Focus groups and interviews with GRT community members and education professionals

Young People from GRT Communities

A total of five focus groups and two targeted engagement activities (n= 22 young people) were held with GRT young people. Observation also occurred of a further 'hands-on' learning activity run by the University of Leeds which involved young people attending a virtual session with academic staff, but which was outside of this project.

The focus groups consisted of three short discussion sessions (averaging 25 minutes each) with a total of 16 Roma young people (5 girls and 11 boys) in a secondary school setting within standard lesson timetabling, and two focus groups of approximately one hour each, with four young Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller girls, aged 13-14 (two of whom attended both groups), and which took place virtually. The young people who were accessed via LeedsGATE are currently being educated outside of formal school settings.

This apparent core differential in access to formal schooling by ethnicity is not to be taken as equating to a significantly higher number of Romani Gypsy/Irish Traveller being out of school than are Roma children, but is likely to be an artefact of the fact that we have accessed some young people through the LeedsGATE young people's support programme which works particularly closely with young people

who are not in the formal education system. Similarly, that the focus groups/meetings with young people from Roma communities occurred in a school setting during school hours in an establishment with a large Roma pupil population, by definition means that we have only captured data from young people in formal education from these populations. Ideally, we would have been able to undertake interviews with young people both receiving education within and outside of formal school settings, from all three communities, as well as meeting with their parents and carers to discuss attitudes to formal education and aspirations for further and higher education. Inevitably however, the pandemic has had a major impact on initial research plans, limiting access to potential participants.

A craft workshop which included space for discussion on further and higher education aspiration, took place at the LeedsGATE offices in April 2021, with two young Gypsy/Traveller young people (although one young person was quiet throughout the session participating, but speaking little). In this session a young university experienced staff member from LeedsGATE discussed and answered questions about their route into, and experiences of higher education, alongside a floristry demonstration and conversation about her experiences as a student and role as a researcher led by Sherrie Smith. This activity based workshop proved extremely popular with the participants, and during the lifetime of this project the University of Leeds also ran a practical hands-on workshop on making lava lamps at LeedsGATE which attracted 10 young community members who were thus exposed to practical science activities as well as meeting HEP representatives. A member of the research team, alongside LeedsGATE colleagues working on this study, opportunistically 'sat in' on this event, observing interactions and listening to young people discussing the learning process and their additional reflections on what could be studied at university.

It had initially been intended that some individual or 'family' interviews would occur to explore experiences of and attitudes to access to FE and HE and how this impacted young people from the GRT communities, but the impacts of the pandemic precluded such activities. Accordingly we adapted the methodology and expanded on the number of group interviews from the initially planned two focus groups to extend the depth and range of data obtained.

Informed consent from young participants, and also parental/carers' consent for young people below the age of 16 (as well as permission to hold the sessions/ consent from the Head Teacher of the school where



group discussions took place with Roma pupils) were obtained. All focus groups and discussions/ engagement activities took place in the presence of a minimum of one adult youth worker (LeedsGATE) or pupil support worker (school setting) who was known to the young people and fully DBS checked.

See Appendix 1 for further demographic information on participants in these series of data gathering activities/events.

Focus groups and interviews with education and Widening Participation professionals

One focus group (involving 4 participants) and six individual interviews were undertaken with education professionals with experience of working to promote educational opportunities for GTRSB communities. Two of these participants had also completed a

survey (see above) and indicated their willingness to be interviewed in more detail, whilst the majority of interviewees were contacted via snowballing from networks with whom we engaged on this study.

The sample included professionals employed in a range of settings (including a Local Authority, universities, a further education college, and Secondary Schools) and working with Romani Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma young people in a variety of roles (including academic, widening participation or outreach and inclusion, and careers guidance). Geographically, the sample was mostly drawn from the Leeds district, but with one participant working in the Bradford region, and another reflecting both on their experience of working with Roma communities in Bradford in a previous role, as well as their current work in Leeds. Appendix 2 provides information on the demographics and role of interviewees in this category who participated in the study.

Literature Review

This literature review sets out to frame the longitudinal background to early school leaving and low rates of progression to further and higher education for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma young people, as well as presenting the relatively limited literature on GRT experiences in higher education.

The Plowden report (Plowden, 1967) which resulted from a Government requirement placed on the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) 'to consider primary education in all its aspects and the transition to secondary education' and which led to a major reorganisation of education including the abolition of the 11+ Exam, proposed Education Action Zones should be set up across the country, to target resources on deprived and disadvantaged communities in an early attempt at levelling up of educational opportunity. However, the report also noted that such Zones would be insufficient to address the needs of gypsies [sic] because they were mobile, hidden from census data and largely rural. A specific piece of research was commissioned to feed into the report (Adams and Smith, 1967) which attempted to assess the numbers of Gypsy and Traveller school age children in England (estimated to be 6000) and the communities' attitudes to education. They estimated 10% of Gypsy and Traveller children, at most, attended school but also noted that based on demographics the population could be expected to double within 20 years.

In 1970, the Schools Council surveyed all English and Welsh LEAs and from the responses estimated there were 12,000 Traveller children of school age of whom 1,500 were in school, the majority in Primary. The report also observed *"The educational plight of the Gypsies has changed little since the 1870s...most Travellers do not attend schools, and the ones that do tend not to make satisfactory progress."* (Reiss, 1975). Accordingly it can be seen that older generations of Gypsies and Travellers in England and Wales are highly unlikely to have attended school in any sustained manner, with associated low levels of literacy, and lack of educational capital to permit adults to support children and grandchildren in their educational journeys.

There has been some limited subsequent research in the field of education of Gypsies, Roma and other Travellers undertaken since these reports, predominantly dating from a time when the

campaign for human rights for these populations was taken up by activists from these communities and those who supported them (Acton, 1975), with a recognition that education is key to equality.

Legal Status and Educational Attainment of GRT children

In 1989 the Court of Appeal test case (Commission for Racial Equality v Dutton, 1989) confirmed Romani Gypsies as a racial group as defined by the Race Relations Act 1976. O'Leary and others versus Punch Retail (Charing, 2002) similarly recognised Irish Travellers as an ethnic group. Although not subject to testing in court, Roma have by de facto extension of the recognition of 'ethnic' Gypsies and Travellers been included in the (often theoretical) protection from discrimination afforded by the race equality legislation and subsequent Equality Act 2010. Other 'non-ethnic' nomadic groups such as circus and fairground families (Showmen), New Travellers and those who live on the waterways (Boaters) also experience discrimination and disadvantage but do not benefit from the protection of race relations legislation (Cemlyn et al. 2009). Accordingly, the legal duty not to discriminate against some groups who fit within the rubric of Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen and Boaters is patchily applied, and frequently misunderstood in educational settings, and moreover as detailed below, statistics in school census data (recorded since 2003) only capture children who are members of the three 'ethnic' groups with a problematic use of nomenclature which makes it impossible to easily disaggregate migrant (or second generation) Roma and Romani Gypsy pupils in school settings.

Thirty years on from the Plowden report the situation with regard to school attendance for GRT children was still seen to be acute. In 1997, the incoming Labour Government prioritised *"Education, Education, Education"*. Estelle Morris, then Junior Education Minister said *"The problems of racism, social exclusion and*

educational failure are particularly acute for gipsy and traveller [sic] children. Only 5 per cent are still registered or regularly attend school by key stage 4, and the numbers in vocational training and further and higher education are worryingly small. Disproportionate numbers are excluded from school and levels of achievement are lower than for any other minority ethnic group. The reasons for this are complex and deep-rooted and cannot be solved overnight." (Morris, 1997)

A thematic inspection review (Ofsted 1999) requested by the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) focused on four underachieving groups, three – Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean – had been identified by a review of research on the achievement of minority ethnic pupils (Gillborn and Gipps 1996) and a fourth comprising of 'Gypsy/Traveller' children was identified due to rising concern in policy circles about outcomes for this group. At that time, the school census categories, 'Gypsy/Roma' (collapsing both ethnic categories under one heading as noted above) and 'Traveller of Irish Heritage' were not available as ethnic identification choices, and for this reason these children were not initially identified as a cause for concern by Gillborn and Gipps in their review.

One of the reasons Gypsies and Travellers had not been identified by the 1996 review was that they were not at that time included as ethnic categories in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). Moreover, none of the 12 schools visited (6 primary and 6 secondary) where the Ofsted inspection focus was on Gypsies and Travellers, monitored the attainment of these groups. However it was found that at KS2 Gypsy Traveller attainment was well below school and national averages. As a result between 50 and 80% of this group of learners were identified as having Special Education Needs. *"In half the schools no Gypsy Traveller child has yet sat for GCSE."* (Ofsted, 1999 p.11)

In order to address these issues the Department for Education issued guidance to schools and introduced two additional ethnic categories to the PLASC return, Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage, corresponding to the ethnic groups recognised in case law (Charing, 2002).

In 2003 new ethnic monitoring categories identifying Gypsy Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils were finally introduced and in 2005 the first national data analysis to include these groups was published. Just under 4000 Travellers of Irish Heritage pupils were identified as being registered in school, and just under 6500 as Gypsy/Roma children. The Ofsted thematic review *Provision and*

Support for Traveller Pupils (Ofsted 2003) estimated that the Traveller school population of England was between 70 and 80,000, although its definition was broader than that of the PLASC, including as it did fairground families, circus families, New Age Travellers, bargees and other families living on boats who cannot be effectively captured in PLASC data. Of these children who are enumerated in PLASC data, 87% were in school at KS2 and 47% at KS4; based on these figures, the review estimated that 12,000 Traveller children were not engaged with education, most of them in the secondary phase. This figure had risen from 10,000 children out of school since the previous report (Ofsted, 1996).

The report on 'Ethnicity and Education' (DfES 2006) found that in contrast to most other ethnic minority groups Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage had consistently have lower levels of attainment than other ethnic groups across all the Key Stages. They also made less progress than White pupils in both Primary and Secondary phases. Gypsy/Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage were much more likely to be excluded from school (permanently and for a fixed period) than other pupils. They were also found to be over-represented among many categories of SEN, including Moderate, and Severe Learning Difficulties and Behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. (DfES 2006).

In 2006, 11,600 pupils were identified as Travellers of Irish Heritage or Gypsy/Roma, compared to 10,330 in 2004 – a 12% increase in numbers. However the analysis commented that Ofsted have estimated much higher numbers of these pupils in schools than are officially recorded, with many children not publicly identifying as being a member of the GRT communities.

A 2020 data analytic release from the Office for National Statistics which sought to extrapolate linkage between ethnicity, educational attainment and children living in poverty found that in contrast to other ethnic groups, when calculating school progress using the 'Attainment 8' measure (2019 data), Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils made the least educational progress between ages 11 and 16 years, achieving scores of negative 1.05 and negative 0.81 respectively⁵. The report noted that *"some caution should be taken when interpreting these percentages as they are based on a small number of pupils. For example, there were [only] 141 pupils from Traveller of Irish Heritage backgrounds [enumerated] in the academic year 2018 to 2019"* (ONS, 2020: 8).

⁵ The baseline used to calculate attainment between Key Stage 2 and 4 uses assessments of Maths and English attainment at the end of primary school (Key Stage 2 results), when children are usually 11 years old. Each pupil's progress is then worked out by comparing their "Attainment 8" score with the national average score for pupils who started at a similar level to them. Attainment 8 is a measure of a pupil's performance at the end of Key Stage 4 across eight core subjects, including Maths and English.



Non-Ascription and 'Passing'

There is a cultural tradition used by many Gypsies, Travellers (and other minoritised communities seeking to 'disappear' amongst majority communities) called *passing*⁶ which Bowers (2008) describes as *"Allow[ing] you to keep your head down and pass by unnoticed. It's something we're taught as children and practice as adults. Hiding comes naturally to people that have been chased and persecuted for 500 years."*

Derrington (2007) describes passing for Gypsies and Travellers as *"playing white"*, a maladaptive coping strategy with roots in denial and repression which she contrasts with bicultural adjustment – the ability to switch between two cultures – which *"can help to minimise social isolation in school and lessen the effects and tensions of cultural dissonance."* (p.365)

In 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families published guidance (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008) pointing out the benefits of voluntary self-identification for schools and pupils. Lord Andrew Adonis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools said, in his introduction:

"[W]e know that this data is incomplete as many parents and children are reluctant to identify themselves for fear of bullying and prejudice which is endemic in their everyday lives. This leads to policy makers, local authorities and schools not receiving the resources they are entitled to and not being made accountable for improving the life chances of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

children, young people and families". As is evident in the qualitative data gathered for this study, the 'endemic' bullying and racism in schools is still as problematic over a decade after Adonis' call for change.

In 2004, it was reported that only just over half (11 out of 20) of the GRT students who completed Key Stage 3 in Derrington and Kendall's in depth study were open about their ethnicity. Foster and Walker (2010) suggest a similar proportion of young people feel safe to openly identify as members of their ethnic communities, based on feedback from Traveller Education Support Services, suggesting that parents may choose alternatives which are also accurate, but less contentious, such as WBRI (White British), WIRI (White Irish), WEEU (White East European), WEUR (White European) or WOTW (White other). Some parents may be open about their ethnicity to teachers, even though they have not ascribed to either of the two Gypsy Roma and Traveller categories, while others may only identify once they have established a trusting relationship with the school. The issue of registering identity can be particularly sensitive for Roma families who have experienced transportation and genocide within memory of elderly relatives, whilst in turn dual-heritage families may not find an appropriate category to which to ascribe.

⁶ See for example Beck (2014) on the <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/02/trouble-with-passing-race-sexuality-religion> and Renfrow, Daniel G. "A Cartography of Passing in Everyday Life." *Symbolic Interaction* 27, no. 4 (2004): 485-506. in relation to how passing as being of another ethnicity, religious identity or sexual orientation (for example) may either bring benefits (access to privilege) to an individual or shield them from danger which may accrue should their 'real' identity be known.

Challenges to Proceeding to Further and Higher Education

Retention of GRT pupils in School

Many literature sources recognise challenges around attendance and retention for GRT pupils, particularly in the secondary school phase. Derrington and Kendall (2004) found that of 44 eleven year-olds they tracked longitudinally, 38 transferred from primary to secondary school but only 20 remained on roll three years later. 61% of The Traveller

Movement's (2020) sample of 44 young Irish Travellers aged between 15 and 25 dropped out of education before the statutory leaving age whilst (Wilkin et al. 2010) found *"Just over half the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in the national cohort were successfully retained in school until Year 11"* (p.104).

Retention of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils between end of KS2 and end of KS4 by different Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Year Group	Travellers of Irish heritage		Gypsy/Roma		Roma – EAL		National	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Year 6	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Year 7	74.2	78.0	82.3	83.4	71.9	70.8	96.4	96.3
Year 8	65.4	67.2	76.8	78.2	73.7	76.9	95.6	95.8
Year 9	50.0	55.6	68.3	70.5	68.4	69.2	93.7	94.1
Year 10	47.5	51.5	64.0	70.5	68.4	64.6	93.9	94.4
Year 11	35.0	41.5	52.3	61.4	64.9	61.5	91.9	93.0
Base (n)	240	241	400	386	57	65	310244	296124

These figures are based on tracing one cohort of 1,389 pupils who were in Year 6 in 2003 and identified themselves as Gypsy/Roma or Traveller of Irish Heritage at any time between Years 6 and 11. Pupils identifying as Gypsy/Roma with a first language other than English were assumed to be Roma in calculating the retention rate for these children. As can be seen, other than for Roma males, females were more likely to remain in education, but there is a steep decline for all communities, with Travellers of Irish Heritage of both genders the most likely to leave school early, and only just over 1/3 boys who self-declare as Travellers still remaining in education at KS4.

A similar pattern is evidenced by more recent data collated from schools in Wales (Fensham-Smith 2014), where it can be seen that there is a steep decline in attendance at secondary school (assuming similar numbers of children in each age group,) although it is not possible from the data provided in this study to map individual pupil's educational careers.

The number of Gypsy and Traveller pupils registered in Primary, Secondary and Special schools over the age of 5 (2013)

	Primary	Secondary	Special
Traveller of Irish Heritage	240	94	11
Gypsy/ Roma	334	176	6
Total pupils= 861			

Parental aspirations and support for education

Derrington and Kendall (2004) found that parents of GRT pupils who stayed on in school valued secondary education, wishing their children success and hoping they would remain in education to get a good job. Higher Education and proceeding to a professional career were only mentioned by family members in the case of one boy in their cohort, though mothers spoke about college *"and even University"* (p.158) and

careers for their daughters. Positive views on the value of education were expressed by parents who had not attended secondary school and in some case could not read and write. Those parents who did *not* express strongly supportive attitudes were willing to leave the decision to their children. The majority of parents whose children dropped out of school it was noted held “*traditional views on gender roles [but] saw literacy as an important educational goal.*” (p.159)

Pupil explanations for early school leaving

More recently, the Greater London Authority’s Citizen Led Engagement project (Traveller Movement 2020) used the methodology of training 11 young peer researchers in basic qualitative research skills and working with them to co-create a questionnaire to identify reasons for Irish Travellers dropping out of secondary school. The main reasons for early school leaving (by gender) cited by the 44 young people interviewed (Traveller Movement, 2020:5) were as follows:

	Girls	Boys
Bullying	45%	29%
Dad took out of school	10%	
Family pressure		13%
Did not want to go	5%	
Lived too far from school	5%	
School did not support	5%	
Preferred to work		4%
Family not settled		4%
Stayed in school	30%	50%
	n=20	n=24

Ureche and Franks, (2007) consulted 201 children and young people of Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller, other British Traveller and New Traveller heritages by means of questionnaires, 9 focus groups and 8 interviews to explore their reasons for being out of school. Among the reasons given for non-attendance were:

- They were travelling a lot of the time
- School curriculum was not relevant to them
- Being bullied at schools
- Schools did not respond to complaints about bullying

- The behaviour of other children in class
- They lacked previous schooling and had difficulty in understanding and catching up
- Parents wanted girls to stay at home once they reach puberty. (p.32)

63% of 97 young people surveyed for this study said they had been bullied and 86% reported receiving racist comments in school settings. (2007:40).

The factors impacting school attendance cited in the above studies can be separated into the values of the community and culture preventing students participating fully in the life of the school (pull factors) and push factors where students’ experiences in school led them to feel undervalued and disrespected reducing engagement. Parents were clearly concerned to protect their children from activities that undermined their moral and social codes, but the most common fear expressed by parents in a number of studies was that their children were or would be victims of bullying. While schools may regard this concern as overprotectiveness, Derrington (2007) finds evidence that it is well founded and “*may be appropriately considered a push factor,*” a theme which became very evident in the primary empirical data we have gathered for this current study.

Derrington and Kendall (2004) found that almost 80% of participants in their study of 44 secondary age Gypsy Travellers “*encountered racist name calling or some sort of bullying in secondary school. In almost two-thirds of cases, this was not reported to teachers because students had little faith in this means of redress.*” (p.178)

D’Arcy (2014) reported that “*most of the families I interviewed felt compelled to take up home education because of problems in school, particularly at secondary level. Seven families talked of overt bullying by school staff or students.*”

Cemlyn et al (2009), in reviewing educational inequalities faced by Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, concluded that “*Racist harassment and bullying is the most prominent theme in all the studies, combined with the inadequacy of many schools’ responses.*” (p.97)

Three-quarters of the students in Derrington’s (2007) study said they had experienced racist name-calling or bullying in secondary school whilst Teachers reported playground fights and heated verbal exchanges involving Traveller students in the first few days and weeks after transfer from primary school. *Fighting* along with *flight* and *playing White* (Passing) were found by this author to be the three most commonly reported maladaptive

responses to the cultural dissonance experienced by GRT pupils, all themes which emerge in the empirical data collated for this research.

The experience of racism in school is frequently fuelled by negative and stereotypical coverage in the media and press. Foster and Norton (2012) note that teachers working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children reported that television programmes, such as *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and press coverage of the eviction of the families from Dale Farm, heightened the tensions that young people feel in schools and other institutions. This narrative, updated by vivid illustrations from recent sensationalist programmes such as *The Truth about Traveller Crime* (first broadcast 2020) and evidence of the cyclical nature of racist hate speech recurring unchecked in schools and other public settings on each occasion a programme is rescreened, also emerged strongly in Greenfields and Rogers (2020) research into the impacts of hate crime on the mental health and wellbeing of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people.

The 2021 report by the charity Mind on the mental health challenges faced by young people in school, highlighted experiences of racism and bullying in educational settings as impacting on well-being, self-esteem and attainment. The report flagged up that of the young Gypsy and Traveller boys they interviewed 90% had been victims of bullying and racism in schools, and 30% reported that their teachers had treated them differently or behaved in a racist manner towards them (2021:30). The prevalence of racism in school settings and that not only other pupils but also teachers may be perpetrators or enablers of racism or permit use of negative stereotypes in school settings also emerged in the Anti-Bullying Alliance/FFT study (2020) which reported a number of examples given by interviewees of teachers either not believing young people who had reported incidents of racist bullying, or presuming that the GRT pupils were perpetrators or ‘trouble-makers’; themes which arose strongly in the findings reported below.

Other factors which are relevant to early school leaving include (as noted by Derrington and Kendall, 2004 and replicated in the findings here) a recognition that many Gypsy Traveller young people aspired to achieve financial independence and marry significantly earlier than their peers. Learning skills and finding work within the family and community setting are thus seen as a quicker and more reliable route to financial independence than academic qualifications achieved through a

lengthy formal education (Bhopal, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2003). Parents have therefore been reported to fear that school attendance may prevent children acquiring life skills and simultaneously weaken their cultural identity (Clay, 1999).

Parents interviewed by Derrington also revealed “*an underlying and consistent anxiety about children’s moral, emotional and physical well-being in relation to the perceived hostile and threatening environment of the secondary school.*” (2007 p.360). The parents of children who dropped out early have been reported to be more likely to have “*a weak affiliation [to], or rejection of, gauje [Non Gypsy/Traveller] culture and values.*” (Derrington and Kendall, 2004:175).

Most of the parents of students who stayed on in school expressed views which challenged traditional GRT cultural norms. Such parents were more likely to allow their children to participate more fully in school activities, such as school journeys and after school clubs, which are often causes for concern amongst parents from the community who are often reluctant to be separated from their children outside of core school activities and would not allow a child to go away without a parent or close relative present at all times. In part this can be explained by the fact that as reported by D’Arcy (2014) most parents she interviewed had not attended secondary school and their lack of confidence engaging with schools can be wrongly interpreted as lack of interest or support. She also identifies “*concerns about safety and well-being in an environment dominated by a different culture.*” (p.104)

School Exclusion

The failure of schools to take complaints of racism and bullying seriously can result in students taking matters into their own hands (commonly through fighting with those children who are responsible for racist comments) with this escalation resulting in exclusions. The National Statistics Service website highlighted the exclusion rates in its analysis of permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England for 2018/9. “*As in previous years, pupils of Gypsy/ Roma ethnic groups had the highest rates of both permanent (0.39) and fixed period exclusions (21.26), followed by Traveller of Irish heritage ethnic groups at 0.27 and 14.63 respectively*”. However it was also noted that “*The fixed period exclusion rate for Travellers of Irish heritage has decreased from 17.42 to 14.63.*” (Department for Education 2020)⁷. A 2021 Guardian newspaper story (McIntyre, et. al. 2021), which reanalysed DfE data on school exclusions by ethnicity, commented on the fact that whilst exclusion

⁷ Exclusion rates are the number of exclusions of pupils in a group as a proportion of the school population of that group. As some pupils may be excluded more than once in an academic year it doesn’t accurately indicate what proportion of Gypsy Roma and Traveller population is excluded. It does, indicate there is a serious cause for concern.

rates for Black Caribbean and mixed heritage White and Black Caribbean students in English schools are up to six times higher than those of their White peers in some local authorities, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are excluded at much higher rates, with Roma children nine times more likely to be suspended from school in some localities.

As noted elsewhere in this literature review, even when controlling for prior educational attainment, Traveller of Irish Heritage, Gypsy Roma, Black Caribbean, White & Black Caribbean, Black Other and Pakistani pupils make considerably less progress at primary school and between Key Stages than do White British pupils with the same prior attainment whilst all other minority ethnic groups make more progress than White British pupils with the same prior attainment (DfE 2017, 2020). It has been noted by the Department for Education and Skills (2017) that Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils are over-represented among many categories of SEN, including Moderate, and Severe Learning Difficulties, and Behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion (DfE, 2017:10) acknowledges this. *“Whilst an exclusion may still be an appropriate sanction, the head teacher should take account of any contributing factors that are identified after an incident of poor behaviour has occurred. For example, where it comes to light that the pupil has suffered bereavement, has mental health issues or has been subject to bullying,”* but in practice, as illustrated by the above data, awareness of such negative experiences does not appear to impact on decisions on exclusions experienced by GRT children.

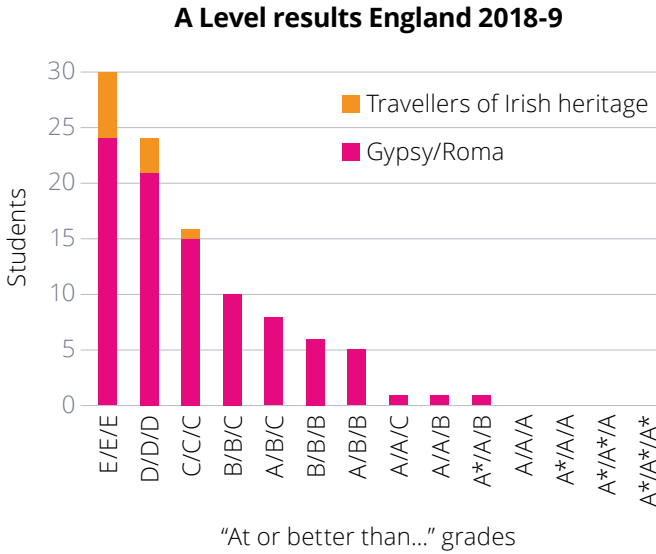
Attainment of GRT children

The Race Disparity Audit (Cabinet Office, 2018) found *“Pupils from Gypsy and Roma, or Irish Traveller background ... had the lowest attainment and progress, and were least likely to stay in education after the age of 16.”* (2018:9) The Attainment 8 scores (out of 90) at KS4 in 2019-20 were 23.3 for Gypsy/Roma and 31.8 for Irish Travellers, compared to the average for all pupils of 50.2. The numerical and gender breakdown below suggests that boys achieve better than girls (in the case of Irish Travellers, significantly so) but also the numbers completing KS4 are markedly small. The equivalent cohorts tested at KS2 in 2015 were 1,886 and 448 respectively (DfE and Statistics 2016).

Attainment 8 scores 2020 – KS2-KS4				
	Girls		Boys	
	Score	Pupils	Score	Pupils
Gypsy/Roma	21.2	687	25.6	667
Irish Traveller	27.8	75	35.4	85

The ONS (2020) review of Attainment 8 scores confirmed unequivocally that Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils make the least educational progress between ages 11 and 16 years, achieving scores of negative 1.05 and negative 0.81 respectively, and also underlining the high rate of drop-out from education between KS2 and KS4, particularly for girls of Irish Traveller heritage.

There is an inevitable ‘knock-on’ effect from this rate of early school leaving amongst GRT pupils, and in 2019 – most recent year for which data is available by ethnicity – it can be seen that only 3 self-identified children of Gypsy/Roma heritage and no pupils of Irish Traveller heritage attained more than two Grade A A levels. Travellers of Irish Heritage were represented in A Level statistics as achieving Grade C or lower in A Levels. Overall, there were a total of 102 self-identified GRT pupils who passed A Levels at any grade in 2018-19, of which 10 were children of Irish Traveller heritage.



Source: DfE Statistics Website (2021) A level grades by student characteristics’ from ‘A level and other 16 to 18 results

The Further and Higher Education Pipeline for GRT young people

Although literature, anecdotal evidence and ongoing data gathering associated with GTRSBintoHE Pledge activities (see further Greenfields, 2019) does seem to strongly suggest that GRT graduates are more likely to enter into Further and Higher Education as mature students than to proceed straight to higher education at age 18 (a finding which also emerged in the narratives of GRT NGO staff who participated in this current research); the current study is focused on the educational experiences and challenges to engagement in FE and HE of community members below the age of 26.

We can therefore see that, based on current rates of self-ascription in school, there are only a limited number of young people from GRT communities with A level grades which will permit ‘traditional’ routes into higher education. As is also illustrated by findings from this research (presented below) and the existing literature explored above, there is often a preference for young GRT people to seek to obtain training or employment which will permit of early entry to work and earning, rather than deferred employment after extended education.

The Traveller Movement (2021), in their short report on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller access to Further Education (which provides case studies based on their support work with young people facing challenges in accessing provision for 14-16 year olds outside of mainstream schooling, as well as

those studying for vocational qualifications and seeking to obtain apprenticeships), highlights the very limited research into the experiences of young people from the communities at this stage of their educational careers. They emphasise the issue of extremely limited funding availability for pupils aged 14-16 to pursue vocational qualifications, noting that this is often provided at the discretion of schools experiencing considerable challenges with funding. Given the high numbers of GRT pupils leaving school prior to KS4 they suggest that lack of support for early transition to vocational training facilitates under-achievement in formal exams, impacting on long-term life chances. Similarly, they note that the low numbers of young people undertaking apprenticeships who identify as from the GRT communities is related (in at least some cases) to low prior attainment where potential students/apprentices have not attained Functional Skills or GCSE Maths and English despite passing practical and vocational training assessments.

These suggestions support responses to our own enquiries into the latest available data on self-identified GRT young people in apprenticeships (facilitated through the support of the All Party Political Group on GRT affairs in Autumn 2020) which suggested that in total there were only 350 registered Apprentices from GRT communities in the academic year 2019-20 (230 below the age of 25), with anecdotal evidence leading us to posit this figure is low as a result of barriers to access to such Apprenticeships including lack of knowledge of the schemes, as well as challenges to completion of programmes as a result of lack of functional skills and poor prior attainment.

Finally, the Traveller Movement (2021, op. cit.) suggest that the limited numbers of training and out-of-school educational placements which meet the needs of young GRT people (both in content and location) can act as an additional barrier to progression, as can the frequent necessity for obtaining a loan to support training for 19-25 year olds who may have dropped out of school at a younger age then sought to access vocational learning at a subsequent point in time. These findings have synergies with our own research undertaken for this report in which there has been a persistent emphasis (from Gypsy and Traveller young people in particular), on moving into paid employment at an early age, with limited understanding of, or appetite for, taking out loans to fund further education as well as a reluctance to train at a distance from home and familiar surroundings.

Access to Higher Education

As is self-evident from the discussions above, amongst young people aged under 26 (the subject of this report) there are significant hurdles to remaining in education and achieving 'traditional' qualifications which may lead them into Higher Education. Whilst not examined within this study, there is increasing evidence (as noted above) of GTRSB students accessing HE at a later age, particularly for women, who may already have married and had children prior to exploring routes to HE, not infrequently associated with their determination to be able to support their children with their education and a desire to act as a role model for young people in their family and community. Such access routes often involve access courses or routes to HE which may use alternative qualifications (often vocational or technical in nature such as having trained as a Teaching Assistant; or a skilled trade such as NVQs in Floristry or Childcare etc).

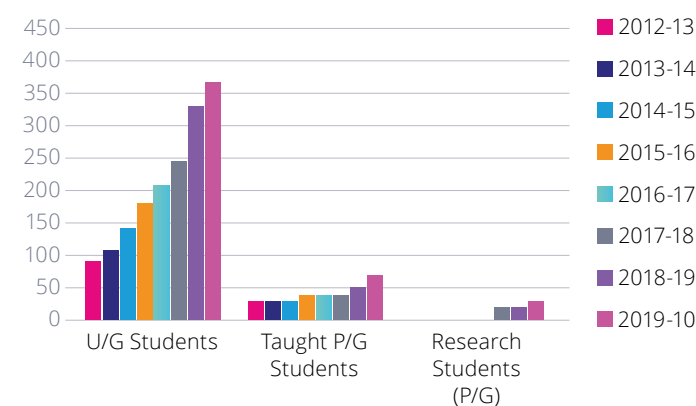
The literature around access to HE for GTRSB students – particularly in relation to traditional A level pathways to HE – is extremely limited.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency collects data on applicants from White – Gypsy/Roma/Traveller and White-Irish Traveller (Northern Ireland only) as well as White-Scottish Traveller (Scotland only) applicants, but has until recently routinely aggregated these groups into a White Other category in published data. On request, disaggregated data, supplied to Danvers (2015) allowed her to estimate that between 3 and 4% of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population over 18 accessed higher education compared to around 43% of the total UK population.

Data obtained from HESA/OfS as part of the GTRSBintoHE Pledge which research team members have undertaken, has enabled us to track numbers of self-identifying students in England using the Gypsy/Traveller category but only from academic year 2012-13 onwards. Whilst it is not possible from the available public datasets to analyse by age and ethnicity and gender, adjusted figures⁸ which became available in 2021 indicate an increase from 90 Gypsy/Traveller under-graduate students (2012-13) to 390 self-identifying undergraduate students in 2019-20 (most noticeably increasing from 2018-19 onwards, which may indicate greater confidence in self-identification or a 'real' growth in numbers), and simultaneously an increase from 30 to 100 post-graduate students (taught Masters and research students) across the same time span, again

increasing in the two most recent years. Anecdotally, it is believed that the majority of such students are female. From 2017-18 it is possible to disaggregate taught and research post-graduate students who self-identify as being Gypsy/Traveller and for 2019-20 (most recent year for which data is available) there are 30 MPhil/PhD students, an increase from 20 research students between academic years 2017-19.

Changes in Numbers of self-identified Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage in HE 2012-13 to 2019-20



As with school-age students, there will inevitably be HE students from these ethnic groups who have chosen not to identify as such but there is a clear upward trend in participating in HE and electing to self-identify although the pipeline to post-graduate and research degrees is still slow with considerable under-representation of the communities at this level.

Not only, as our data presented below has identified, do some community members fear racism in higher education settings but as an English Romani contributor to a Kings College London Roundtable on HE (Mulcahy et. al., 2017) suggested:

"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." (Mulcahy et al. 2017:21)

Research commissioned by Kings College London (Mulcahy et al, 2017) calculated that in the academic year 2015-16, Gypsy and Traveller students were approximately 11 times less likely to enter HE than would be expected, given their population size, with this finding based on a best estimate of the

Gypsy/Traveller population size⁹ calculated from the School Census data and the 2011 Census, which are both widely acknowledged to be flawed data sets which under-estimate the population size for the reasons identified earlier in this review.

Greenfields, (2019) in the preparatory briefing note which supported the House of Lords Roundtable on Higher Education, an interactive event which brought together community member graduates, education policy experts (including the OfS, NEON and Advance HE) and academics working to support the communities into and within HE and led ultimately to the development of the GTRSBintoHE Pledge; summarised the limited extant literature on GRT communities in HE (Mulcahy et al, 2017; Greenfields, 2007; Danvers, 2015; Bhopal, 2018). She reported that the research consistently found that young people reported a sense that FE and HE was 'not for them'; anxiety over moving away from families and support networks; concerns over racism in FE and HE settings, low expectations from family and staff impacting understanding of options; limited knowledge of processes involved in applying to university and lack of appropriate qualifications and cultural capital to support academic transitions.

The background briefing note concluded that whilst even less is known about the experiences of GTRSB students who do proceed to HE, synergies could be drawn with other minority ethnic groups, working-class students, or those with protected characteristics in relation to support needs. The outcome of the House of Lords Roundtable session was the development of a working group and ultimately the GTRSB into HE Pledge¹⁰ which refined down the various strands of evidence and recommendations made by community member graduates, WP specialists and policy specialists to devise a number of practical recommendations which include: enhanced data collection; visibility within the curricula of the communities; targeted activities to increase a sense of belonging; further training for staff and students to increase awareness of the racism and discrimination experienced by GTRSB community members; dedicated outreach activities; greater visibility of, and engagement with, role models and the identification of designated contact points within institutions to support applicants from the GTRSB communities on their educational journeys.

In 2020 three new major publications which focused on the experiences of GRT communities members in HE were launched (Atherton, 2020; Forster and Gallagher, 2020, both of which focused

on the UK context, and the collected volume on *Roma in European Higher Education* edited by Morley et.al., 2020). Whilst once again the findings and recommendations for practice had close synergies to earlier studies, each of these volumes contributed to and enriched further academic understanding of the experiences of community members in HE (summarised above), highlighting strategies and tactics to succeed in education (Forster and Gallagher, 20200; Atherton, 2020), the challenges faced by first generation students from the communities – in particular prior educational challenges which impact on level of qualifications and attainment, lack of cultural capital and associated lower ability to access family support around educational practices, a sense of isolation and invisibility in HE; stereotyping by teachers and peers, and the pernicious impacts of life-long experiences of racism.

It is noteworthy too, that whether in the UK or in mainland Europe (as evidenced by Morley et al, 2020) members of the communities are exceptionally under-represented in HE, at between 1 and 3% of the populations (depending on country of origin) entering into further or higher education. Moreover, regardless of the locational context (North of England, Southern England, mainland Europe etc.) it can be seen that with broadly similar narratives of overcoming educational exclusion (and recommendations for practice) as those captured from UK GTRSB graduates, and embedded into the Pledge recommendations outline above and discussed in our policy and practice proposals, targeted at different audiences who can most effectively support these students and potential students.

It is particularly striking that Atherton's review of University Access and Participation Plans presented within his 2020 report, found that less than 30% of Access and Participation Plans (APPs) covering the period up until 2025, mention GRT learners and of those less than 5% provided specific targets and identified activities which could be used to support members of the communities into HE. Only 2 out of 29 UniConnect partnerships surveyed for the research identified targeted work with the populations in their local areas. Accordingly, Go Higher West Yorkshire is in a very small minority of such partnerships engaged in enhancing educational inclusion of these students.

As such – it can be seen that this current research report speaks to a widespread lack of knowledge amongst FE and HE education staff on how best to

8 Adjusted figures released in 2021 seem to indicate a slightly higher number of self-identifying students than initially recorded in data releases across one or two years.

9 As noted above, no measure exists for Roma or other groups such as Showmen and Boaters
10 <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge>

support and engage with potential students from the GTRSB communities, albeit that there is increasing awareness of the educational disadvantages and exclusions faced by the populations which impact the likelihood to access, retention and attainment within schools, FE and HE. In the following section the key (consistent) themes which have emerged in research across several decades are briefly presented.

Best Practice

The literature is quite consistent in its evaluation of what constitutes good practice in supporting children and young people in schools, FE and HE settings. Whilst the end of this report contains a number of recommendations which are specific to the context in West Yorkshire as well as drawing upon the broader national picture, the core themes relating to best practice from the literature are as follows.

Inclusive ethos

Under the Equality Act 2010 schools, colleges and universities have a general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. They are also required to (1) prepare and publish equality objectives and (2) publish information, to demonstrate compliance with the general duty. Such establishments have a public sector race equality duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. This means they must assess the impact of their policies and practices on the people affected by them and take steps to remove any barriers that come to light where it is proportionate to do so. Recognition by all staff that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are protected groups under the legislation is a critical starting point.(DFES 2003)

With reference to schools (the only education sector where this has been reviewed to date) those establishments which have clear and effective policies and positive and inclusive ethos are the most successful in including Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils and promoting their achievement and opportunities. (Wilkin et al. 2009; Fensham-Smith 2014). It has been recognised by Government departments responsible for education that identifying pupils from these communities, recognising the barriers and challenges they face, developing plans to address them and monitoring the implementation of such plans to assess their effectiveness involves a combination of strategic leadership, staff training, monitoring and assessment and regular review and evaluation. (DCSF 2008)

Senior leadership

Clear and positive vision and leadership are fundamental to the development and implementation of policies and practice to dismantle the barriers encountered by Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils and FE and HE students. Designating a senior member of staff with responsibility for improving outcomes raises the status of the issues within the school (and also Colleges/Universities) and signals to the communities that their identity and needs are respected. Schools with the most effective practice have invested significant management resources into the establishment of good relationships with parents and pupils, evidencing that they are listening to pupils and parents. School leaders can show respect for the communities, by visiting homes, attending community events and offering an open door to grieving relatives following a family bereavement. Not only was there evidence of some effective practice using these techniques in research for this project, but it is well established (Ofsted, 2014; Yafai, 2017; Morley et. al, 2020 and a range of studies of parental-school engagement within European Roma communities e.g. Wauters et. al., 2017; Noulia et.al., 2015) that closer intercultural engagement with GRT families has benefits beyond strengthening an individual family's connection to a school, enhancing a sense of trust amongst the extended community and encouraging both whole family learning and greater holistic understanding of the opportunities which can arise through education.

Thus there are two-way benefits for schools who reach out to GRT families as not only can staff learn more about Gypsy Roma and Traveller cultures but there is also the opportunity to create channels of communication to resolve difficulties which might otherwise lead to early school leaving. It is identified in that literature that it is good practice for the head teacher to meet GRT parents and pupils and explain school policies and procedures, especially pupil health and safety, bullying and race equality so as to enhance trust and reduce misunderstandings (DfES 2003; Wilkin et al. 2010; Bhopal et al. 2000). In schools where senior members of staff took the time to visit the sites, families spoke warmly of the school and its support for them (Ofsted 1999).

The senior management teams of schools which are most successful raising the attainments of underachieving ethnic minorities, concentrated on developing an ethos which values learning and all pupils equally. The underperformance of any group was seen as unacceptable and evidence gathered systematically is used to challenge individuals and departments to spell out what they

intend to do to improve the situation. In this way they develop *"a raft of interlocking initiatives which addresses all aspects of school life."* (Ofsted 1999:13)

Relationships with parents

Safety and trust have been identified as key concerns of many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents, specifically the moral, physical and emotional safety of their children in school, a theme which has emerged in the narratives of young people collated for this study. Once a school has shown itself to be worthy of trust by, for example, having effective behaviour policies or simple means of communicating with key staff, it will tend to be trusted by other families with the reputation passing across generations (Wilkin et al. 2010). Indeed once a school is recognised as having a positive relationship with local GRT communities there is often a considerable demand from families for their children to obtain a place in a 'known' school – as highlighted in findings from educational professionals interviewed for this study who reflected on the pressures this can place on Schools or placement staff when one particular establishment is consistently identified as being the first choice for members of some communities, leading to a reluctance to send children to any other school.

As the number of literate and educated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller has increased, so schools have had the opportunity to employ community members on the school staff. Recruiting and supporting Gypsy Traveller parents to be school governors, inviting them to work in schools as mentors and teaching assistants can assist the development of trust. (DfES 2003), a theme which also arose in our focus groups (below) with Roma young people who reflected positively on the fact that there were mentors working with them who spoke the same language and knew their communities.

Staff training

If an inclusive ethos is to permeate the whole school, college or university it is crucially important that this knowledge and culture is communicated to all staff. Staff may be ill-informed about pupils/ students' and their families' cultures, in particular in relation to attitudes to education and school attendance, or as a result of holding stereotypical presumptions about GRT populations. Administrative staff may be the first point of contact families have with the school and it is important they have the knowledge and skills to be welcoming to

parents and pupils and that knowledge is not only held by teaching or specific designated staff.

Education staff may not be aware that Gypsy/ Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage are protected groups under the Equalities Act, that name-calling or 'banter' can constitute racist abuse and that bullying can be a hate crime. Departmental staff should review curriculum content and remove content which is based on inaccurate or stereotypical representations of Gypsy Roma and Traveller cultures and identify ways to recognise the contributions of communities and individuals.

Curriculum and resources

It is beneficial for pupils to see their home culture reflected in a positive way in the school, college or university curriculum and respected in educational organisations. The social and aesthetic environment of the school, college or university should be specifically and explicitly welcoming, reassuring and affirmative of respectful acceptance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, their culture, history and languages (DCSF 2008). Books, teaching materials and works of art in classrooms, libraries and public areas should reflect the cultural diversity of the school (or other learning environment) and community and be inclusive of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history, language and culture. (DfES 2003)

Jake Bowers, a Romani Journalist wrote *"In schools, children learn more about the Romans, Vikings or even fairies than they do about our cultures and what we have contributed to this world."* (text no longer available but quoted in (Themelis and Foster 2013). There is sufficient flexibility within the National Curriculum (and of course within FE and HE lecture planning) to enable teachers and lecturers to recognise and respect the contribution of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, as well as other nomadic communities such as fairground families, circuses and bargees. These cultures often have artistic, musical, engineering and performance skills.

The experiences of Roma under the Nazis, slavery, genocide and expulsion can all be effectively embedded into the curriculum, as recommended by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation of 1st July 2020, which for the first time called on all 47 Member States to include the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials ¹¹.

In the same way distinctive painting styles (for example of Roma, Bargee/Boater and Showmen)

¹¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/schools-should-include-roma-and-traveller-history-in-teaching-curricula-council-of-europe-recommendation>

can be effectively worked into art projects and the Gypsy/Roma inspired music of many composers can be linked back to its origins to enrich the school, college or university curricula¹². The depiction of Gypsies in literature and the media can be examined critically, and students can be given opportunities to write alternatives and responses as recommended by Themelis and Foster (2013), whilst in HE settings there is a growing body of critical and theoretical literature which interrogates the representation of GRT cultures in a range of art forms (e.g. Silverman, 2021; Houghton-Walker, 2014; Matthew, 2020)

Inclusive schools reviewed in the literature (including DfE and Ofsted inspection reports) were aware of this balanced approach of engaging with and respecting culture whilst ensuring that parents and children were aware of school cultures and regulations, and were successful in communicating their expectations to families whilst being sufficiently flexible and inclusive to accommodate cultural differences (Ofsted, 1999). A flexible, work-preparedness curriculum was reported as often being seen as more relevant to Traveller lifestyles and cultural expectations although it is important that this does not become a stereotypical curriculum offer, precluding opportunities for young people to follow a more traditional academic pathway. Individual students thus need personalised learning opportunities building on their interests, aspirations and particular needs via different pathways which retain their engagement with learning (Wilkin et al., 2010).

Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM), celebrated every June since 2008 in some schools, provides *“a safe place within which critical narratives of the history of GRT groups can help in the reconstruction of more equal relationships.”* (Acton and Ryder, 2012). Indeed in the last two years we have begun to see a small number of universities also celebrating and engaging with GRTHM¹³ as interest grows in supporting members of the communities into further and higher education, with the GTRSBintoHE Pledge recommending the adoption of GRTHM into the regular calendar of university multi-cultural events hosted by HEPs.

In the Acton and Ryder chapter (2012, op. cit) Isaac Blake, a Romani Gypsy who was active in establishing GRTHM in Wales, describes how activities scheduled for presentation during the month, may be developed over several months in advance of the event to enhance engagement longitudinally and across communities and ensure continuity of

discussion within the curricula. 2011 GRTHM events in Wales, for example, included dance, drama and artwork, and residencies by professional artists. Staff of inclusive schools can thus be facilitated in maintaining a balance between acknowledging and celebrating culture, while not making students feel exposed as being different as they see their histories celebrated alongside other populations such as the long-established Black History Month.

Mutual respect

Respect is clearly a two-way process. Wilkin et al (Wilkin et al. 2010) reported that inclusive education required that a balance was struck between acknowledging and celebrating culture, while not making students feel exposed, a theme which has also arisen in the background consultations when developing the GTRSBintoHE Pledge, with some students from the communities (see Greenfields, 2019) emphasised the importance of dialogue between universities and GTRSB students as some individuals might just wish to get on with their course rather than being required to act as a role model or ‘educator’ to support staff and other students’ learning, or to be seen as the ‘expert’ in all things relating to their culture.

Accordingly, schools (and also colleges and universities – see further Braisby, 2021) should embrace the cultures of all its pupils and pupils and students should be encouraged to feel proud of their own culture, but also respect and identify with the culture of the school, college or university.

In primary schools, where there is frequent contact between GRT parents and teachers, as well as the potential for greater flexibility, this may be less problematic than when young people reach secondary school age or consider entering into College or Higher Education, although as is clear from our findings (below), parental and wider family influences on educational intentions and pathways remains strong for many young people from GTRSB communities who may frequently elect to work alongside parents rather than remain in education, and who would often not contemplate leaving home to go to university in a different location.

In secondary schools (as is borne out by comments from young people interviewed for this study), adolescents Gypsies, Roma and Travellers expect to be treated as adults and feel it is disrespectful to speak to them as children (Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Levinson and Sparkes, 2003; Levinson,

2008). Teachers also expect to be respected and engaged with in a particular manner and this often can be a source of conflict, which may potentially lead to school exclusion.

Schools which successfully retained Gypsy Roma and Traveller students were found to have clear and simple rules, clearly explained and fairly applied. In such circumstances parents were found to be supportive where rules were based on the principles of mutual respect and agreed at enrolment, creating scope to develop a longer-term relationship between the school and family. The shift to college based education for young people who stay on, or alternative (typically skills based) provision for young people aged 14-16 where there is a more interactive relationship between learners and teachers is thus often more suited to the expectations and culture of GRT families and their young adults.

Whole school behaviour expectations, such as staff using solution-focused language, praise and encouragement and students developing ways to respond appropriately were also found to build respect and minimised tension (Wilkin et al., 2009); with these lessons equally applicable to FE and HE contexts although in the latter contexts it is to be expected that these models of engagement with students already apply, alongside a focus on self-direction and responsibility for learning.

Flexibility in delivering education/expectations of in-person attendance

In the context of schools – and by extension, FE and HE – best practice in supporting GRT learners is linked to the degree to which the educational setting is willing to be flexible, with such flexibility being the professional search for the most effective ways to meet the needs of all pupils.

A constructive approach to mobility, including distance learning or supporting dual registration with schools for pupils who travel for parts of the year for family employment, and a flexible attendance policies which sanctions time off to attend cultural, whole family employment or family events where pupils’ attendance was generally good have been seen to support engagement with and positive relationships with GRT and Showmen learners and their families (DfE, 2014). A number of schools highlighted as having good relationships with GTRSB families have been

noted as providing additional support for children such as homework clubs at lunchtimes, project-based homework and support with presentation of drafts followed by receipt of feedback to support improvement of submitted work (Bhopal et al. 2000).

Both Kent and Norfolk County Councils (local authorities with large GRT and Showman communities and well established Traveller Education/Inclusion Services) are good examples of local education authorities who have produced detailed information on their websites, and leaflets for schools which provide information and advice, underpinned by evidence based practice, on creating a welcoming environment for GTRSB pupils. Downloadable materials and case-studies suggest that in addition to inclusive curricula, alertness to education support needs and awareness of challenges which may pertain in relation to access to uniforms or literate adults to assist children with homework; discreetly offered access to school washing machines or showers (for example) may support nomadic families who are passing through an area and who may send a child to school for a few weeks if it is known that the school is culturally competent and engaged with young people who may only have intermittent access to education (Norfolk County Council, Kent County Council, undated¹⁴). Similarly, the advice pages for these two local authorities stress that the ‘virtual school’ system can support children in remaining engaged with education whilst nomadic or out of physical school settings.

Overall, the literature reinforces and emphasises the fact that whilst many GTRSB pupils and students may need additional signposting or support initially, learners needs vary and it is important not to generalise or stereotype, even positively, as this may place additional burdens or expectations upon a young person (Women and Equalities Committee, 2019).

Indeed, for those relatively few GRT young people who have entered into HE, as emphasised by participants in the House of Lords Roundtable on Higher Education (Greenfields, 2019) it is important that they are not required by default to be the expert on their community and culture as many may wish to simply blend in quietly and learn, free of stereotype, stigma or valorisation as a ‘role model’.

In the next section of this report we turn now to briefly contextualising the West Yorkshire GTRSB population before presenting the findings from this study.

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/22/roma-culture-influence-mainstream>

¹³ <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/features/bucks-new-university-celebrates-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history-month-events-championing> and <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/news/support-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/>

¹⁴ Kent County Council Inclusion Support Service <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/support-for-children-and-young-people/inclusion-support-service-kent/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-inclusion-and-achievement>; Norfolk County Council Inclusion and Opportunity Service: Supporting new GRT children in your school or setting <https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/pupil-needs/gypsy-roma-traveller/training-and-resources>

Contextualising the Study Area

The main administrative data sets in the West Yorkshire area are based on the regional Government statistics on diversity and school census data supplied by GHWY. The main PLASC categories in England (unlike Wales) which capture data on Roma/Gypsies and Travellers of Irish Heritage cannot be easily disaggregated by ethnicity or age of pupils based on available open access Department of Education or ONS statistics and require identification of key administrative areas by self-identified ethnicity and across the entire secondary or primary/nursery age groups.

Overall however, recent (January 2021¹⁵) DfE PLASC statistics¹⁶ suggest (pupils of secondary school ages) that for the five main administrative areas in West Yorkshire there are a total of 1056 ‘White Gypsy/Roma’ Pupils in state funded secondary schools and 36 Travellers of Irish Heritage in such schools in the following localities: Calderdale; City of Bradford, City of Leeds; Kirklees and the City of Wakefield. Inevitably these figures do not capture young people who are out of education/NEETS, home educated, in special schools or other alternative provision. It is important to note that anecdotally, and as noted in the findings from the focus groups and discussions presented below, there is likely to have been a reduction in young people from GRT communities in schools resulting from the pandemic, leading to reduced pupil numbers in the year in question, and earlier school leaving. This can be tracked by reviewing the figures from earlier years which demonstrate slightly higher numbers of pupils in both ethnic categories in the five years prior to the pandemic.

The largest number of **Gypsy/Roma** children in secondary school returns are found in Leeds (528 pupils in total), Bradford with a total of 424 secondary school age pupils identifying as Gypsy/Roma; Calderdale 71 pupils in this ethnic category. Kirklees enumerates 18 Gypsy/Traveller pupils in the year in question and Wakefield recording 15 such pupils of secondary school age. It is calculated that the greatest proportion of young people in these categories are Roma who, as discussed below, appear to be more likely potentially to remain in education to secondary school age than do Romani Gypsies.

For pupils of **Irish Traveller Heritage** in the administrative areas the numbers of self-identifying pupils in secondary schools in the academic year 2020/21 is as follows: 18 such young people in

Leeds; 8 in Kirklees; 5 pupils in Bradford secondary schools; 3 Irish Traveller pupils in Wakefield and in Calderdale secondary schools 2 self-identified young people in secondary education (Total of 36 pupils).

For comparative purposes to demonstrate the differential between primary and secondary age cohorts – assuming that there is not a significantly greater ‘bulge’ at primary age than secondary school entrance in January 2021 – a total of 1146 primary age pupils were enumerated as being of Gypsy/Roma ethnicity in in West Yorkshire (predominantly in Bradford (533 children) with Leeds enumerating 501 children in this ethnic category followed respectively by Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield (53, 30 and 29 young people in each of the localities). In addition 140 pupils were identified as being Travellers of Irish Heritage in the region (62 in Leeds, 28 in Bradford; 26 in Wakefield, 18 in Calderdale and 6 in Kirklees) illustrating the drop-off in school attendance during secondary school transition or in the early years of secondary education amongst all three ethnic communities.

There were no Travellers of Irish Heritage and only 17 Gypsy/Roma children in nursery; all found in Bradford indicating that potentially all are Roma children in areas where there is a long-standing relationship between educational authorities and parents.

Special Schools in PLASC returns do not clearly delineate by age/school stage (and may indeed provide for children/young people across the age range) but for January 2021 under this category there were a recorded 6 children who are Travellers of Irish Heritage and 25 Gypsy/Roma pupils in ‘special schools’; with patterns of attendance in such schools following the geographical trend outlined above. e.g. The highest number of children in special schools who are of Gypsy/Roma ethnicity is as follows: 11 in Bradford, 10 in Leeds, 2 in Wakefield and one child each in Calderdale and Kirklees. In relation to Traveller children in special school education, 4 were enumerated in Leeds, 1 in Wakefield and 1 in Bradford special schools (both state and non-maintained establishments).

Finally, Pupil Referral Units do not differentiate by age of pupil in PLASC returns but a total of 7 Gypsy/Roma young people were recorded: in Calderdale 3 such young people, and 2 each in Bradford and Wakefield. No Travellers of Irish Heritage were enumerated in PRUs in 2020/21 although they have been detailed as in such educational provision in previous years albeit at considerably lower levels than for Gypsy/

Roma young people. The relatively low number of Traveller young people in PRUs may related to lower school attendance initially or families opting not to send children to a PRU but simply withdrawing them from education should such a referral take place. Greater interrogation of data would be required to explore the differentials between PRU referrals by area and if this pertains to more effective relationships with families and better management of young GTRSB pupils’ challenges in school.

To contextualise the number of young people in education (although as widely acknowledged administrative data derived from the Census is an undercount¹⁷), the most recent obtainable data on estimates of population (all ages) by GRT ethnicity in West Yorkshire are as follows (see table below); with Leeds clearly showing the largest populations.

The data included in the 2018 ONS calculations (see table below) is replicated also in the LeedsGATE baseline census for Calderdale & Kirklees (2015:18¹⁸) and then recalibrated based on their own collected data to suggest a more valid estimate of population of 426 Gypsies and Travellers in Kirklees and 216 in Calderdale. No comparable figures are available to recalculate numbers in Leeds, Bradford or Wakefield.

White Gypsy and Irish Traveller ethnicity population of West Yorkshire (Government Statistics, 2018 – based on Census returns 2011)

Local authority	Value/% of local population in this ethnic group	Census count 2011	Overall Population in administrative area
Bradford	0.08%	433	522452
Calderdale	0.04%	80	203826
Kirklees	0.04%	158	422458
Leeds	0.09%	687	751485
Wakefield	0.09%	302	325837

Accordingly, data is sparse for the size of the populations, and largely missing for migrant (or second generation) Roma families creating significant difficulties in accurately enumerating the populations. It can be anticipated however (supported by anecdotal evidence) that the populations are substantial and growing, albeit

school attendance may be unrecorded or patchy for the reasons explored in the literature and our primary research discussed below.

The Commissioning Team for this research Go Higher West Yorkshire were able to provide us with information and contact details of named secondary schools reporting percentages of Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage pupils (redacted to show only by locality in which the school is located). These establishments were all approached to participate in the survey which formed the initial phase of the research. Details of one other Academy in Leeds was also provided but no data on pupil numbers was provided during the initial scoping phase although the school in question was able to provide considerable support in relation to this research when a phone conversation took place with the Principal and a member of the research team.

15 July 2021 updates indicate a decline in school attendance across all age ranges for both Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children in the year 2020/2021 averaging 20% of all such children which may (see elsewhere in this report) pertain to declining attendance in school settings and transfer to ‘home education’ resulting from parental concerns over Covid risk which has exacerbated either early school leaving or young people experiencing home migration to countries of origin amongst Roma families.
16 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics#publicationSubjectForm-subjectId>

17 Traveller Movement (2013) Gypsy and Traveller population in England and the 2011 Census London: TM available at: <https://pad.basingstoke.gov.uk/documents/4753/01/07/37/01073789.PDF>
18 LeedsGate (2015) Calderdale & Kirklees Baseline Census Gypsy & Traveller Communities Leeds; LeedsGATE <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/planning-policy/pdf/supportingDocuments/homes/Baseline-Census-Gypsy-Traveller-Communities.pdf>

School/college	number of pupils classified as Gypsy/Roma ethnic origin	% of pupils classified as Gypsy/Roma ethnic origin	number of pupils classified as Irish Traveller ethnic origin	% of pupils classified as Irish Traveller ethnic origin
Leeds – Academy	16	2%	1	0%
Bradford – Academy	25	1%	0	0%
Bradford – School	54	4%	0	0%
Leeds – Academy	93	10%	0	0%
Leeds – Academy	21	2%	3	0%
Leeds – Academy	10	1%	1	0%
Bradford – Academy	25	1%	1	0%
Leeds – Academy	32	5%	0	0%
Bradford – Technology College	131	8%	0	0%
Bradford – School	14	1%	1	0%
Bradford – Academy	57	6%	0	0%
Leeds – Academy	84	10%	0	0%
Leeds – voluntary aided (Church) school	17	2%	3	0%
Bradford – voluntary aided (Church) school	25	3%	0	0%
Bradford – Academy	24	3%	0	0%
Calderdale – Academy	104	16%	0	0%
Total	732 young people		10 young people	

As can be seen from the data presented above, although the total of pupils who are members of the community returned to us from respondents was considerably less than the figures submitted through Plasc returns (732 v 1056 Gypsy/Roma children and 10 v 36 Children of Irish Traveller heritage), there is a preponderance of Leeds and Bradford Academies with a largely Gypsy/Roma (in practice mainly Roma) student body represented amongst schools with largest numbers of pupils from the target communities. Several schools (one in Calderdale and the remaining three – including an Academy not shown in this table – in Leeds who provided verbal information during an interview) reported that they have around or in excess of 10% of pupils from Roma backgrounds. Irish Traveller pupils are significantly under-represented in all recorded statistics for secondary schools.



Findings from Young People

Findings from Qualitative Data Gathering Exercises and Activities: Young People from GRT communities

In the discussion below, quotations and commentary have been grouped under the core themes which emerged during the in-reach activities with young people, differentiating where possible by ethnicity and gender. It has not been possible to differentiate Roma young people in the discussion groups by country of origin or duration or residence/birth in the UK but would recommend that additional work is undertaken to explore this further and the impact of either migration (and potential language barriers) or being a second generation (first born in the UK) migrant on aspirations amongst young Roma.

Perceptions of career and further education options

GRT young people articulated ambitions to enter a wide variety of careers. Examples from all three communities included football coaching/management, construction, mechanics, engineering, business and management, taxi/Uber driving, policing, real estate, interior design, and hair and beauty. There appeared however to be relatively limited knowledge of the range of courses which were available at university or for young people (which may pertain to the age range of those interviewed) and some difficulty differentiating between programmes available at University and FE colleges.

“I want to go to university, college thing, go and be a makeup artist or something” (Romani Gypsy girl, 13)

Amongst the young people who participated in discussions, there is a largely ‘traditional’ gendered split in aspirations (see also below), a theme which also arose in comments from Professionals, although it was noted in one interview with a careers advisor that they had once encountered a Roma girl who had reflected on courses and training which might be seen as more commonly

associated with ‘masculine’ career paths, e.g. STEM subjects, particularly engineering.

While some Roma young people indicated a preference not to progress to further education, most indicated that they were thinking about, or planning to study at college and/or university, indicative perhaps of increased parental and family alertness to opportunities for study which Roma would typically be precluded from taking up in their countries of origin.

In contrast, Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people (all of whom were currently being educated outside of formal school settings) communicated a strong interest in further learning, often skills based, but were more hesitant to access this in college or university settings than were their Roma peers.

This is typically due to previous negative experiences in schools and early school leaving impacting literacy and numeracy skills. As considered below, the lack of role models in the community who have remained in education, a lacuna in knowledge pertaining to the range of programmes in HEPs, processes required to access further or higher education, and limited financial literacy have also had a profound impact on attitudes towards the feasibility or desirability of continuing in education to tertiary level for young Gypsies and Travellers.

In contrast, further and higher education were seen by most Roma young people involved in interviews as opening up opportunities and improving employment prospects.

“If you go to college you get better education and qualified for big jobs” (Roma boy, 14-15)

“Wanting to make something in life. Get a good job” (Roma girl, 14-15)

For some young people, specific career goals drove their interest in attending college or university:

“The dreams I’ve got [influenced decision to go to college] because I want to be like football manager. You’ve got to do football coaching if I’m going to college” (Roma male, 14-15)

It is possible that these more positive attitudes to FE and HE (which contrasts clearly with the



views of some Professionals who commented on low parental aspirations) are evidence of parental support for their children taking up opportunities which they themselves did not have, although as noted by some professionals, parents typically have limited knowledge of further and higher education, or may be illiterate themselves, or not speak/read English, so are often unable to provide educational support to their children. Despite this, there was considerable interest in remaining in education articulated by young Roma who participated in discussion settings in their school, which has a large cohort of Roma pupils. Indeed, the provision of tailored careers advice and guidance in the school, and encouragement from dedicated staff has likely also contributed to these aspirations.

A number of young people from all the communities perceived of college or university written work as particularly challenging, (based on their experiences of education in school) with several raising concerns about whether or not they would be able to cope with the standard

of work expected in FE or HE. This theme arose particularly in focus groups with young Roma:

"Sometimes I feel like maybe I'm not ready or I can't handle going to college or something like that... I'm bit like stressing and I think I might not be able to do well overall" (Roma male, 14-15)

Facilitator: We've talked a lot about college, what do you think of universities? What do you imagine...

Roma Male: "It's much harder because you have to do a lot of stuff".

Roma Male: "Yes, I don't want to go university".

Facilitator: So, you don't want to go to university, you think it's harder?

Roma Male: "If I stay here I'd like to go to university"

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)¹⁹

¹⁹ This exchange also raises the issue of return to country of origin or migration elsewhere in the world for this family, a theme which is explored in more depth below, and also emerged in a Professional interview where a school liaison officer commented on families returning to mainland Europe during the pandemic, as well as concerns over EU settled status impacting Roma families in West Yorkshire who may feel unable to remain in the UK

Roma Female: "I think it is going to be hard for us" [if go onto FE or HE].

Facilitator: Hard, yes. Do you want to say why you think it is going to be hard? What is it that is going to be hard?

Roma Female: "Because you need to learn too much. You do not have time for your friends, for you. You need to learn."

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

For Roma young people in particular, not only may family or gender expectations (identified by young people as 'culture') impact opportunities or expectations of remaining in education, but language barriers could exacerbate and pose an additional hurdle to pursuing further education:

Facilitator: "What else is similar or different? Is there anything else that is different, when you talk about culture?"

Roma Female: "The language".

Facilitator: The language, yes. Do you want to say what you mean a bit more?

Roma Female: "They [Roma] do not really know how to speak [English] that well".

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

Role models

While one or two young people knew GRT community members who had attended college or university, others described an absence of role models in their communities who had participated in FE or HE and to whom they could look for inspiration:

"Here's a good example....I can't name one person I know that's been to university. I can't name a single one, and that just goes to say that's proof [of the very low numbers of Gypsies/Travellers in university, noted by the community member facilitator] (Irish Traveller boy, 17, studying in college for a Trade)

Roma Male: "My aunt, she went here to this school and now went to university like last year".

Facilitator: What were her experiences like? Did she talk about it?

Roma Male: "She sometimes struggled sometimes when she first started, like she says how it's hard, but it has its good points"

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

"It is not really a thing to go and do education. I have never ever seen someone in our culture actually go and do something. It is not a thing". (Roma girl, 14-15)

Seeing the achievements of other community members, to whom young people could relate, was seen by participants from across all the communities as particularly important in inspiring future generations. These individuals were also seen as potentially able to mentor, aid with networking, provide advice, and instil confidence in young people that they themselves could achieve similar success:

"I've always seen businessman who are dressed up nicely, spoke professionally and engage with everyone and that's what made me choose [in school] business". (Roma boy, 13-14)

Facilitator 1: Does that change how you think about it when you've seen your sister [or] your aunt go [to college]?

Roma Male: "Yes, it makes me feel I can go as well".

Roma Male: "It encourages us to go further and see that we can still succeed".

Roma Male: "When you see a person like from our country become something that big in this country".

Roma Male: "It inspires you"

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

"It's like most people they could relate with who've gone through the same experiences and the hardships they went through". (Roma male 14-15)

Indeed, the impact of visible role models from the communities cannot be under-estimated. This was evident in the workshop sessions, and focus groups themselves, where Romani Gypsy and

Traveller young people clearly identified with, and benefited from the opportunity to ask facilitators of similar backgrounds to themselves about their experiences of education and university.

“Then you would get into the likes of you, [with qualifications] would go back into your course because [you’ve] got my qualifications now and then I could go back from there and I could get the jobs that I want”. (Irish Traveller boy, community mapping exercise)

Another young Roma boy who participated in the school-based discussion offered the following response to the facilitator sharing his own experiences of going to university, with this clearly stimulating interest and motivation to undertake further education:

“He’s [facilitator] making me feel more confident about going to college and university” (Roma boy, 14-15)

The influence Gypsy or Traveller community members carving out a career path which could potentially be open to others from their community, although not usually seen as something Gypsy or Travellers ‘do’ arose in several discussions with young people during workshops and focus groups at LeedsGATE, particularly in relation to modelling of such activities by young staff members who have studied. Responses from female participants in particular were underpinned by a pragmatic acceptance of the necessity for a second income to support a life-style to which young women might aspire:

“More people, like, more Travellers and Gypsies should get back into education, because most of them now, they’re all, like – some of them, like the 14 and 15 year-olds, they should go and apply for colleges and all and get back in and get jobs, because they can’t just be depending on the man that they’re married to, to get them all clothes, get all their lashes, nails, all the sunbeds and everything done.” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

“I went to college and I learnt to work with children with disabilities and then from that a job came up at Leeds GATE, and I always wanted to work with children, it was like my dream to work with children, especially Travelling children, because being from the Travelling community I know all the barriers and that... in the way” (Young Romani Gypsy community worker in focus group)

“[If Gypsies and Travellers were together in college] ...all the other young ones, like all the brothers and sisters might follow on from them” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

I know a few Travellers [referring here to women] that I know of who work, but it’s only, like, a few of them, like two or three of them that I know that work. (English and Irish Traveller girl, 14)

Importantly, (discussed further below under gender) young Gypsy and Traveller women highlighted that mothers, community mentors and youth workers had emphasised that having an education or training in a marketable skill both provided some additional financial security for the family, and should a relationship fail enable a woman to provide for herself and her children rather than becoming reliant on Benefits, in a culture where re-marriage is very strongly critiqued.

Young Roma women in one discussion group, none of whom could identify anyone in their community who had undertaken further education or practice based study, reflected on how they felt about the idea of women from a similar background undertaking higher education and also communicated an ambition to act as role models themselves for future generations:

Roma female: “They [Roma who are graduates or well known for a particular profession] are going to be an example for us”.

Facilitator: Yes, they would set an example for you and you will set an example for people who come after.

Roma female: “We are going to be an example to follow”.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

Given the importance of role models, young people suggested that they would value hearing more talks from successful GRT professionals about education and employment options, with (for the young Gypsies and Travellers in particular) an emphasis on practical skills and craft based roles including business development, health and beauty, child care, floristry (as demonstrated by project team member and University Research Assistant Sherrie Smith within a workshop) etc. Two girls in a focus group recalled with great satisfaction the hands on training session and information on skills courses which was delivered to them by a community member some time prior to the research project commencing:

“I’ve got a very supportive mother, she wants me to educate myself, she wants me to go far in life” (Irish Traveller boy, 17, currently in FE).

“She said to us, “What do you want to do today?” and she came down and she showed us how to pin hair and she showed us how to do your make up”. [Traveller woman who came up from London to LeedsGATE to run a short-course](Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Encouragement from family and mentors to remain in education/learn a trade

While the extent to which family encouraged study at college or university varied between participants, a considerable number of young people suggested that their parents prompted them to think about these options, with Romani Gypsy and Travellers mothers in particular likely to advise girls that it is important to have a ‘fall-back’ in case of family poverty or divorce:

“Sometimes my parents ask me if I have any plans for the future or anything like that. They’re saying that I have to decide, that they’ll support me” (Roma boy, 14-15)

“My mum tells me that I need to go to a college and university so I get what I want to get”. (Roma boy, 13-14)

“My father don’t believe in me going to college but my mother wants me to go – but I say no” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Parental literacy problems however can mean that it is particularly challenging for them to support a young person’s education – especially during the Pandemic when there has been a rapid swivel to on-line learning, which may itself have acted as a further disincentive to accessing formal education.

“My mother doesn’t really know how to read and write but I don’t go to any home schooling class, she had to do it but she don’t really know how to read and write so it wasn’t really that good.” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Similarly it was noted by one young man that concerns over entering a new environment can lead to anxiety about trying a new opportunity

“Because Travellers shy away from education, like, “You’ve never been in this building before, I don’t know anybody in there,” there’s nerves, there’s past bullying, there’s multiple things that have gone on and popped up. The stories, my granddad when he was back in Ireland years ago, it was an awful struggle for him when he was younger because not only was he verbally bullied, now in school the teachers and the children were racist” (Irish Traveller boy, 17)

Overall however, encouragement and support from family and others (e.g. teachers, community groups) was seen as an important facilitator of more GRT young people considering that college or university could be a positive and achievable goal:

Facilitator: What else would help you to succeed in going on to college and university? Is there anything that you can think of?

Roma Female: Family encouraging.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

“She said that you can go [to college] because again, if the boyfriend goes up and leaves you, you’d have something to fall back on” (Romani Gypsy girl, 13, speaking about encouragement provided by a community worker to enable her to think of going to College)

For me, someone has to push me because I don’t push myself (Roma male, 14-15)

“In school I struggled a lot but say like you ask for help over in Leeds GATE they help you, they don’t say, “Oh, go do it yourself.” They just help you more over in Leeds GATE. That’s why I wouldn’t go back to school.” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Some Roma young people felt that opportunities for parents to visit university, or more and in-depth discussion between parents/families and universities and careers advisors, would be useful in raising awareness of the benefits of receiving further and higher education in the UK, supporting the young person's aspirations, and assisting parents to consider the implications on future opportunities, of a potential return to the country of origin:

Roma Male: I think it would be good [to remain in the UK and undertake further education] and it will explain better to our parents because they don't know much and how much they give the education better than in Romania.

Roma Male: They know that it's better here than in our country.

Roma Male: But you have to explain to them how much better you want to be in the future if you stay here.

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

Given the point also made above by the Traveller boy about the sense of anxiety some community members experience about being in an environment where they don't know anybody, there is clear scope for familiarisation activities with young people from GRT communities and their broader families, to encourage them to enter into Colleges and Universities and see that they are a welcoming environment in which GRT people can thrive and achieve.

Roma youth – returning to a family's country of origin

Several young people from Roma backgrounds suggested that the ever-present potential of family consideration of return to the household's country of origin was a barrier to pursuing further education:

Sometimes family, they say you cannot go to college because we might move to another country and you cannot go (Roma boy, 13-14)

Brexit and settled status concerns were noted explicitly in a Roma discussion groups as one of the drivers for families moving, a theme which was also mirrored in interview findings from professionals.

Male: They don't – I don't know how to say it [reflecting on concerns about moving – with a Roma peer offering the term to complete the sentence].

Male: Brexit you mean?

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

While it was suggested by the facilitators that it might be possible for Roma young people to stay in the UK to pursue higher education even if their parents returned home, this was disregarded by young people – both because of difficulties if there are no other relatives with whom they could stay, and an understandable reluctance to be parted from their family:

Roma Male: If my family decides to stay here for a long time I might go to university.

Facilitator 1: Would you ever go to university even if your family didn't stay or is that something that you would find...?

Roma Male: Well, if I have like my relatives... If I have relatives, yes, I can stay with them.

Facilitator 2: When you go to university you don't have to depend on anybody else, you'll be 18, you'll probably work, or you'll get a loan.

Roma Male: Yes, but it would be hard for me to remain.

Facilitator 2: It's hard for you to stay here?

Roma Male: Who will take care of us?

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

A perceived lack of good quality colleges in the countries young people would be returning to and the educational practices used within these institutions (as well as implications of racism against Roma students) were also identified as barriers to pursuing further education outside of the UK:

You feel like you're not wanted in any school so you just don't go back." (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Facilitator 2: Are there no colleges in another country?

Roma Male: Yes, there are but in Romania there are not good colleges there.

Roma Male: "In Romania teachers are fighting you".

Roma Male: "Yes, sometimes the teacher uses corporal punishment".

Roma Male: "They get a stick and when you're late to school they smack your hands".

Roma Male: "When I was 6 ...I didn't want to eat, so she [teacher] pulled me out of the chair and then she forced me to eat".

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14))

Experiences of bullying and racism in educational settings

Concerns about bullying and racism in schools, and dismissive attitudes of teachers when complaints of racism were made, emerged repeatedly in responses from Gypsy and Traveller young people. Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller girls involved in the study, discussed this theme extensively in all sessions, as a reason for early school leaving:

"Like we lose our education due to racist people. Like, why should that happen? It shouldn't." (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

"When I went to school they said that I was very intelligent and all that, but then, like, when I started getting bullied and all the racism started then I just left and now I don't go back to school and I'm not going to go back...you feel like you're not wanted in any school so you just don't go back." (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people described a lack of understanding shown by teachers towards Traveller Communities, as compared to other groups:

"There isn't even really – not much about us. There's everything about every other race, like, there's loads of TV programmes about everything, and there's books about different races, but if you even look around every shop and store, there isn't anything about Travellers. There aren't any books being written about Travellers.... only if there was anything about Travellers in the newspapers, they always put the bad stuff in" (Romani Gypsy girl, 13)

"They don't understand where we come from but they understand where all the other races are from...But yes, I don't think it's equal, like, we all should have equal rights" (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Incidents of bullying and racism often went unchallenged in schools, resulting in a loss of trust and little confidence among young people that they would be protected and supported in college or university settings:

"People can tell straightaway if you're a Traveller or not. They just say, "Oh you're a Traveller." And sometimes say if you were arguing with them they would say, "Go back to your trailers, go back to your caravans. You don't belong here," stuff like that. Like, "You Pikey" (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

"They'd say that they would sort it out and then when you get in, nothing really happens about it. So even if they said that I wouldn't really trust them to be honest. I just didn't want to stay here because sometimes Colleges do lie and say, "We'll this out and we'll do this for you," then when you get there, they don't do nothing for you" (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

One young woman perceptively reflected on how if it were Teachers' or non-Gypsy/Traveller children being bullied in school, parents and teachers would be outraged and demand that action was taken:

“Exactly, they wouldn’t [put up with it], but their children don’t get bullied, so they don’t care about other people’s opinions on their children being bullied. Mainly people are all about themselves; they don’t really care about other people anymore.” (Romani Gypsy girl, 13)

Traveller boys in particular were more likely to refer to experiences of physical violence in school settings, linking their own experiences to that of their uncles, fathers and grandfathers, sadly reflecting that little seems to have changed for their community over generations in relation to experience of brutal racism, and the failure to recognise and label racism where this is directed at White minority ethnic groups:

“We used to fight when we were younger, we got in trouble for it, there was no more fighting [later years in school], but then a lot of it was verbal, bullying and the rest of it. So, what would happen then is if there was more of them to go to a teacher, then you’d get in trouble. So, if you think of it this way, if there’s 2 Travelling boys sitting down in school and about 10 other boys going to a teacher and telling them you’ve been bullying them or that you’ve been carrying on with them – this happened to me and my Black friend at school as well.

They [White majority pupils] were racist towards some of the Blacks but they got used to them. It was different between Travellers and Blacks because I feel like they [White children in school] were educated not to be racist, but little did they realise... [they think] I am White, I’m not a race or anything like that.. [but] we’re still an ethnic group. There was a lot of disrespect. When I was in Year 2, I was very young at the time, I think I was about 6 years old and I used to get into a lot of fights with the 13-year-olds and stuff like that, because they heard a lot about what was going on with Travellers and that they didn’t like them and stuff like this. So, I was fighting a lot and obviously, that’s what I meant by when I got into my older years things had quieted down but that’s when they wanted to teach us [a lesson] and they’d outnumber you” (Irish Traveller boy, 17)

So strong was the perception that racism would be experienced wherever a GRT person was in education (other than when studying amongst their own community), that in one focus group a (female) participant explicitly enquired of Sherrie (Romani Research Assistant at a University) (off recording) about whether they would be likely to encounter similar instances of racism and bullying in FE or

HE to those she had endured in schools. On other occasions, the anticipated experience of bullying in FE and HE settings emerged spontaneously when young women were asked to reflect on whether they might want to continue in formal education and what they felt they might learn:

“Even if they said, “I can give you a place now and we won’t let you get picked on,” I would say no. They’re not trustworthy” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

“Colleges and the big school is the same, in my opinion they’re the same. I was, like, picked on and bullied and that in the corridors” (Romani Gypsy girl 14)

To underline this, one young woman who had been identified as intelligent and doing well in school until she left early because of bullying, had contemplated going to an FE college, with her mother’s support. Although her mother had made enquiries on her behalf about alternative provision, ultimately she didn’t take up the place as:

“My father don’t believe in me going to college... my mother wants me to go but I say no. She applied for a college because I said that I would go but then I changed my mind because I was not sure” (Irish Traveller Girl, 13 years old)

Young Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller girls receiving home schooling reported mixed views about this experience. On the one hand, this alleviated the risk of experiencing racism and bullying in schools; however, on the other hand, some found the home-schooling experience quite isolating, or suggested this was more difficult where their parents had lower levels of literacy:

“It was a bit boring and I’d rather go in a classroom than be home schooled by myself. It was a bit awkward just by yourself” (Romani Gypsy girl, 13)

Roma young people articulated fewer concerns about experiencing bullying in school, college or university. However, this is likely because individuals involved in the study were recruited from a school in the area with large numbers of Roma pupils, with these networks noted to be important for fostering inclusion. Indeed, negative experiences of school were not exclusive to Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people, with two Roma boys reflecting on the experience of being within a larger cohort of Roma pupils in a particular school, as one drew a contrast between his current and prior educational experiences:

Roma Male: “At primary school I didn’t feel like I fit in, there weren’t any people I really like knew and felt like I was out of place but here...”

Roma Male: “Yes, but now you get better with a lot of people”.

Roma Male (1st speaker) “Yes, I found here a lot of people who I already knew and talked to...and as years passed from then I’ve become better as a student, my grades improved and my social skills as well.”

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

Creating safe and welcoming educational spaces

Within the discussions, although often the theme arose spontaneously, the young people were also invited to reflect on the conditions that led them to feel safe and welcomed in educational spaces. While differences were apparent between ethnic groups in regard to the extent to which they felt included in formal school settings, and the educational support they would like to receive, this is likely (as noted above) to be a reflection of the sample, in that all Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils were currently receiving education



I think it’s the same [college/university], like, with the high school, they don’t want us there”. (Romani Gypsy, 13)

at home, whereas Roma pupils were recruited through a school which has been very proactive in supporting members of these communities.

Due to the extensiveness of bullying and the intergenerational nature of such experiences, young people also described the transmission of ways of responding to such negative experiences:

“Well, I left [school] because I didn’t really like it. So I just thought, “Oh I’m not going to fit in the college as well” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Due to the bullying encountered, as well as the observed lack of understanding of Travellers in ‘traditional’ education settings, Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people articulated a preference to receive education and training in dedicated settings (such as GATE) which are specifically for their community, and in which they felt free from judgement, able to learn in a culturally congruent setting and protected against racism:

“because we’ll all understand each other a bit more and we’re all the same, so we know stuff other people – so say if we went into a normal university and to be honest, I don’t really know much and you kind of get a bit embarrassed if you were getting asked questions and stuff if you didn’t know anything about it, whereas if you are with Travelling people you wouldn’t be bothered. Like, your own kind of people” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

“I wanted to do hair and beauty but if I went there, I just don’t think I fit in so that’s why I don’t go. Down the road there’s like a college and it’s for 14 year olds and I would have been able to join in March but I didn’t want to go because I wouldn’t fit in. So that’s why it would be good to have a separate college for Travellers and Gypsies” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Concerns around safety also fed into decisions beyond school, with young Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers communicating a preference for self-employment and working from home when thinking about future employment choices:

“I can just do my businesses at home, like, you know where you deliver stuff? I’d rather... I wouldn’t work in shops, stuff like that.” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

For young women there was an acute awareness of the need to balance anticipated childcare and

family responsibilities (often occurring at a young age, by late teens or early 20s) with employment opportunities, and at times a frustration with expectations of staying on in school to achieve formal education when there was a strong sense of entrepreneurship already deeply embedded into their daily lives and culture:

“Yes, I always wanted to run my own shop and do my own business but then when I left school (by age 14) it’s like you don’t have any education, you won’t be able to get GCSEs to get any job” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young women also indicated that their preferred style of learning (by observing and modelling others) was not always accommodated in schools. They described feeling constrained by strict codes of conduct in schools (around not being allowed to talk or needing to ask permission for toilet breaks for example) when compared with the environment at Leeds GATE, and once again, connected with gender norms (see further below), found revising outside school time difficult alongside other family responsibilities:

Irish Traveller girl: “Like you forget it all because they’re not really showing you. They just write it down, they say write down in your books and revise it at home. We don’t really have time to do that”.

Facilitator: “Why don’t you have time? Tell me a little bit more about that”.

Irish Traveller girl: “We mind the babies and cook and clean”

(Dialogue with Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Young Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers valued educational provision which was driven by their own interests and ambitions, as opposed to being asked to complete tasks and activities which were set by others, from outside of the community:

“I wouldn’t go to a college. I would prefer people to come to GATE and do those [training programmes] with us” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

“I enjoy doing most of the tasks because they ask you what you want. Like in school you don’t get to say what you want, you just get handed out all the stuff. But Leeds GATE, they get your opinion on what you want as well.” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

In contrast, whilst apparently feeling more comfortable in school settings than did Gypsy and Traveller young people, Roma youth pointed to the importance of supportive staff, as well as opportunities to make friendships, and highlighted the sense of solidarity and belonging fostered by networks of students from similar backgrounds:

Facilitator: Great. What do you think about being at school here, what’s good about being at school here?

Roma Male: “Here is lots of good people that support you as well”.

Roma Male: “We have a good education”.

Roma Male: “There are lots of Romanians here and it’s easier for you, [name of staff member] here with us and you know”.

Roma Male: At primary school I didn’t feel like I fit in, there weren’t any people I really like knew and felt like I was out of place but here...”

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

Thus, although the Roma young people are within a formal school setting rather than a community learning environment, the sense of solidarity, cultural understanding, visibility and belonging within a group of peers, appear to be key to retention in education and achievement, in a manner alluded to by young Gypsies and Travellers. In the context of the young people accessing LeedsGATE this group also stressed that they would be more likely to consider formal learning (linked to priority areas related to employment and entrepreneurship) if they were learning alongside other community members, and taught or supported by Gypsy or Traveller tutors and youth workers.

Gender expectations around marriage and family responsibilities

The impact of gender on further and higher education choices formed a strong theme throughout discussions with GRT young people. However, this influence was not straightforward, and expectations connected with gender must be understood as operating in complex and nuanced ways. For Roma as well as Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young women, family and community expectations were typically strongly linked to a concern for morality and personal and family reputation.

“I was only 10, the way my birthday would fall was I was only 10 when I left school and my mother said she wasn’t sending me to high school with 18-year-old and 19-year-old men.” (Traveller woman, community group staff member)

In turn, for many girls these themes were embedded into an overarching prioritisation of marriage and family responsibilities over further education (which was also regarded as unnecessary for males):

“The boys don’t really need college, because they just get vans and they do all the trees and cutting down trees and stuff like that, whereas girls, we just have to stay at home and cook, mind children and clean” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Although there is clear emerging evidence that even in the last half decade there is increasingly a shift in attitudes amongst the GRT communities towards remaining in education, and greater articulation of the notion that young women may need to either support themselves and their children should a relationship fail, or at the very least be able to assist with earning enough to provide some family and household luxuries for their children and themselves; there are still clearly differentiated expectations on boys and girls in most families and communities. This holds true across all of the three communities interviewed for this study:

Facilitator 1: Do you think that there are different barriers in the way of young Roma girls going on to college and university than there are for other people? Or is it the same?

Roma Female: “It is different”.

Facilitator 1: It is different? What is different about it?

Roma Female: “Some cultures allow. Some cultures do not allow”.

Facilitator 2: So, you think that in some cultures young ladies would choose – So, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 would choose to get married rather than go to university.

Roma Female: “Yes”.

Facilitator 2: Okay, so, why do you think they would make that choice?

Roma Female: “Because that is what their families tell them to do, or expect them to do”.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 13-14)

In part, this was connected with the potential that a decision to go to university might result in shame, where this was equated with a loss of virginity:

Facilitator 2: Okay, so what in your opinion, what do you think happens if a girl says, “Well, I do not want to get married. I want to study. I want to be this and that.” What will happen?

Roma Female: “Nothing happens. Nothing. ... It is her choice... But they will go and talk about her”

Facilitator 2: Yes. So, what are they going to say?

Roma Female: “They are going to say that she is not a virgin anymore. That is why”.

Facilitator 2: That is why she does not want to get married?

Roma Female: “Yes... People [in the community] are going to judge your parents... that [they] have not educated [you] more”.

Facilitator 2: So, when you say, you have not educated them more, you mean educated in the culture or not been to school enough?

Roma Female: “[in] Religion and culture”.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 13-14)

The practice of gossip as a form of social control and the importance of female reputation also emerged strongly amongst Gypsy and Traveller girls, although in one focus groups interestingly this was linked to the necessity of having a way of earning their own living should a marriage fail as it would often not be permissible in a socially conservative culture to start another relationship for a woman who had once been married, or who had become a mother:

Romani Gypsy girl, 13: “If you got a boyfriend and you get married and you get divorced, you can’t go out with another boyfriend”.

Irish Traveller girl, 13: “You can’t have another boyfriend. Nobody would take you, you’d get your name taken away. So boys, they can go with as many girls as they want to. Our names would be taken and we’d just be scandalised everywhere.”

Similarly to Gypsy and Traveller young women – who as noted earlier referred to significant domestic roles from a young age impacting on the opportunities to study, Roma girls also highlighted challenges in balancing study and domestic responsibilities, with this acting as another barrier to undertaking further education.

Facilitator 2: Sometimes you can choose to get married at 16, but that does not mean you have to stop studying.

Roma Girl 1: You have to...If you are married...

Roma Girl 2: Yes. You have to stay in the house. You have to clean. You have to help

Facilitator 2: I know what it is like. I know. I know. But you can also study. You do not have to be physically in a university.

Roma Girl 1: You do not have time to study.

Facilitator 2: You can make time if you want to. So, you are telling me, if you get married, then you just have to stay at home and clean and cook?

Roma Girl 1: Yes.

Roma Girl 2: Yes.

Facilitator 2: But obviously my wife is married to me, so she does not do that. She goes to work, she still reads, studies.

Roma Girl: I know, but – so, Gypsies, you are not allowed to – if you are married, you need to stay home.

Facilitator 2: Yes, but before you are Gypsy, you are a human being with choices.

Roma Girl 1: I know, but it is not your choice anymore.

Roma Girl 2: When you marry, you have to listen to family and your husband’s family as well. They do not allow you ____.

Roma Girl 3: It is their choice for you.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

As such there was a clear perception among the young Roma, Gypsy and Traveller women interviewed in school or community settings (all of whom were very young around 14-15 years of age) that they were either unable to both marry and progress to higher education, or that doing so would be extremely difficult with significant impacts on their personal reputation and family. When prompted to consider how this tension could be overcome, solutions suggested by young women included:

- not marrying,
- waiting until after studying and training to get married, or
- marrying someone from a different culture.

However, there were also several examples of parents (overwhelmingly mothers) and girls (in addition to the Gypsy and Traveller role models

working in community settings) who did not uphold these expectations, or who were more active in challenging them and advocating for the continuation of education for young women (see also under parental and family influence).

“My father don’t believe in me going to college but my mother wants me to go” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Roma Girl: I do not care what other people are talking about [if remains in education].

Facilitator 1: Good. That is good, isn’t it? Yes, and you are nodding too. Do you feel the same?

Roma Girl: Yes. It is my life. It is my decision.

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

The following exchange with a group of young Roma girls illustrates how gender norms were simultaneously present yet challenged in the accounts of young women, with participants seeking to follow examples of those they knew in their community with (relative) independence although even in this exchange of views, there is a presumption from one young woman that the husband has the right to make a decision over what a woman can and can’t do:

Roma Girl 1: I have seen some girls that have driving licenses at 18 and are not married yet.

Facilitator 2: Yes. So, what do you think about that?

Roma Girl 2: That is good, and they have their own job and their own money.

Roma Girl 3: A woman, she has children and a car too, and her husband lets her

(Dialogue in group with Roma girls, 14-15)

“My mum said to become a doctor”
(Roma girl, 14-15)

Considerations around marriage and independence co-existed similarly in the accounts of young Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller community members involved in this study, with education and employment seen as important in ensuring financial security in the event that one’s spouse became unemployed, or the marriage ends:

“You need an education to fall back on, because say if you went and you got married and you had loads of children and then he left you and then he was the one with all the money then you need an education to fall back on because then what would you do?” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

“What about the girls that can’t do that because they didn’t go to college, they didn’t pursue or learn themselves or educate themselves in any way? So, now they’re sat there drawing, I don’t know, maybe child benefits or anything like that, looking for help, because they’re in the gutter now, they’re struggling. you get a lot of boys that give girls promises and they’re going to give them nothing in life, it’s as simple as that. You don’t know what’s coming around the corner, life, it’s not one straight road, it’s crooked, it’s got loads of bends and twists.” (Irish Traveller boy, 17)

“If you get a boyfriend and you get married and you have children, if they get up and leave you, they have nothing to fall back on, so that’s why you need a job” (Romani Gypsy girl, 13)

[My Mum] “She just says like you need something to fall back on, like, you can’t be dependent on other people” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Interestingly however, a clear disconnect was evident between Roma boys and girls in regards to views and expectations about marriage. While young Roma women clearly felt some pressure to get married rather than continue in education, young Roma men interviewed did not articulate the same expectation that they would marry early:



Facilitator: What about marriage? Do you think that would stop you from going to university?

Roma Male: Yes.

Roma Male: No.

Facilitator: Or College? Why do you think – [name] said yes.

Roma Male: If you get married, then you have kids, then you have to take care of the kids.

Facilitator: I mean if you get married at 16.

Roma Male: You're not going to get married at 16.

Facilitator: Why not?

Roma Male: That's too young, sir.

Facilitator: That's too young?

Roma Male: You can have a girlfriend but not married.

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

Similarly, when asked for their views on whether marriage acts as a barrier to young Roma women undertaking education, Roma boys did not articulate the same expectation that women should get married early or be required to give up their own ambitions for education or training:

Facilitator 2: What do you think about the girls that want to go to university or college and they have to get married at 16 or 15?

Male: No, 17, 18 years but 15, 16, no, sir.

Facilitator 2: Is that a barrier for their education?

Male: No, it's not because who gets married at 15.

Facilitator 2: So you don't think there are any girls out there that have to marry-

Male: It depends on their character, sir.

Facilitator: On their character?

Roma Male: If a girl doesn't care [about marriage] but if a girl is smart, then yes get married at a normal age, get husband... know how to cook and stuff.

Facilitator 2: What about the girl that's very, very smart and she wants to go to university and she's 16 and she says, "I'm going to college and studying and then go to university," but her mum and dad and her community come and say, "Well, you have to get married."

Roma Male: What if you say, "I wait for you."

Facilitator 2: Are you not a gentleman?

Roma Male: You should [wait and allow her a choice]

Facilitator 2: Do you think that barrier exists for girls... As in the community?

Roma Male: Some girls yes, but not like – it depends on the girl's choice, it's not, like, you have to get married to him at 16 at that time at that place...It's the girls' choice because you cannot choose who to – if I have a girl now, I'm not allowed to tell her who to marry, that is her choice. What about if I went, "Go, marry him," but then my little girl doesn't-

Facilitator 2: You make a very good point.

Roma Male: My girl doesn't love that guy but then the whole relationship's going to be awful.

Roma Male: About the girls, I don't know, in my opinion for girls it's both, it's easier and harder, for example, a man will not sit with a girl and marry her but for a girl I think it's more easier because if she has a good reputation I think she could get married to a rich man.

Facilitator 2: What does a good reputation mean?

Roma Male: Good character.

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

A similar perspective challenging 'traditional' gender expectations was expressed by an Irish Traveller young man, who took part in the community mapping exercise, and who reflected on the fact that: "Now, in the Travelling community there's an awful lot of sexism because some girls are happy settling down, minding their family, and cleaning the house. But what about those girls that want to pursue [a career]" (Irish Traveller boy, 17), noting, as had the Gypsy/Traveller girls in previous sessions that it is important that woman is in a position to financially support herself in the event of a separation.

This highlights a potential gap in the perceived and actual expectations of young men in the eyes of their female peers, and suggests that raising awareness of these views and attitudes may go some way to alleviating the pressure that some young women are experiencing. However, as evidenced in the following exchange, the likelihood that previous generations may have different views and expectations regarding marriage must also be borne in mind (and that even a relatively late age of marriage – in a man's early 20s, might be seen as a relatively late age to form a new household amongst some communities).

Roma Male: Some parents might force them to marry.

Roma Male: I want to marry at 23 years old.

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

Gender expectations around employment for Traveller men

Several participants also highlighted gender norms impacting on the decisions of young men from Romani Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma backgrounds in relation to education and training. Above are quotations from a young Irish Traveller who spoke about the fact that attending college to learn a trade such as being a bricklayer can subsequently act as a stepping stone to other opportunities, but he and other young males interviewed also commented on gender norms and expectations of becoming financially independent and able to support a wife and family from a fairly young age, with this cultural norm impacting their choice of work, training or consideration of further education:

Traveller community worker: "Say you said 'I want to be a barber or I want to be a hairdresser'"

Irish Traveller boy, 17: "All of our family has a reaction and they'll look at that and they'll say, "No, son, listen, we don't want you to be a hairdresser unless you want to settle down, you want to get a good wife, and hairdressing isn't going to make enough money," or, "We don't believe hairdressing is a good career choice." I can understand if we have our passions, but then there's earning money"

Other participants reflected on expectations that young men take up similar occupations to their fathers, with this presumption of following in a family trade sometimes being identified as a barrier to pursuing alternative employment opportunities or attending college or university:

"Yes, like my brother, he took his GCSEs, my older brother, and he's 17 now, nearly 18, and he got all A stars, and he's very good, but he wanted to do business all his life until he grew up and now he does the job that my father does. So he just really went on and left all those A stars there to waste. (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Young Roma men in particular, identified pressure to achieve certain milestones such as being legally able to drive prior to marriage:

Roma Male: I want to drive, I have to have driving license, I want to be something in the future.

Roma Male: It's embarrassing to get married and not have a driving license.

Roma Male: Yes, that's right.

Facilitator 2: As a man?

Roma Male: Yes, as a man, yes

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

While some young men confidently communicated a desire to follow in their fathers' footsteps, this was not always the case however, with one Roma boy describing how his father encourages him to pursue a different path and continue in education in order to open up employment opportunities that he didn't have access to himself:

Facilitator: What made you decide what you wanted to do, what kind of things have made you decide to do the things you're describing?

Male: Myself.

Facilitator: You chose yourself?

Roma Male: "My dad tells me to go to school to not be like him because he only did 4 classes [years at school] and he told me, "You want to sit in Uber 8 hours a day? No, go to college, learn," and then I learn"

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

"[My dad] told me, 'You want to sit in Uber 8 hours a day? No, go to college, learn.'" (Roma boy, 14)

Financial barriers, emphasis on earning and entrepreneurial interests

Although as noted above there was (particularly for Gypsies and Travellers) a relatively limited knowledge of entering into HE, university was seen by some young people as expensive. Participants also suggested that entering employment and earning money was often seen as more important or advantageous than staying in education, as this quotation (also partially utilised above in relation to a discussion on girl's gendered role expectations) indicates:

“The boys don't really need college, because they just get vans and they do all the trees and cutting down trees and stuff like that” (Irish Traveller girl, 13)

Irish Traveller girl, 13: “Like, I sell eyelashes, makeup, clothes and, like, all other stuff [online]. So I make, like, business cards and stuff...”

Facilitator: and then you're packaging it and sending it out by post? Or delivering it, or what?

Irish Traveller girl, 13: “By post and, like, for the people who live close to me either they come and collect it or I deliver it round to them”.

Roma male: They [Roma] just want to go to the jobs after they finish school, they just go to the jobs.

Roma Male: Just want to go straight to the job.

Roma Male: I don't want to get like a qualified job, I just go straight to work

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 14-15)

As a result, while young people tended not to be aware of what Apprenticeships were and appeared to lack information on these routes and other practically based courses, when these options were discussed in focus groups, young people generally viewed them as favourable in enabling people to earn, whilst continuing with their education.

A view that it is possible to become wealthy without going to university (reinforced through the success stories of select role models such as footballers),

was identified in one group of Roma boys as a further disincentive to staying on in education:

“For example, rich people, like, they now can stop people going to university because a lot of people that are rich and are successful didn't go to college or university and they might want to do the same” (Roma boy, 13-14)

Some participants also identified a risk that young people could become too reliant on their parents, and highlighted the importance of becoming financially independent:

Facilitator: Are there any other barriers that you think or reasons why young people from your community might not go to college or university?

Roma Male 1: Don't find the point of it, a lot of them.

Roma Male 2: They say I'm already rich, I don't need to go and then when their parents leave, people like us, they say we have everything but actually your parents have everything and then when the parents are not there, then you're going to...

Facilitator: Struggle?

Roma Male: ... Struggle a lot. When you see those, I want those, how much is it? Yes, that's £100. You say, “No problem.” But when you have your own money you say, “I'm not going to pay £100 for that.”

Roma Male: They think I don't care about nothing because my mum and my dad have money.

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

Financial security and earnings were not the only consideration in choices about employment and further study however, with the following exchange between young Roma men in a focus group also highlighting their desire to have a career which is emotionally as well as financially satisfying (although there is still perhaps something of a misunderstanding in relation to the extent of earnings of tradesmen given a presumption that charged cost are all profits):

Roma Male: As a plumber, a plumber gets £3,000 just to put one boiler.

Roma Male: It's not all about money.

Facilitator: It's not all about money, you said.

Roma Male: I know it's not only about money but it's like what you want to do in the future?

Facilitator: Plumbers are very well paid. You make a very good point.

Roma Male: Like to do what you enjoy.

Roma Male: Like follow your dreams

Roma Male: It's about enjoying it, it's about when you do something there for the passion you have then the money comes

(Dialogue in group with Roma boys, 13-14)

Concluding Discussion

Findings from the interviews with young people point to a complex interplay of influences on perceptions of and potential routes into further education. Most young people involved in the study communicated clear education and/or employment aspirations, with promising indications that more GRT young people are considering or planning on going to college or university, and are receiving encouragement from parents or carers to do so.

However, a legacy of intergenerational negative educational experiences in school settings, including stark instances of bullying and racism experienced by GRT young people interviewed and their families, forms a key barrier to more community members pursuing these routes. These experiences have understandably resulted in a loss of trust which tends to be generalised to, and taken as the norm, in all educational settings.

Much work is therefore required to build confidence among GRT young people that they are welcome in formal education environments and ensure that they are always treated as such. Until this is the case, the provision of educational and learning opportunities within trusted environments (such as GATE and other NGO organisations) will hugely help to ensure continuation of learning for those who are receiving their education outside of formal settings and where delivered in partnership between colleges, universities and NGOs, work to rebuild trust.

Young people were often apprehensive about what college and university study involved (underpinned by a lack of knowledge about further and higher education environments and options), and whether they would be able to meet academic expectations (in some cases even despite the encouragement of supportive mentors/staff or family). These concerns were amplified by the fact that many young people involved in the study could not identify anyone within their community who had studied at university. As such, raising the visibility of GRT community members

who had pursued and succeeded in further education was suggested explicitly by young people as useful in providing motivation, as well as networks that can be drawn upon for mentoring, advice and support.

Financial worries and concerns with entering employment and beginning to earn further discouraged some GRT young people from continuing on in study. Findings therefore point to the potential benefits of Apprenticeships, and the need to provide more information to young people on these options (as very few GRT young people involved in the study knew what an Apprenticeship was). Challenges in ensuring young people have the required functional skills must also be overcome, potentially through a collaborative approach whereby courses are delivered in partnership with NGOs and/or universities working to upskill and prepare GRT young people for university. This may take the form of academic and widening participation staff, or student volunteers, working alongside NGOs offering pre-university training and access courses.

Maintaining proximity to family was seen as crucial for many GRT young people, connected in some cases with concerns around female reputation and domestic responsibilities. Opportunities for GRT young people to study close to home are therefore likely to be important for and valued by some community members and should be facilitated where possible. The requirement to return home was identified by Roma young people as a further barrier to their educational progression, with young Roma participants as well as educational professionals suggesting that more could be done to raise awareness among Roma parents of the opportunities provided by the educational system in the UK.

Gender was clearly important in structuring the experiences of young people from Romani Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma backgrounds, with earlier levels of maturity equally apparent, but manifesting in differing sets of expectations evident for young men (pressures regarding employment/earning and continuing on in family trades) and women (marriage, taking on family and domestic responsibilities). However, the research has also drawn attention to some divergence between the views of young men and women involved in the research, with pressure felt by girls to marry not always mirrored among boys their age, suggesting a need to raise awareness among women of the ways that views and expectations may be changing among new generations of men. These subtle shifts within community practices and growing alertness to a range of opportunities thus potentially offer scope for greater co-production and development of culturally accessible access to education, training and employment so as to enhance the life chances of young people from the GTRSB communities in a rapidly changing world.

Findings from Educational Professionals

Survey Findings

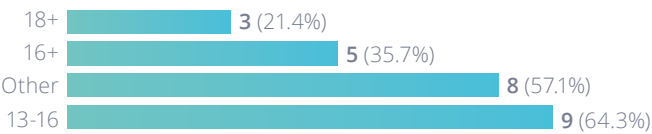
Working with GTRSB young people.

In response to the question on whether their role directly consisted of working from young people from the communities, nine respondents indicated that such work was within their remit, providing further information in subsequent question responses;

Three individuals stated that they did not know if there were young people from the communities in their role/place of employment, with comments including:

“As a University this is an area we are currently endeavouring to improve and we hope to be able to work more directly with students in the coming months”.

The age range of young people whom respondents worked with is indicated below: (nb. more than one age range could be selected):



One respondent noted that “Some of the young people are below 13 years of age” (youth worker) whilst an Assistant Principal of a secondary school indicated that they have pupils from the GTRSB communities who are aged 11-18 in their school.



Ethnicity of young people in educational/professionals’ setting.

Of those respondents who were able to identify which communities they worked with (some of whom, depending on their role/level of experience had indicated that they were unsure of numbers or communities from which students/pupils came), 8 respondents identified **Romani Gypsy** young people in their settings (one PRU; 4 secondary schools; a UniConnect officer in a University setting; and both the ‘community’ based youth worker and Outreach and Inclusion officer working for a local authority).

Four respondents (all school based) referred to supporting Roma pupils; three individuals mentioned working with Irish Traveller young people (respectively within a secondary school and both youth/community settings) and one secondary school based participant referred to on occasion working with Showmen and Circus families who were wintering near to their school.

No individual mentioned having contact with young people or children who are live-aboard Boaters.

Nine respondents attempted to quantify **the number of young people they work with from the communities** and to disaggregate this data by **ethnicity**.

More detailed analysis of internal evidence within the survey suggests that in some cases the respondent has not necessarily been able to disaggregate the data from School Census categories as although Romani Gypsy/Roma have both been ticked comments may also in some cases suggest that language or integration support is being provided to children who otherwise may be included in the Gypsy category.

One respondent provided an estimate of the number of young people known to be members of the communities they’d worked with without distinguishing by ethnicity: “Over the past ten years of teaching I have worked with approximately 25 students. There may be others because not all students will make this known.” (Secondary School)

Responses below are shown by the professional setting in which the respondent works:

Professional Setting	Ethnicity of young people	Number of young people/families supported
Secondary School	Romani Gypsy	26 pupils
PRU	Roma	5 young people
Secondary School	Gypsy, Gypsy/Roma, Roma	7 pupils 35 pupils 29 pupils
Youth Worker	Roma	25 young people
Secondary School/Progression Officer	Romani Gypsy, Irish Traveller	9 1
Secondary School/Progression Officer	Roma pupils	27 (within year groups 9-11)
Secondary School/Progression Officer /Careers service	Gypsy/Roma	7 young people
Local Authority Community/Inclusion Officer	Roma “The majority of our families are Romanian, closely followed by Czech and Slovak – we rarely with other Roma communities” nb: also noted working with Irish Traveller and Romani Gypsy families but no detailed numbers provided	As of Spring 2021 (see further comments below), 8 young Romanian Roma people were being supported (1x 14 years of age; 4 x 15 years old; 3 x 16 years old)

This final respondent, a local authority specialist professional who works to support recently arrived Roma families added “Our caseloads vary but we work with up to 50 families at any one time with [age range of children varying from] babies to teenage children. This last quarter (Winter-Spring, 2021) 40 families were supported with up to 68 children between the ages of 0-19”

Respondents were asked if they were able to provide an estimate of **the gender of their pupils/service users by ethnicity**. In total, six respondent provided information on the gender of their pupils/students from the diverse communities.

Professional Setting	Ethnicity of young people	Estimated Gender break-down
Secondary School	Romani Gypsy	70% female 30% male
PRU	Roma	“12.5% of the [PRU] cohort is Roma. Of these 80% are male”.
Secondary School/Assistant Principal	Gypsy Gypsy/Roma Roma	No gender breakdown given but indicated elsewhere in survey that a total of 71 current pupils “8.8% [on school roll] are from the GTRSB communities” and that both male and female pupils are in their setting.
Youth Worker	Roma	15% of service users (25 young people) are Roma. Of which 80% are male
Secondary School/Progression Officer /Careers	Gypsy/Roma pupils	5 Gypsy girls and 2 boys 5 Roma girls and 7 boys
Secondary School/Progression Officer	Roma	3.15 % of my pupils (across the entire school) are from Roma communities of these: 51.8 % are Female and 48.1% are male nb: the respondent indicated elsewhere in the survey that they have worked with/are supporting 27 Roma pupils

Only two respondents stated that they are aware of GTRSB pupils who don’t self-declare their ethnicity with five others stating that they were unsure. One suggested that they weren’t aware of precise reasons for this (although young people’s data would suggest fear of bullying). Another individual then went on to suggest “Brexist Discrimination” may be a concern mitigating against self-identification having highlighted these were in all cases ‘non-disclosers’ were Romanian Roma families; stating that: “None openly talk of their heritage but information given on entry to the school” reflected on children’s “fear of being treated differently or not accepted by their peer group”.

Respondents were asked whether they/their team/ setting had **characteristics which they felt made it easier for pupils/students to self-identify as being from a GTRSB community**. Although in subsequent follow-up interviews it was suggested that shared/ similar experiences of being a minoritised ethnic person could help to bridge barriers and create understanding, only four responses were received for this section of the survey. These were as follows:

- “Friendly environment. Celebrating diversity across the school” (secondary school with large Roma cohort)
- “Not me personally. 3 members of the team are Slovak” (Outreach and Inclusion Manager – community setting, also working in/with schools)
- “More training for staff to help them identify the barriers students from GRT(SB) communities face” (Progression Officer based in a secondary school)
- “Our careers office is a non-biased, open and honest environment where students can feel comfortable and free of judgement” (Careers/Progression Officer – faith school).

Patterns of engagement with education for GTRSB pupils

Seven respondents provided information on the question of whether they had noticed any trends in relation to school leaving or staying on in education over the time you’ve been working with Young People from these communities. In the main, adult /non community respondents were unable to identify any trends in engagement with education, although young people themselves were in contrast somewhat more nuanced in their reflections and comments on attitudes to learning in diverse settings or intentions to remain in education.

“We have a lot of movement with GRT pupils, who will come and go from our local authority frequently.” (Assistant Principal – school with Romani and Roma pupils)

- “[can identify] Individual cases (not trends) pregnancy; [transfer to] college in Y10; home-education” (Head of EAL – in a school with Romani Gypsy and Roma pupils)
 - “Increased disengagement from education when moving into KS4. Perception in some families that a child has left education when they turn 16. However, since starting to work with GRT families around 10 years ago there has been an increase in students continuing on into further education. This seems to be particularly the case for female Roma students” (Alternative Education manager in a PRU).
 - “From the very small number of students I have worked with, there are students who are wanting to stay on to education however there are still high numbers who are not wanting to stay on education and are wanting to get a job” (Progression Officer / School based – working with Roma pupils)
 - “From my previous role, the trend is that educational aspirations tend to relate directly to parents’ views. Would say nothing has more of an impact. I worked indirectly with one student who had lots of ambition and drive but no support at home at all” (University Outreach Officer – previous NCOP experience with GRT students).
 - “Attendance often an issue. In the past, girls in particular have not fulfilled their full education time and left early. Periods of non-attendance. Complex behavioural needs” (Progression Officer /Careers lead – Secondary School)
- A further respondent (local authority outreach role) noted that Data is not collected to enable them to track educational pathways/outcomes by ethnicity.

Progression to FE/HE

Although (see literature review and also findings from some young people themselves) there is emergent evidence that some young people from GRT communities are exploring their educational options and slowly becoming aware of the range of programmes or benefits of remaining in or returning to education some years after school leaving) professional respondents were less clear on the overall pattern of educational progression amongst young people from the GRT communities:

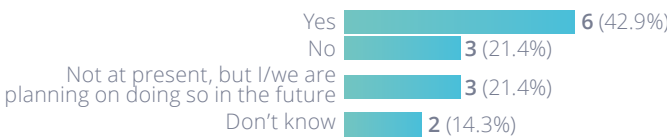
Five respondents (excluding those who simply answered ‘no information’) provided an answer on whether they had any data or simply anecdotal evidence on routes into FE/HE for young people from the communities with whom they/colleagues work:

- “No hard data/figures collected. For a number of community members, the general trend is not to go on FE/HE. Figures in Leeds, with regard to overall NEET are coming down over the last few years. The trend is positive, however, no significant issues are arising with GRT Young People. The number of GRT NEET and Not Known are not increasing” (Local Authority community outreach officer – supporting a range of GRT families)
- “The majority of our students continue to FE/HE” (Head of EAL, working with Romani and Roma children)
- “I don’t have any specific data but have noticed an increase in progression to FE, particularly with female students. The majority of male students do seem to apply to colleges but do not always complete the enrolment process. There also seems to be a fairly high drop-out rate during the first year of college etc. I have not noticed a take up in apprenticeship schemes”. (Alternative Provision/Home Engagement manager – PRU: currently working with Roma boys predominantly)

- “[Young people from the communities] generally do not progress to HE/FE” (Progression Officer/ Careers Lead, secondary school working with Roma and Romani Gypsy young people)
- “I feel there are a number of students wanting to pursue FE however there is not enough focused support for these groups”. (Progression Officer secondary school based supporting Roma young people). This staff member also referred to that fact that in their school there is a “designated worker to work with Roma students”.

Current/Future Institutional Plans for working to support GTRSB young people into/within HE:

Respondents were asked whether they on a personal basis within their role, or others in their agency were currently undertaking work to widen Higher Education participation for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) and Showmen/Boater (SB) young people; or had plans for such work. Where respondents had indicated such work was ongoing they were also asked if applicable, whether they were working with external agencies and the name of such organisations. Responses are illustrated below:



Perhaps unsurprisingly, given these are responses from a self-selected group with an interest in working with GTRSB pupils, a total of six respondents indicated that there is currently outreach/support work ongoing with young people from the GTRSB communities in their settings. GHWW/WP outreach leads in two universities stated that there is currently work on Access to HE for GTRSB community members, although it would seem from one comment “Some colleagues are looking to start a project in this area” (University Deputy Head of Schools & Colleges Liaison) that activities within that particular HEP are currently at an early stage of development.

Additional comments from respondents reflecting on work in progress indicate that there is considerable scope for development and networking to support future activities in this area (particularly from HE providers working in partnership with NGOs), although some examples (the PRU and one secondary school) of well-developed engagement activities were provided:

- “Our Careers and Employability Coordinator makes sure there is greater involvement of our GRT(SB) students in all events. The results vary. It is still a work in progress” (EAL lead, Secondary School)
- “We are a secondary age PRU but part of my team’s remit is to provide support for transition into Post 16. We support Roma students with careers advice and support in selecting and applying for relevant courses. We have a keyworker assigned to Post 16 students that has arranged interpreter services for families and

visits to colleges and FE establishments. We have established links to ESOL department at Bradford College". (PRU Alternative Education lead)

"Support given for progression to FE via careers in school and outside agencies e.g. outreach workers, Health For All, Attendance teams, UniConnect where applicable.... Also doing virtual work experience, work place visits" (Progression Officer/Careers Lead, Secondary School)

"We have recently started a WP programme looking at improving access for a range of students to HE [working with]... local universities and others further afield, as well as the Sutton Trust, Realising Opportunities & Social Mobility Foundation." (6th Form Careers Lead)

Two participants stated they were unsure whether or not there were any plans for targeted work under development within their service.

One of the three participants who indicated that there is no current or planned work to support GTRSB pupils into FE and HE in their setting, did however comment that:

"We have worked with the Princes Trust [in the past] through a mentoring program to have focused support for a small number of GTRSB students". (Schools based Progression Officer).

Three participants indicated in response to the question above that they/their organisation were planning future activities to engage young people around access to FE and HE.

Overall, six individuals added further qualitative responses (including two organisations with experience of engagement with and support for GTRSB communities) which expanded on anticipated future activities such as taking the young people on a "trip to Kirkstall Forge [housing development]" (Secondary School Careers lead); whilst the Youth Worker who supports Roma community members, mainly boys at present indicated that as soon as possible he would be "Restarting youth sessions targeting Roma young people after lockdown".

Two University based respondents (UniConnect/ WP/Outreach roles) noted that tailored activities are under development, including in one case working closely with feeder institutions/partners:

"[The University] want to build on best practice from the GHWY Leeds City Academy project to build relationships with community groups as an avenue to reach GRT youth".

"GRT applicants are currently eligible for the University's progression scheme and this will be extended to include Showmen and Boater applicants for the 2022 intake. The Outreach team also hopes to build in specific work with this group over the coming months running bespoke events, offering 1:1 advice and guidance and building contacts with LEAs and stakeholders".

A third university based Outreach/WP Lead indicated that although a commitment had been made to such work, currently the planning of the programme it was at such an early stage of development that precise activities were unknown, whilst a secondary school also indicated that they are in "early stage discussions" about how best to expand their work on Access and Participation for GTRSB pupils.

It is noteworthy that none of the respondents to this section who indicated ongoing or planned activities around access to FE and higher education referred to knowledge of, or collaboration with, LeedsGATE the major Gypsy/Traveller support agency in the study area, which runs educational support programmes for young people (see further under qualitative findings).

Participants who had indicated that they were either already providing, or planning to provide support and advice activities focused on FE/HE options to young people from the GTRSB communities, were asked how – if at all – they would tailor their 'standard' widening participation strategies or approach when working with GTRSB communities.

In total six responses were received as follows which show awareness about barriers to participation in HE. These bear similarities to the themes identified by the education professional focus group attendees, and to some extent young people, including in relation to enhancing visibility of community member graduates and alertness to financial issues and other responsibilities which might impact young people's engagement with activities.

"The use of role models is particularly important with this group, but finding these are hard. We would always tend to use narratives, examples specifically from a GRT background in any work. The Leeds City Academy project [referred to above as an activity under development] will use ESOL resources to make activities more inclusive". (GHWY Outreach Officer/University based)

"Ensure participation for all groups. Be aware of any barriers to access e.g. cost, travel etc." (Progression Officer/Careers Lead – School based)

"The use of role models is particularly important with this group, but finding these are hard" (University Outreach Officer)

"Parental involvement is a key" (EAL lead, Secondary School)

"We intend to link with Connecting Roma service in Bradford in the future as they are able to provide a keyworker from the Roma community". (Alternative Provision/ Home Engagement Lead, PRU)

"Working with schools and voluntary organisations" (Youth Worker, supporting Roma young people).

Of the planned and ongoing activities identified above, six respondents (schools/University outreach officers/PRU staff) indicated that the planned activities had an aim of supporting progression into FE and HE, with some additional description of such activities provided by four respondents: "trips [to universities]"; "Visits to colleges. Mentoring via HE colleges"; "Engagement with progression scheme events enables applicants to achieve equivalent UCAS points towards the entry requirements"; "we are members of various [opportunity] schemes and advertise these to pupils"

Four respondents also identified their planned or occurring activities acted to support retention and attainment once a young person had left post-compulsory school education, reporting that they offered:

"In college mentoring sessions. Access to Roma keyworker". (PRU Alternative Education lead)

"One to one mentoring and support into HE with tracking in place and support at any drop off point" (Progression Officer Careers lead, School based)

"Supporting young people accessing college. Promoting courses" (Youth Worker)

"Mentoring and raising aspiration workshops" (Progression Officer based in a Faith School)

One UniConnect/Outreach officer based in a university also reflected that "Initial discussions about a West Yorkshire GRT support network would fit well here"

Indeed by the time of publication of this report such a network has come to fruition supporting partnership collaboration and the development of inter-institutional networking between community groups and other stakeholders focused on supporting GRT young people into further and higher education.

Barriers to Young People Accessing FE/HE

Participants were invited to reflect on perceived barriers to GTRSB young people's engagement with FE and HE. There was both a considerable degree of alertness to the challenges faced by young people from the communities and a remarkable degree of unanimity amongst the eleven respondents who answered this question in relation to barriers to 'staying on' in school. Respondents with more practical experience of working with members of the communities, and particularly those in PRU and school settings with a considerable number of pupils from the GTR communities tended to provide more in-depth comments.

Despite this awareness of and understanding of the barriers experienced by young people from the communities articulated by a number of respondents, it was noteworthy that there was some mismatch in perceptions between education providers and professionals and young people themselves, most noticeably in relation to professionals' perceptions of lack of parental support for remaining in education, which in a number of young peoples' narratives was contradicted with mothers in particular emphasised as encouraging young people to gain an education or training which would provide them with security.

Professionals who responded to the survey highlighted that young people could be hindered by lack of confidence or low aspirations (which contradicts findings from the young people themselves, which suggest that aspirations are not low but that other barriers may stop them meeting their aspirations), no awareness of or access to community role models who had themselves entered FE or HE, and a limited sense of belonging in non-compulsory education. Other concerns which were highlighted related to financial constraints; language barriers (for Roma students); and poor prior educational attainment, all of which stood out as key themes, as in some cases did concerns over racism or bullying (mirroring experiences in school and highlighted extensively by young people who participated in this study).

Frequent moving impacting educational opportunities (reflected on as impacting both sited Gypsy and Traveller pupils, and housed Roma students, as noted also in qualitative data gathered from young Roma) also emerged in some comments. The majority of those who responded (differentiated by role below) provided a number of explanations for young people from the communities largely not continuing on into FE and HE:

“Mindset; Low self-esteem; Lack of role models at home; Not believing they can. Fear of the cost”

“Low aspirations and lack of role models from within the community that have progressed and achieved within HE. Lack of parental expectation that child will attend and progress through HE. Financial constraints on some families necessitate working as soon as possible. Lack of suitable support in schools to meet the needs of GRT students. Lack of understanding in schools of needs of GRT students. Lack of funding to address the issues facing GRT students achieving in schools”.

“Being an ethnic minority is always a barrier. I myself was an ethnic minority [in school/ further and higher education].²⁰ There is lack of focused support for young people from GRT [communities]. English as a second language a barrier if students are new to UK educational system... Financial barriers – [there are] still expectations for some young people from GRT to get a job early to help/support families who may rely on this income”. (Progression Officer, based in a secondary school)

“Barriers: Young people in Leeds have a very diverse learning offer, however, specific courses for GRT are not provided as the offer links directly to the Labour Market. Parents not understanding importance of education and ensuring children attending regularly. No English. Poor relationships with peers [presumably related to bullying]. CME – returning to country of origin sporadically. Different languages spoken at home. No role models” (Local Authority Outreach/Support Manager)

“Having access to the information, advice and guidance relating to HE studies. [Young People] seeing HE as a realistic and welcoming opportunity. [Prior] educational attainment if school/college experiences have not been supportive or positive”. (University Head of Student Success services)

“Parent/carer view of education – [that it is] not worth it. Casual, systemic racism towards GRT people”. (GHWY Outreach Officer, University based)

“Lack of stability in terms of residence/ housing. Financial situation [needing to] support family” (Youth worker)

“Attitude towards education/attendance [records]. Movement between areas / schools” (Assistant Principal, School)

“Family tradition and expectations. Lack of career aspirations” (Progression Officer, School based)

“Lack of awareness around the issues affecting these communities, lack of understanding about their way of life, discrimination”. (UniConnect Outreach officer)

“Usually parental pressure or non-engagement [with education]” (Schools based Progression Officer/Careers lead/UniConnect link)

Good practice recommendations to support young people into and within FE and HE.

Participants were asked if they were able to identify examples of good practice which could be replicable or extended to support educational progression, inviting them to share examples with which they were familiar, either within West Yorkshire or further afield.

Eight respondents made suggestions, predominantly focused on the value of community role models, need for support for young people experiencing digital exclusion, the importance of employing specialist staff to work with GRT families; tracking those children at risk of leaving education/frequent movers; inclusion in curricula and celebration of GTRSB culture which was seen as very successful in school settings and bespoke careers advice tailored to members of the community.

“Support from Youth Workers based in a College” (Youth Worker)

“High level tracking of movement and work with local authority to safeguard pupils [aided by] employment of a GRT engagement officer” (Assistant Principal, Secondary School).

Specialist staff acting as a dedicated resource to work with members of the community – overwhelmingly Roma pupils – were also mentioned by other respondents based in schools.

Several respondents highlighted that where community role models exist who are experienced in FE and HE, these individuals are remarkably helpful in raising aspirations and supporting open discussions with young people who may not otherwise have considered “staying on” in education. For example: *“Using previous GRT students who have went on to progress in education as role models”.*

The Local Authority Outreach Team member who has extensive experience of working with young people from diverse GRT communities noted that a particularly positive example consisted of *“Teams in Leeds who offer a youth work approach to Careers advice. This means a holistic view to assessment takes place. Support is then offered on a bespoke basis... [considering] Digital inclusion – Leeds has been able to support GRT Children with devices for continued learning”*

A Progression Officer in one school reported on the success of an initiative which reached out to families and supported a sense of belonging in education through: *“Mentoring and [providing] family liaison support. In past years, there was a celebration event aimed at GRT [pupils and families] which was a positive outcome for students and developed links with other role models.”*

Similarly, the respondent based in a PRU commended an initiative which they were familiar with from another local authority, which they felt could effectively be replicated in the study area: *“Firth Park Academy in Sheffield and their inclusive approach to integrating Roma students”*

Five respondents (schools, youth worker, PRU and local authority based) indicated that the largely individually designed and service specific examples they had provided – such as employing a specialist member of staff, or bringing in role models to meet their young people – were available in the study area. The Local Authority GRT outreach and inclusion specialist referred in particular to the work of their *“Digital Inclusion, Individual assessment & Bespoke Support initiative”* referred to above as a service which they felt had been particularly successful, precisely because it was tailored to the individual needs of the young people and their families.

Only one respondent was able to flag up **specialist careers advice** tailored explicitly to the interest of GRT young people and available to young people from the communities (supplied they reported by youth workers in a community setting). As noted elsewhere, one school Careers advice specialist also reported that they brought in role models where possible to speak to young people and the Local Authority outreach worker supporting GRT families noted that care is taken to attempt to link young people who are not attaining as well as hoped, to individual advice, but overall these initiatives are ad hoc, dependent largely on the knowledge and interest of particular staff, and it appears to be a dearth of centrally devised, coordinated careers activities targeted at young people from these communities across the study area. Connexions workers (generically) were also identified by three respondents as available to provide support and advice on FE/HE to NEETS but this does of course pre-suppose that those young people are in contact with the Connexions team or somehow ‘linked into the system’.

²⁰ This respondent also participated in an in-depth interview where they reflected on the pressures and challenges experienced by a young person who is in a minority at school or in FE/HE and may not have peers or role models. See further under qualitative findings from educational professionals.

Suggestions to improve take up of FE/HE in West Yorkshire for young people from GTRSB communities.

Respondents were invited to suggest ways in which access to FE/HE could be improved in West Yorkshire for young people from GTRSB communities. Seven respondents provided the following answers (with the sector in which participants work, mapped against response). By far the most common responses pertained to delivery of increased training for staff in contact with community members and use of specialist staff resources to provide services.

*“More Training and awareness for staff, for schools and those working in education to embed this into work, programs to support students from GRT(SB) communities”.
(Schools based Progression Officer)*

The issue of financial support for families under fiscal stress which impacts rates of academic retention (as noted in several places in this report) underpinned the suggestion by a Progression Officer/ Careers Lead in one secondary school that there is a need for the “Return of Educational Maintenance Allowances” for families experiencing hardship.

One respondent (Head of Student Success in a University) stressed the importance of a local networks of expertise to support young people into and within FE and HE:

“An active network including schools/colleges/ HEPs and other community stakeholders in the area would be a positive way of building the conversation and increasing opportunities”,

a theme which also arose in other responses, for example a call from a University Outreach Officer to collaboratively develop meaningful action across the study area:

“We talk about BAME students/ care leavers lots but there isn’t any high profile events or sessions (that I’m aware of) targeted specifically at them [GTRSB students]. Involving CATCH/ GATE [West Yorkshire based support services/NGOs] is important” whilst a further respondent (Head of EAL) proposed that there is a need to engage families more with activities to “Increase Parental Involvement”.

This subject of the need for collaborative working with a number of stakeholders, and knowledge sharing to support young people from the communities was echoed by the Youth Worker who proposed “Targeted work from schools and colleges. Workers to liaise better with Travellers’ Education [services]” and the Assistant Principal of a School who noted that “There appears to be a lack of provision, especially within our authority”.

Impacts of Covid on young people’s engagement with Education

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked if they had any comments on how Covid-19 has impacted on the educational needs/support available to GTRSB communities in West Yorkshire. Comments presented in this section bear considerable similarities to emergent findings identified in the literature review (e.g. Traveller Movement 2021 interim report on education) in relation to the impacts of Covid on GRT young peoples’ educational engagement. This differential in access to resources and widespread digital exclusion experienced by young people from the communities has since this report was first drafted, been recognised by the UK Government, who in July 2021 announced²¹ that a programme of targeted catch up provision and educational mentoring would be rolled out to support GRT pupils at risk of educational disengagement.

Of the eight respondents who replied to this question, all identified reduced contact with young people and families, disrupted education occasioned by lack of engagement or poor quality IT equipment/internet access; problems in accessing family members who spoke English and translators (Roma students/pupils) and several mentioned digital exclusion as well as poverty impacting the families through job loss, leading to a refocus away from educational concerns.

“It has impacted the community as much as any other. The small number of agencies that exist to support them are not able to deliver the services. In my experience, many Roma families and students are reluctant to engage in online education or support. There are also many families that lack the infrastructure to support this i.e. Devices, WiFi etc. As this is all that is currently available, Roma children are at risk of falling further behind.” (PRU Alternative Education lead).

“Covid has meant that we have been unable to speak to families with interpreters as they were only offering over the phone support. Families’ priorities were altered as many of the earners in the households lost their jobs and poverty became a huge issue” (Local Authority Outreach and Inclusion Officer)

Progression Officers and University WP/Access/ Outreach officers all spoke too about reduced contact and greater sense of disengagement from education, even where there had been prior positive contact with young people and families:

“Less contact, less motivation, less guidance and support.”

“More difficult to contact and relationships more distant”

“This has created a wider gap in my opinion due to the level of engagement reducing further”.

Finally, two participants reflected on the need for targeted support to assist in ‘catch-up’ for young people from the GTRSB communities to avoid them being lost to re-engagement in schools and further educational opportunities:

“Lack of IT and home schooling facilities [are] definitely be an issue. Lack of routine which will make the transition back to school difficult.” (Schools based Progression Officer)

“1 to 1 support is reduced and access to resources for online education needs improving” (Youth Worker)

Finally **any other comments** which participants wished to share were invited. Four additional answers were received with several respondents mentioning their gratitude for this study which they felt would fill much needed gaps in information.

The Local Authority outreach and engagement officer stressed their concern for the impact on Roma families of the looming “deadline for EUSS [EU Settlement Scheme] applications”, particularly given the issues highlighted above about problematic access to advice, translators or disrupted IT access; whilst one respondent warned that they had noticed

“Roma young people seem to be cautious in sharing information” about themselves and their family circumstances which could make it

difficult to establish support needs and provide appropriate services. Again, this final concern could helpfully be addressed by delivering of tailored support by trusted individuals and dedicated community resources, underpinned by appropriate information sharing on how best to engage and work with GTRSB young people.

Conclusion

The findings from this survey – as noted under Methodology and in the Qualitative Findings below, fed into the design of focus group and interview questions or supported additional in-depth discussion in the few cases where survey respondents also agreed to be interviewed in more depth; as well as enabling us to consider how Education/Youth Support Professionals responses related to the comments and experiences of young people from the communities presented subsequently.

Findings from Qualitative Focus Groups & Interviews: Educational Professionals

Engagement with education and career ambitions

Participants described Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members, in the main, as highly engaged with their learning and education. Some professionals (based in schools or as a Local Authority inclusion officer working with young people and their families) perceived a developing trend towards increasing numbers of GRT students (largely undifferentiated by community within comments) continuing on with their education or staying on in 6th form to complete level 3 qualifications rather than making more vocational choices. This perception is aligned to the research team’s own reflections on shifting attitudes towards FE and HE amongst the communities (especially Irish Travellers and Romani Gypsies) in recent years:

*“I’m in this role...for over two years now and before I spent three years in Secondary Schools. So, I can see the trend. More and more young people are carrying on in education, they’re looking for courses and things like that. Yes, there is an [upward] trend”.
(Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)*

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-million-education-programme-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-announced>

“More and more of our GRT students are wanting to go onto level 3 programmes.”
(Careers worker in a secondary school)

“More and more of our GRT students are wanting to go onto level 3 programmes ... I can see a definite rise that more and more of them are wanting to apply to sixth form, as opposed to doing a vocational [programme]. So, this academic year, forgive me, I have not got the percentage, we have had 10 GRT students apply to sixth form. That is the highest in any one year...I just think it is encouraging that more and more are wanting to progress onto those sixth forms, and that University is now an option. Whereas before...in previous years, I do not even think that some of this community would even have considered it.” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

That said, there was also recognition among participants that the overall number of GRT students progressing to further and higher education in the region remains low, and that further work is required to support more GRT young people to pursue these routes:

“I can think of maybe 4 students or 5 students maybe in the 6 years that I’ve been here that I know have gone to further education. So there’s a kid, his sister is still with us, he’s Year 10, and he’s back at University. I think he’s studying business. There’s another 2 girls from the same family, their sister is still here, I think they’re in...University. But 6 students – and we probably had over 1,000 in my time here – is not good” (Outreach and Student progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Professionals perceived GRT young people to be interested in varied careers (mirroring findings from young people themselves), however, one participant suggested that the strong drive to promote STEM subjects has led to increased interest in this field of study among GRT female students as well as other under-represented groups:

“There is an increasing interest in STEM careers, and I think it’s the case with Gypsy Roma students as well, like the fact that you can do medicine if you’re a girl, which no doubt, like, many years ago, was a barrier. So, I feel like there’s a lot of promotion that goes into girls in STEM. We do little trips and we do events where it’s just girls that can go and visit, like, work placement opportunities where women are working in things like engineering, maths and science. So, I think that’s always quite helpful really”. (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Examples were also cited of young GRT people interested in pursuing art and design, and courses provided by a local building college were noted, in particular, to have benefited GRT young men, who may want to pursue similar occupations to those of previous generations, while gaining qualifications at the same time:

“So, you’re not just living, working with your dad, but as in you were thinking, “Actually, I want to be an architect. I want to do construction and go to [name] and do a course.” So, I think... that has actually benefitted a lot of the male students and the Gypsy Roma community, where they see the role models and they see it’s not just doing, like, construction, but you need the qualification to recognise the skills to give you a better wage” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

In this way, a congruence can be seen with the comments made by the young man who participated in the mapping exercise who indicated his interest in studying at ‘the brick college’ rather than simply learning the trade alongside his adult male relatives.

Returning to country of origin

As with young Roma – some of whom referred to the decisions of parents or extended family to return to their country of origin as impacting their educational plans – educational professionals also identified frequent (or in some cases permanent) return to a family’s country of origin as a barrier to further and higher education progression for Roma young people:

“Yes. I recently spoke to a family member about a student who wasn’t in school, and basically they’ve gone back... to their country [of origin], yes, to Romania” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

“Some communities travel up and down [internationally], so they might stay here for the Year 9, half of the Year 10 they can spend back home and they’re coming back, especially then you see the times like the summer holidays. They go for the summer holiday, they’re coming late in September, struggling to get a place and the same in December, they go for Christmas, again coming back, the problem to get a place”. (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Another participant working in a University reflected on a conversation with a colleague who had worked previously as a teacher, and who suggested that, transience was an important consideration not only for Roma communities, but also Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people, albeit with the caveat that there is, inevitably, variation across families in regard to the extent and nature of travel:

“He also said...he would have GRT students who would be not in for three weeks and then they’d come back and they’d be like, “Oh well, I’ve just been up in Newcastle or wherever.” I think just the transient nature of the lifestyle for some people. I know that’s not, obviously... I think that’s the thing as well, they’re really not a homogenous group at all.” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Education professionals reported attempting to support and engage with such disrupted educational transitions by monitoring attendance and maintaining communication with families – in some cases visiting young people’s homes in person:

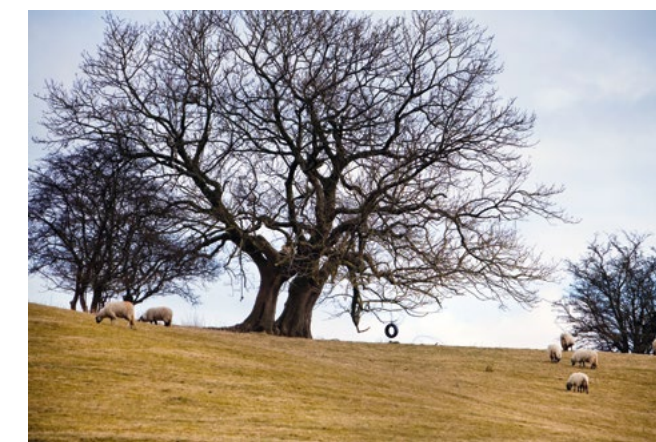
“We are trying to resolve that and ensure that they are here, and so it is constant phone calls and chasing up, and going on the attendance bus and knocking [on doors], finding out where they are, why they are not here” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

However, as was also noted by one young person in the Roma youth discussion groups, in some cases a return back to country of origin was connected with the broader issue of Brexit, and uncertainty over settled status which was not as easily resolved. Indeed, staff working with Roma communities described sourcing and providing families with information and support on applying for settled status as part of their roles:

“I’ve asked the Romanian Embassy to come in 3 times now to do passports, so that families don’t leave early...We’ve had somebody come in [from local NGO] to help people apply from EUSS [the EU settlement scheme]... It’s from the whole Brexit situation, so they have to apply for pre-settled or settled status... So just speaking to parents, making sure they’ve got all the paperwork, they’ve got everything they need so they can apply because there are other people in the community that charge them a lot of money but I will do it for free. That’s my job” (Outreach and Student Progression lead in a Secondary School, male)

Impact of Covid on young people’s engagement with learning and academic career paths

Although in the young people’s focus groups and interviews Covid-19 did not particularly emerge as a theme which impacted on learning opportunities, amongst professionals the pandemic was identified as having a number of impacts on their ability to support GRT young people into further education. Several participants noted the disruptive effect of Covid on young people’s routines²² and suggested that the focus on getting young people settled back into school life, together with pressure to catch pupils up on academic work after extended periods away from school, was leaving them with little time for broader career development activities and support:



²² <https://eachother.org.uk/concerning-rise-in-homeschooling-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-pupils/>

“In terms of the focus with Gypsy Roma, it’s continuation with the Maths and English and getting them back into the rhythm in school... We’ve still got students that are not attending, and some of them are Gypsy Roma students. So, it’s just getting kids to come back to school, encourage them to get back on track really... I can totally empathise now that it’s very much catch-up now. In terms of doing these extracurricular activities, I think they’re important and, again, like I said, schools will do them if they have to in terms of their Ofsted to look good as a tick-box exercise, but at the moment, it’s very much about catching up with the missed learning. It’s sad because [they are] missing out on these things that are really important really, which I imagine a lot of schools that don’t have the deprived communities are just getting on. So, you’re going back again, not just academically, but in terms of, you know, cultural... awareness and things, and career opportunities. I think there’s definitely a backtrack” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Several participants also suggested that the decision of some Roma families to move away from the UK due to concerns around safety, or a desire to reunite with family in their countries of origin (a pattern which the research team have anecdotally heard was common across the UK for Roma families) was also having a disruptive effect on young people’s education:

“I would say now we probably lost about 100 students during these times. Some of them panicked in the first lockdown and they’ve now returned. I was speaking to a few families, it’s a better situation here than it is Romania. It’s a better medical system and one of the Dads turned around and said, “It can be the best in the world, but if I don’t understand it and they don’t have interpreters, I can’t access it.” So there is a massive shortage of interpreters. Because of the COVID rules you can’t take people in with you, for example, if they’re not contracted by the hospital... for families that don’t speak any English and they don’t have somebody to explain to them, they just panicked and left and they’ve not returned” (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Decisions to return home due to fears associated with Covid interacted with and exacerbated the pressures associated with Brexit identified above, with a sudden move meaning that families did not always have the paperwork completed which would enable them to return to the UK post-pandemic:

“Some of them, they’ve not applied for Brexit either, so they won’t be able to return even if they want to because they’re not skilled workers and it’s probably a bit late for them to apply especially if they don’t have paperwork” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Inevitably therefore, even for those young GRT people who have been in school (unlike the young people accessed via LeedsGATE focus groups and activities), there are concerns over whether the disruption posed by COVID may lead to increased rates of withdrawal from school or other educational opportunities, particularly where children may already be struggling academically, or at risk of disengagement or early school leaving.

Covid had often also had a direct effect on the extent of face-to-face work and support that outreach workers could offer to young people, as articulated by this professional interviewed in the Spring of 2021:

“I missed this year, I missed one full year because of COVID. I don’t know what’s happened with the students from the last year and I still can’t access schools to be honest, because the schools are still really restricted with visitors” (Inclusion Officer working in a Local Authority, male)

Accordingly, this final quotation is indicative of the suggestion that GRT young people may be even more likely than some other groups to ‘fall through the gaps’ which have occurred as a result of the disruptions caused by the pandemic, with limited support to retain momentum in education, the potentially limited ability of family and peers to support on-line learning as a result of language barriers, and literacy challenges or limited knowledge of curricula subjects²³. This is particularly problematic given evidence which suggests that many GRT young people also are at high risk of digital exclusion²⁴, may live in crowded accommodation with little space

to work or have limited access to shared laptops, and (for those on sites in particular) may find internet access problematic, expensive or erratic.

Staying near family and friendship networks as a barrier to further education

The theme of retaining close proximity to family, networks of kin and friendship groups (as well as practical or fiscal barriers to travel) were noted as influential in decisions about the schools and colleges that GRT young people attend. A synergy can thus be seen once again between comments made by young people who had participated in the Gypsy/Traveller sessions at LeedsGATE who emphasised the importance of undertaking education and training in a culturally congruent environment, with members of their communities, in order that they can feel safe and comfortable.

Based on the young people’s data we suggest too that the impact of prior experiences of racism and bullying in schools has a fundamentally important impact on whether or not a young person feels comfortable in changing educational environments. It should be noted, however, that this issue (in terms of the impacts of prior poor school experiences on aspiration) may not be something which educational support and outreach professionals are particularly aware of, based on the relative absence of comments about GRT youth concerns over safety and security in educational settings. Professionals instead focused more on practical issues impacting the wider family, or young people’s reluctance to travel or change schools, rather than exploring psychological concerns about stepping out of a known ‘safety zone’:

“The travel by bus [to other schools/colleges] it’s always an issue. So, even if they have to travel 10 minutes it’s always an issue. Why? Because large families mum needs to take other siblings to primary school, so all this and that... Then also they know which school has got the most Roma community in, so they’re trying to stay close, so they have friends there and things like that. Every time I fill an application forms for the schools I know exactly which one they want. I look at the application and say, “Okay, fine. I know.”...for example...is he too young or can’t really speak English, can’t travel on his own by bus and things like that. So, they’re always trying...to get the school walking distance, like 20 minutes maximum” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

“I met a guy and he was really about [training as] a car mechanic. Because he couldn’t get the place in Leeds, we offered him a place in Bradford and it was just ‘no’ because again coming down to travelling and this and that. So, he just left and he started working on buildings with the Dad” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Specific requirements in relation to travel and schools also meant that parents were sometimes reluctant to specify more than one school choice. This, combined with the oversubscription of schools in areas with high populations of Roma community members in particular (e.g. Harehills) sometimes made it difficult to secure places for community members:

“They’re very specific which school they want, so many times when you go to school you’ve got five options. If they really, really focus on one, they’re going to say, “Right, do you know what? I don’t know any other school, I just want [school name], okay. I don’t want anything else.” Then obviously even you suggest to them, “Look, it’s better for you to add more because it’s a better chance”, but at the end of the day it’s parental choice. So, you just need to do what they want really” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

One participant did suggest that a lack of confidence was also contributing to a reluctance to take up study options outside of a local area, with colleges and universities seen as unknown environments due to the fact that they have not historically been accessed by family members:

“I think there is a lack of confidence. Moving out of an area if they were to progress to something that was not local to them, I think that is a barrier for quite a lot of our students. Some students do not go to Leeds. They do not even come out of Beeston, Middleton and Cottingley. They stay very local. I think they have strong family ties within the area. ... There are generations that have not gone to University before, so I think it is difficult still to break that mould” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

This lack of confidence was not felt to be unique to GRT young people however, but was suggested to be common across the school population, a large proportion of whom were suggested to be experiencing multiple and complex forms of disadvantage.

Overall, these qualitative comments, underpinning findings from data gathered in the survey element of this research, suggest that it is schools which already have GRT pupils which are more likely to attract

23 Although the Traveller Movement/KCL “Tutors for Travellers” initiative focused on solutions and supporting a limited number of young people from GRT communities via top-up e-learning during the pandemic, the briefing documents and associated Travellers Times story on the project (2020) <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/yt/features/find-out-more-about-tutors-grt-initiative> highlight the extent of digital exclusion and challenges faced by the community. The fuller evaluation/report which will be published in 2021 will provide more information on their findings in relation to challenges faced by families:

24 Scadding, J. and Sweeney, S. (2018) Digital Exclusion in Gypsy and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom Brighton: FFT <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Digital-Inclusion-in-Gypsy-and-Traveller-communities-FINAL-1.pdf#:~:text=Policy%20makers%20should%20consider%20the%20digital%20exclusion%20faced,options%20are%20available%20to%20populations%20experiencing%20digital%20exclusion>. This report, published and researched pre-pandemic illuminates challenges around digital exclusion which have inevitably worsened significantly in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis when there has become a necessity for urgent swivel to e-learning for children and young people if they wish to remain in education.

other self-identifying members of the community, as this sense of a cohesive community enhances a sense of 'safety' and co-learning with peers; a theme which was also strongly emphasised in the Gypsy/Traveller youth interviews. The importance of being around other 'known' community members also emerged to some extent in the Roma young people's data where one young person noted that they had become more engaged in education and more outgoing on attending a school with other Roma, some of whom they already knew.

Creating safe educational spaces

In contrast to the strongly voiced experiences of young people who took part in this study, there appeared to be some lack of knowledge and limited consensus amongst professional adult interviewees with regards to the extent to which GRT community members experienced racially motivated bullying within schools, with varied views on this issue articulated by participants:

"Not [noticed bullying] particularly with Traveller students. I think just in general, there is always some bullying, no matter what heritage you are. I have never come across it. Name-calling is what is usually is. If you look at our bullying figures, it is all name-calling and they would I suppose pick on the lowest common denominator... So, we would get racist sort of comments. We might get Gypsy Roma comments as well. But I ... I have not come across any name-calling towards any Gypsy Roma... But maybe there is just not that awareness. Like I say, I doubt our students could tell you who is Gypsy Roma heritage" (IAG/careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"I do believe bullying is definitely a thing... You get a strand where people are negative, "Ah, they're coming to take our jobs," and even, you know, like Gypsy Roma, "What, you live in a caravan?" You get kids like that and then you've got to re-educate them" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

In some cases, participants highlighted that bullying was occurring on the basis of perceived difference, or belonging to a minority ethnic community more generally, as opposed to focusing on GRT identity specifically, with rhetoric surrounding the Brexit referendum identified as stoking such divisions and prejudicial comments. The presence of large networks of Roma students in a school environment was again suggested to offer some relative protection against discrimination experienced based on this identity:

"We've had a couple of incidents, but it wasn't because they were Gypsy Roma, it was more because [of where] they were born, they were called by other students, "Go back to your country." Especially about 4 years ago, when the referendum happened and there was all that going on... we had this situation in school where if there was an incident between 2 students, like a Romanian student and a British student, the British student would be like, "Oh just go back to your own country," stuff like that. So we've had that, but because the Gypsy Roma population is so large here, it's about quarter of the school, we've not really had incidents where they were discriminated against by other pupils because they're Gypsy Roma." (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

That said, this same participant also pointed to the presence of divisions and what they referred to as 'micro-bullying' within networks of Roma young people in schools from different backgrounds and areas, with these attitudes suggested as passed down from parents and internalised by young people themselves:

"In fact, we've had some incidents amongst the Gypsy Roma because they're from different villages and different Gypsy descent. I had six boys in my office and I said, "Look, you're all from Romania, your parents are Roma, you're Gypsy, why don't you get along?" It's not that they don't get along, because all six of them were really nice chaps, so they don't cause any problems, they just don't spend any time together and they're of the same age. Sometimes they're in the same classes and they would sit next to each other but not talk to each other...it's just what they've been taught at home. So their parents would tell them, "Don't hang out with so and so because he's from so and so village." It's just been ingrained in them...It's like micro bullying if you want to call it within the community but because they're from different villages" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

There was also wide variation in views across education professionals interviewed with regard to whether GRT community members were disclosing their ethnicity in school settings. One participant suggested that GRT students were willing to openly declare their ethnicity, with this potentially connected with the way that this was broached. However, it is worth emphasising that this worker was explicit about his own Gypsy/Traveller heritage, and as demonstrated from the young people's data, this was something which could have a profound effect in relation to self-identification, given the lack of role models in authority or academic settings:

"I think they're quite open about their ethnicity because again, if you know how to ask and the first thing that I do when I go to do some intervention for the young people, first thing I say, "Look, that's who I am, that's my background." So, I didn't feel embarrassed or ashamed for who I am, so I just tell the truth, that's what it is. Then I think then they're quite open about their ethnicity, I don't think that's something what they're hiding". (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

However, others suggested that GRT young people (and their parents) hid their identity or did not discuss their heritage openly in school for fear of being stereotyped and experiencing racism or bullying:

"I just think there is still a stigma to the labelling of it. 'The Gypsy' and the connotations about a stereotypical Gypsy lifestyle. So, I think some students do not want other students to know that... I just think some students do not want to disclose that. They are not embarrassed about their situation. They just do not want to be classified in that way. I think that is the general feeling". (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"I had a few students, I had very few students and they were hiding their ethnicity but again, they had reasons, yes, say bullying and racist comments and things like that. That's another thing, that's something that you're still going to see around the schools, you can't avoid this. I know the schools they have very strict policies about this but you're still going to see it, name calling and things like that. Yes, very few students I met, I know they are Roma and they said, "No, we are not." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

"I think it's more their parents. So when we have admission meetings to bring students to school, one of the questions on the forms is what's your ethnicity and some people refuse to disclose it or one of the options is Eastern European so they say Eastern European. So they choose that even though I've had families sit in front of me, speaking Romanesque and say they're not Roma" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Highlighting the sensitivities surrounding self-identification, one participant highlighted situations in which children themselves were unaware of

their Roma heritage, as well as those where young people had been mistakenly identified as Roma, with this unearthing prejudice and discriminatory attitudes against Roma among parents, which staff had found it difficult to counteract:

"Also there's a different situation where we have students in school that are not aware that they're Gypsy Roma. So their parents, kind of, moved away from the community or their grandparents rather moved away from the community, didn't teach their children the language. So then their grandchildren are not aware that they're Gypsy Roma even though they are 100% of that descent and that ethnicity... We went via the ethnicity to create groups and some of the kids that were in the groups were coming to me and saying, "Why am I in this group," or were coming to me and said, "The teacher says I'm in this group because I'm a Gypsy, but not a Gypsy." Then I would have to sit down with them and say, "Well, look, your parents – you'd [need to] have this conversation with your parents, not with me, even though you don't speak the language, you are of Roma descent. If you don't want to tell anybody, that's fine. If you want this removed from school [records] we need to speak to your parents and we can do that as well, but your parents, when you were admitted said that you are Roma ethnicity." So I have to have those conversations as well" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

"And then I've had to have the opposite conversation where there was a mistake and people were classed as Gypsy Roma, then we had parents in school who were very discriminatory towards Roma people and said, "My son should never mix with Roma, why was he put in the same group because we are not. We always want to avoid and we don't want to have anything to do with them." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Some participants suggested that in many cases, teachers would not be able to identify GRT pupils, which in itself may contribute (as noted by some young people) to the invisibility of GRT culture in both curricula and how teachers engage with young people, as minority ethnic communities with distinct cultures:

"I think teachers in general they have a problem to recognise who is who" (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

"I just think that we – if you asked our Head, he would say, "When you come into school, you are not just another student but we treat everybody equally." So, I do not think that people would even be aware that they were teaching a Gypsy Roma student. Other than checking it [on School census/records]... You do see it – we do seating plans in school and you get all the information on the students. So, you would notice it, but I do not think you would do anything differently". (IAG/Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

Indeed, while avoiding distinguishing GRT pupils was felt to be beneficial in ensuring that students were not singled out or treated differently in any way, it was also acknowledged (and highlighted by young people themselves) that this reactive rather than proactive approach may create barriers to ensuring that GRT students receive appropriate and tailored support:

"Yes. I do [think a non-targeted approach is the right approach] to a certain extent, but I think if being Gypsy Roma creates any barriers to anything that a student does, then I think we have got to be aware of it... But in terms of... we do not do anything any different for anybody, unless – I suppose it is very reactive, isn't it? We are trying to become proactive, so maybe we should be more proactive in observing every cultural difference". (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

Furthermore, a lack of attention to GRT heritage within the curriculum compared to other cultures was suggested as potentially contributing to the reluctance of GRT community members to discuss their ethnicity, suggesting a need for greater celebration and recognition of GRT culture in school environments:

"Maybe we do not... Because when we do things like citizenship, maybe it is not a high enough profile in that. Because we tend to talk about, I don't know, Judaism, Islam and all the other more religious festivals, and maybe do not talk about it in terms of heritage. But interestingly enough, we are just changing our policies on behaviour and talking about culture and [cultural] capital. Now I have got involved in this [research], then it is an opportunity for me to say, "Well, do we need to look at different heritages, not just your main ones really?" (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"I'm curious about any work that anyone has come up against that really is doing that [incorporating attention to GTRSB issues in curricula] well, because we talk about decolonising the curriculum, but I think this is in terms of an inclusive curriculum that is able to understand different heritages. I think that would be really interesting and helpful for us" (Widening Participation Manager, female)

Indeed, one participant highlighted the discontinuation of a Leeds city-wide event to celebrate GRT culture and history as a lost opportunity to raise awareness among school staff. Another participant drew comparisons with her own experiences of belonging to a minority ethnic group, and highlighted a need for much greater consideration of the sense of exclusion and isolation that GRT and other 'minority' groups might experience, and the role that celebrating difference can play in building confidence:

"So, again, it's just like you didn't feel like you fitted in. So, I think feeling quite isolated, it was a barrier, and I can, kind of, understand, it might be a barrier for, you know, the Gypsy Roma community because 3% is nothing, you know? I mean, I was quite a sensitive person. So, I did feel different and I didn't feel as though I could fit in, and plus you're going through the awkward years of the change of the teenage years. So, you're having to deal with that... So, I do feel like with the Gypsy Roma community, there is that element of being a minority, and I guess people need to explore what that actually means...and I don't mean ethnic minorities [should need to do the heavy lifting of exploration]. I mean, how does it feel to be a minority? That sense of shame sometimes, the sense of not belonging, you know, the negative side, as well as the positive side, and how you can foster the positive where you, kind of, celebrate the fact that you are unique. I wish someone said to me back then, "Do you know what, it's amazing that you're from this particular part, and it's great. It's very rare, and the language that you speak is rare. You know, cherish it" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

In addition to celebrating difference, some participants also highlighted successful initiatives which have encouraged diverse groups of students to find commonalities through shared and inclusive activities such as sport and music:

"Partly that music, you know, when you come into the Roma community I don't think there is even one person without a music talent. (Laughter) They're all very talented and I keep saying, "Music is universal. You don't need a language; you just need the rhythm." The music was very successful and unfortunately we had no capacity to carry on because our teams get smaller and smaller... When we celebrated in 2019 International Roma Day, we put together a programme with students from [school name] and I mixed all the students and we had a fantastic performance at [venue]. I think that sort of intervention, through the music, so that can join them altogether [is very successful]". (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Such initiatives, which aim to promote commonality across groups, were thought to be particularly important since Roma communities were not always well integrated with the broader school population. Whilst this may be a result of language barriers for Roma young people, it is likely that cultural differences are also impacting on the extent of 'mixing' between groups where there are large enough cohorts from particular countries of origin to enable clustering to occur:

"The schools are trying to the best to integrate them, but you can still see segregation. You still can see the groups, you can still see Romanians are hanging around with Romanians, the Polish with the Polish, Slovak with the Slovak" (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

As well as highlighting issues around the segregation of Roma within schools, this participant also raised concerns about the tendency to place Roma young people in particular, in alternative/off-site school provision or settings, as a way to deal with any behavioural difficulties which do occur. Roma young people were suggested as more likely than Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people to be placed in alternative provision (as opposed to home schooling), due to difficulties experienced by families in demonstrating that they have the capacity to support young people through home schooling, given the above noted challenges around language, as well as parents' expectations of tighter legal restrictions on school absence, based on experiences in their countries of origin. This perception is born out perhaps by the survey response from the participant working in a Pupil Referral Unit who indicated that their pupils were overwhelmingly of Roma origins.

This particular participant also identified concerns around the high numbers of Roma young people in

alternative education provision, as he was uncertain about the effectiveness of these provisions, and the disruption that this can cause where the reasons for such a transfer were not discussed with or communicated clearly to parents, or where young people were moved frequently between settings:

"It's very interesting because I love data and I would like to see the educational data to say, "Okay, so how successful we are when we send this kid to alternative provision compared to mainstream?" Please, just show me and then if that works, that's the solution, okay. I didn't come across anything like that, so [from] what I can see I have only problems, every time the school sends a child to alternative provision, outside provision, whatever, I have a problem because first of all, you put the child again into new environment. Then many times the parents thinking, "Why did you put them in a different school?" Many schools they're not sending you to a different school, they just sending you to their own provision. That's not clear for the parents, so many times young people are refusing to go to the provision... I feel like this is not effective, this is not working. For some kids, yes, I had a few, I had very few they were successful, the provision helped them but what else. I was supporting a young lad for over a year, over the year he changed about four different provisions and he didn't even attend it for the two days. They just put him from provision to provision, from provision, no impact whatsoever. So, hold on, so we can just blame the lad for that?" (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Behavioural problems which resulted in young people being placed into alternative provisions were suggested as driven in the majority of cases, by a lack of understanding among Roma young people and parents of the school environment and requirements (connected with above noted language barriers). As such, the tendency for young people to become disillusioned and disengaged with school due to these barriers is likely only to be repeated in alternative provision where these issues are not appropriately addressed:

"It's usually behaviour is driving them to that [put a student in additional provisions] but you need to think about it, why behaviour. Again, you're taking the girl or boy, sometimes they can't cope with the school environment especially coming down to the language again, for example, different culture. It's very difficult for them to express themselves, for the parents

to understand the education system and things like that. In the long term that can drive into the solution the school can make. They said, "Okay, the best for him or her is an alternative provision." Then in the schools you've got lots of internal truancy... because they can't cope with the lessons, they can't follow the lessons so for them it's better to do internal truancy around the school. School rules are strict, so if you do this once, two times, three times, you've got detention, you've got isolation and then you've got meeting with the parents and then if you carry on you can end up for two weeks in alternative provision or outside provision. Everything is coming back to how the school engage with young people, how they're supporting them. Again, don't get wrong, I'm not blaming the schools because there are some fantastic schools and fantastic support in place but that's where the problem is starting. I spent years in a pastoral team, and I spent years as a Roma community officer and that was every single day, the problem" (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Thus, it would appear that for some schools there is a need to both break down barriers and integrate GRT pupils more generally, and to also ensure that there is engagement across communities under the same ethnic grouping. To this end, celebrations of culture as in the music example given above, may have particularly positive impacts, allowing exchange of knowledge, showcasing of skills and the illustration of similarities and differences between communities. The importance of celebration of culture is discussed further in the reflections and recommendations for practice, but would note here that clear scope exists for partnership and collaboration between schools and universities in relation to arts-based practice which foregrounds GRT cultures in educational settings.

The Importance of building relationships with both students and family

A theme which emerged strongly in our discussions with educational professionals (and which mirrors the findings from the young people's activities given their repeated emphasis on the ways in which family influence career choices), is the importance of developing relationships with pupils, students, potential students and their wider families.

Family support was judged to be instrumental in young people's progression to higher education, and in keeping with the above reported trend towards increasing interest in further education among GRT young people, professionals also cited examples of GRT parents and relatives who were hugely encouraging of young people continuing their education, and wanted to ensure their children had opportunities that they themselves had not had access to:

"I think parental and community influence seems to be 10 times as strong with this group" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

"It comes from home as well. Like, with this guy, I was going to call him a kid, but he's 19 now, he was with us for about 3 years and it's the family, his parents were very focused. His dad works on the scrap metal van and when he first dropped him to school he looked at me and... he said, "My kid is never going to be like this." He said to me, "You need to make sure of that. If he does anything you need to ring me. If he's not behaving in lesson you need to ring me. I will be here in 5 minutes if I have to be"... Now he's gone off to University and his sister is probably going to do the same thing which is brilliant but they were on 100% attendance. Dad would bring them to school, Dad would collect them. It stems from home." (Outreach and Student Progression Lead in a Secondary School, male)

However, professional participants suggested that some GRT parents did not see the value of formal educational systems, due to their own negative educational experiences and identified a need to raise awareness and understanding among parents of the opportunities remaining in education affords:

"I do think for Gypsy Roma [pupils], it is always if we can get parents on side, then we are usually more successful. Because I think that has been a barrier in the past, that parents are not aspirational for their kids. That then leads to either non-starting or drop-off. So, it is working with parents really. Our attendance team have really good relationships, personal relationships really, with families who we think may be at risk of not entering into post 16 provision" (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"Probably parental engagement as well, again, with other ethnic groups. You know, White students, other ethnic groups, parents are just quite involved in the schooling system, whereas I don't feel like that's the case [with GRT parents], and to be honest, it's a two-way communication. It's not just down to the parents. I mean, it's fortunate that you do get parents that do engage when it comes to other ethnic groups, but in terms of the Gypsy Roma community, if they're not engaging, surely school should be engaging or we need to get some, sort of, like – you know, if there's a struggle in terms of language – translations or support." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

"I think one of the big barriers is that parents have not necessarily had a good educational experience. Whether that is – probably back home in Romania. So, I do not think that they have an understanding of the education system and the opportunities available here. So, as well as educating the students, it is about trying to get that parental engagement as well..... I think again it is just breaking down those barriers of parents having a negative experience of school, and that this is not necessarily going to be a negative experience for their children. So, we are trying to make it as positive as possible". (IAG/Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

These quotations indicate awareness that parents have themselves have had negative educational experiences, but also highlight that there is often a lack of bridging capital or resources to support closer engagement and working with parents. Once more we would suggest that this is indicative of a need to promote greater understanding of the depth of impact of parental disengagement from school, often linked to their own experiences of bullying in school settings which may have occurred in the UK or Ireland²⁵ as well as in Eastern Europe where segregated schooling or extreme deprivation and exclusion often impact Roma.

Participants also highlighted how some parents may be uncomfortable accessing and engaging with schools due to a lack of familiarity with this environment:

"Schools are really intimidating places for some parents. So, it's just about making them less intimidating... because you're going to go to a parents' evening and you might be worried about what you're wearing or there's going to be other parents and teachers as well, you know, sitting behind a desk. Yes, and then your child, you know, your child being judged. It can be quite an intimidating experience. For some parents, it's like a walk in the park... In fact, it's more intimidating for the teachers, but I feel like it's still quite an intimidating process, especially when it's like a new concept [for some parents from GRT communities]" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Given the potential for the school setting to be experienced as threatening or intimidating by some families, it was suggested that an informal approach was most useful when engaging with these parents:

"Even just having more, kind of, casual events in school where it's just like a tea and cake where you're having a chat and you're discussing [children and learning], not like it's some serious careers event and this what you can do, because I think that can be quite off-putting. So, I think you need to have... informal events as well where you're just having discussions, like really speaking to parents and finding out what are the barriers really, and having a chat, rather than talking at them and giving them a presentation" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Offering courses for parents and co-learning events was volunteered as another useful approach for integrating parents and families more in school life:

"I've worked in various schools and there used to be a lot of parental groups and parental officers where they do... courses for parents, and I think that's a really great thing. I don't think our school does that, which is a bit unfortunate, but I think that's really important, where, you know, parents can learn how to use a computer or... just enhance their language skills or take up a new skill really. I think that's a good way to bring parents in." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

²⁵ The recent MHCLG commissioned pilot study into the impacts of hate speech and hate crime on mental health and wellbeing of GRT communities (Greenfields and Rogers, 2020) <https://bucks.repository.guldh.ac.uk/id/eprint/18142/> found that respondents repeatedly emphasised the impact of life-long exposure to racist bullying on their trust in and relationships with wider society. In this study 78% of respondents highlighted school bullying as significant hate related incidents experienced by themselves and/or their children, indicative of an inter-generational cycle of exposure to discrimination and hate speech, with inevitable consequences for a sense of belonging in educational settings.

In fact, co-learning opportunities and engaging parents from Roma communities in education settings have been extremely successfully trialled in Greek and Spanish contexts²⁶, and proven to have positive impacts on school attendance, engagement and children's attainment and staying on rates. This is the case even where parents have had low levels of literacy, but through their engagement, build a sense of trust and awareness of what educational opportunities can offer on a personal or familial basis.

Some participants also indicated that the presence of dedicated staff in schools, who GRT young people can approach for support and who have a specific role in liaising with families and communities, is hugely beneficial for building trusted relationships, with a shared background between staff and students suggested to further facilitate these links. This suggestion is mirrored in literature around sense of belonging in school and developed further in our Policy recommendations for Higher Education establishments:

"I feel now that this cohort of students, I have really built a relationship with them... they now know who to come to. So, in other words, I have said to them, "If you have got any concerns, careers, school questions ...You are welcome to come and see me"... I think the key to it is building those relationships and maintaining those relationships" (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"[School name] have GRT members of staff who work for the school, I think that is probably the biggest...I think, personally, this underrepresented group faces so much more discrimination and everything in general life. I think... involving the community groups, it seems like a very... You need to know the gatekeepers to get in with it ... Unless you know someone in the community, where do you even start?...Yes, I think just having people from the community doing it is so important" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Professionals working in Higher Education environments similarly recommended the need to build relationships with students and their families, both pre and post access to University, but with this felt to be easier for smaller institutions, with more finite cohort sizes:

"I think building personal relationships is what we do really well at [University] and, I think, what will benefit these students the most as well" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Language and literacy barriers

For Roma young people in particular, ESOL and language barriers were identified as creating huge challenges in attaining qualifications necessary for progression to further education:

"There's... two variables, but in terms of when you're new to the country and you've been put into the schooling system, you're not thinking about careers. You are thinking about English and Maths. To be honest, you're not even doing a GCSE programme. You are focussing on your English and your Maths and getting them to a level where you can progress". (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

"Getting the GCSEs that are required for a college course, the 5 GCSEs over 4 and above. It's not through them not trying, they're just not been here long enough. Some of them try really, really hard and then they fall short because they've not had enough time to improve their language" (Outreach and student progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

"There are very solid barriers that I find it really difficult to break down, particularly when dealing with students for whom English isn't their first language" (Academic, female)

However, it is also worth noting that barriers potentially exist around in-school expectations of use of formal written and spoken language²⁷ for Gypsy and Traveller pupils too, and that Romanes and Cant/De Gammon may be spoken at home, adding an additional layer of nuance to language use). Indeed, a professional participant in the focus group noted a requirement, in some cases, to adjust the academic level of outreach activities when working with Gypsy and Traveller young people who have often experienced disruptions in their education:

"The majority of our outreach tends to be for Key Stage 4 or 5 level. Working with GATE, I've realised that we have to come down quite a lot there because the students that we've been working with are, maybe, at Key Stage 2, perhaps. Even if they're a bit older, their educational level might be more around that age group" (Widening Participation lead / STEM, female)

Challenges in being able to express existing knowledge and engage in new learning due to language or literacy constraints, were identified as impacting on young people's enjoyment of school, and their motivation and interest in pursuing further study; something which may hold true across all GRT communities even where English is a first language. Given the literacy and language barriers identified, higher education professionals suggested that they were often limited in the extent to which they could facilitate access without action much earlier on in the system in order to address barriers to GTRSB young people achieving their potential, and gaining the qualifications necessary to entering further and higher education:

"There's a systemic barrier to higher education in that I was working with someone last year and it was just heart-breaking because he just couldn't pass the IELTS [International English Language Testing System] for love no money. He could play [musical instrument] like no-one I've ever seen play [instrument], but it would have been unethical for us to give him a place, because we'd have just taken his money for him to fail on a course that has fundamental academic aspects...There's so much that we can do...but for the mature students, because we can use prior credit...We've got a lot of help that we can give" (Academic, female)

"We're looking at a tariff review, in general, here. I think actual formal qualifications can be a massive barrier, like English and maths requirement is huge, that stops people when that might not necessarily have any bearing on their achievement on the course" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

While participants recognised that language barriers could be overcome with support and over time, the extent of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision and resources was noted to vary across schools, and the duration over which courses were delivered, was suggested to be problematic, with one participant suggesting a need for shorter more intense courses to support young people in acquiring English language skills:

"I'm not really sure if every school can provide EAL support... I know a few schools,.. even [in] Leeds, I don't think all schools can provide it. I know a few schools around Bradford they literally, they said, "Look, we just can't afford an EAL department anymore", so they replaced bits of different programme and they're expecting miracles" (Inclusion officer in a Local Authority, male)

"I know the way the ESOL courses are at college, that is something that they could – is there a course that could help them learn English quicker? I think the ESOL course is good but it's quite slow. It can be a 2 year course. Is there something that they can do – forget the maths, forget the science, just do English because they probably know the maths and the science, they just can't express it in English. Is there something like that for them?" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Extending ESOL support to Roma parents where possible was also felt to be very beneficial in building a supportive relationship with wider extended families who may be influential on a young person's educational career:

"Some schools they provide ESOL for the parents and that was absolutely fantastic as well...We plan to do some more about the ESOL for adults, I think that's going to be [very positive] when we had this ESOL [before] we had mainly women from the community, Romanian women in that session, so that's what's going to start very soon, I think end of June hopefully we can start running some groups" (Inclusion officer in a Local Authority, male)

"Fresh Start" sessions were another example of good practice identified by professional participants. These programmes are designed to teach young people for whom English is not their first language, the foundations of English as well as familiarise them with school processes and terminology before they take up their school place:

"The Fresh start sessions [are] for young people aged 9 till 16, but I think we will change this very soon for up to 18. Six to 18 [years] I would say...for the children who are not in education or they're waiting for the school place... We take 6, 7, 8, sometimes 10 children and we do some work with them particularly about language. We're teaching them the basic words so they can be slightly more ready when they go to school... teaching them school equipment, the name of the lessons and things like that" (Inclusion officer in a Local Authority, male)

²⁶ Flecha, R., & Soler, M. (2013). Turning difficulties into possibilities: Engaging Roma families and students in school through dialogic learning. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(4), 451-465. Symeou, L., Luciak, M., & Gobbo, F. (2009). Teacher training for Roma inclusion: implementation, outcomes and reflections of the INSETRom project. Ppp493-496. <http://iaie.org/insetrom/>

²⁷ See for example (referring predominantly to Black pupils in London):- <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/15/london-school-bans-pupils-slang-innit>; and also the JRF study on the influence of extent of parental formal education and family poverty on children's attainment in school. Goodman A and Gregg, P (2010) Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour? York: JRF <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poorer-children%E2%80%99s-educational-attainment-how-important-are-attitudes-and-behaviour>

Whilst there is a fundamental drive to ensure young people attain Level 2 qualifications in English and Maths, and this means that good support is often (although not universally²⁸) provided up to this point in their educational career, participants also highlighted a lack of clear pathways and support for young people to progress beyond this stage, leading to disengagement from FE and HE options for many GRT youth:

“You see that a lot with other ethnic groups as well, or students that are basically not quite at GCSE level and they’re having to do Level 2 in maths or they go onto college. It’s a case where they’re going to do college and they do English and Maths, because I worked at a college, but there’s no support beyond that which is really sad, and I’ve seen that at the college. I don’t know if it’s to do with the whole government side of things where the focus is, you know, you need to have the level of English and maths – But then it’s like they, kind of, just fall off the radar. ..There is a point where they, kind of, just do their maths and English and then it’s a case of seeking employment, and you do need that support... if you don’t have that career support, it’s easy to fall off the radar, definitely, because it’s always more appealing to do your Maths and English and get a job and earn money... whereas maybe long-term, it’s not beneficial because you’re, kind of, stuck at a level, but at the time, you’re thinking, “This is the best option for me.” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Given the challenges in equipping young people with the language and literacy skills necessary for expressing existing knowledge, and gaining qualifications required as a gateway for further education, one participant also recommended assisting GRT young people to gain practical skills and experience alongside formal learning, which may assist young people in gaining employment:

“One day a week, maybe there’s a kid he wants to be a vet, so maybe one day a week we find a farm and he goes there. We found him, he volunteers in the community and he looks after some goats after school but [we’ve helped him to] do it formally. Get a certificate at the end of your Year 11...from the last year and I’ve done this every day. I’ve not missed a day off. I’ve done this, this and this in the community and show that as well. Because they’re not going to get their

GCSEs for whatever reason that we discussed previously, [but to] have a portfolio of things they’ve done... So do one day a week, 5 hours in a garage for a whole year. Some of them come here, they sit at their desk, they’re really good, they learn the English and that’s perfect but a lot of them can’t do that and we struggle with their behaviour and we struggle with their attendance. And we try and get them and put them to fit this profile and they could have been developing their personality” (Outreach and student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Similarly, another participant highlighted a perceived need to challenge perceptions that further and higher education was only for the pursuit of abstract knowledge or very academically oriented students, and raise awareness of the variety of further and higher education courses provided, including more applied and vocational options:

“We offer a lot of vocational, practical courses. I know that other unis do, but I think showing them that there are also those routes available to them. I think, like you said, we need to show them those routes as well. It’s not all about going to University, being a lawyer, being a doctor. I’ve got dyslexia and dyspraxia. I struggled at school, but I think it’s just showing that there are different routes out there and that you can achieve. Even if you’re not a high, high achiever at school, there are still routes for you to go into higher education” (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager in a further education college, female)

Financial challenges and emphasis on employment/earning

The education professionals involved in the study also raised the issue of financial concerns which were suggested as frequently leading community members to look for employment rather than stay on in education, with the immediacy of income prioritised over longer-term earning prospects and costs associated with University study:

“For the boys they want – even down to Year 9, 13, 14 year olds are going – I think there are 3 lads that are going and working when it’s holidays and Saturdays and sometimes they skip school and work in a carwash because

they want money. Their family can’t give them any money. The see they can work and make money, so they do that” (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

“I do feel... a lot of the families that I’ve spoken to, you know, financially, I think the finances thing is still an issue... there is that kind of pressure where they would like their child to get a job after schooling, as opposed to exploring further education and higher education. So, maybe there is that element where they’re not quite, kind of, seeing the benefits [of remaining in education] as such... the main thing is that primary priority... goal, which is to earn money, which is completely understandable if you’ve living in conditions where you’re not getting the finances. So often the case, there’s multiple siblings or fathers out of work. So, there’s a big pressure compared to other ethnic groups in terms of the whole money side of situation. .I guess [in those circumstances] you’re not really thinking about going to University because that’s very much a, kind of, long game”. (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Indeed, one of these participants further notes their perception that GRT community members as less likely to be engaged in long-term career planning than other groups with whom they work, with this again attributed to pressure to begin earning, suggesting a need to raise awareness amongst young people and their families that further education can lead to enhanced employment opportunities:

“In terms of having a career goal in the future, I think that’s still quite a new concept compared to other ethnic groups, where it is very much just part [of] what you do... Obviously, I can understand a lot of the priorities from the parents that I spoke to is... not thinking about college and not University. It’s finances and ideally they’d like their kids to get a job... [but following HE] the whole point is that you’re getting a job [but] it’s just a different kind of route”. (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Although financial concerns were not expressed particularly strongly by young people involved in this research (though perceptions of University study as expensive were discussed in one of the groups with Roma young people), this is perhaps partly because the Gypsy and Traveller respondents (aside from the young man participating in the community mapping exercise), were out of education and

the Roma pupils were not asked about this issue explicitly. Indeed, the research team are aware from other projects activities that GRT students and their families often express concern over the cost, and value for money of entering into HE (Mulcahy et al. 2017; Forster and Gallagher 2020; Greenfields, 2019).

Apprenticeships

Given the oft-articulated cultural preference for getting out to work and earning money, coupled with financial pressures on families, professionals perceived apprenticeships to be a potentially useful option for some GRT young people; enabling them to “earn whilst they learn” and gain formal qualifications. However, awareness of apprenticeships among young people was thought to be extremely low, and professionals themselves felt that they needed more information about these routes in order to be able to appropriately promote these options to young people where appropriate and in a culturally accessible manner:

“The ones that are still coming over, that are 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and for them I think apprenticeships that are paid would work because it ticks all the boxes. They’ll make money, they’ll see their education as something that they’re being paid to do and they won’t have to ask their parents for money. They won’t have to send their son in the carwash for 12 hours” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

“I think there is not enough resources about, for example, apprenticeship options because [GRT young people] are always looking for the options how to earn some money. I think when somebody said, “Oh, I’m not going to go to college. I’m just going to go and work.” I tried to say, “Look, what about apprenticeship?” They said, “What’s [an] apprenticeship? What’s my option as an apprenticeship?”... To be honest, I still don’t have enough information about the apprenticeships and what’s the offer at the moment... That needs to be a little bit more [articulated] I think that can keep them in education, maybe when they see the options that I can earn a little bit more and plus do some study. Maybe something more practical, they’re always looking for some more practical subjects”. (Inclusion officer in a Local Authority, male)

In addition to above identified concerns around language barriers and the ability therefore of young people to demonstrate the required qualifications to

²⁸ See for example national level evidence of exclusions and ‘off-rolling’ of GRT children who are not ‘achieving’ academically, and de facto acceptance of young people from Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds leaving school early. <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/news/2019/05/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-education-celebrating-good-practice> and for a more general look at characteristics of children likely to be ‘off-rolled’ Ofsted (2019) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936524/Ofsted_offrolling_report_YouGov_090519.pdf

enter apprenticeships and other further education courses, a gap was identified in availability of apprenticeships for those aged 16+, with this apparent lacuna in provision sometimes leading to missed opportunities in schools to guide and support students into these practical options:

"I think for these lads, apprenticeships where they also get paid would work but because of their level of English or because they're not very educated when they come to us in the first place they can't access these apprenticeships. They can't get to the levels that they're being asked to get to this apprenticeship. I don't know if we can create an apprenticeship for them, because some of them are quite practical, they'd be good working in a garage, maybe working in retail or hotel industry, restaurant industry, stuff like that. They'll probably do really well but they can't access those apprenticeship because of maybe their English level" (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

"Because even though they government tells us that apprenticeships are the way forward, still a lot of the apprenticeships are geared towards post 18 and we are only a 11 to 16 school. So, sometimes we send students off and they start in college. But then when we catch up with [some of] them later, they have started an apprenticeship. Again, it is not massive numbers and it tends to be post 18 rather than post 16 [when commence Apprenticeships]" (IAG/Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"I think for these lads, apprenticeships where they also get paid would work but because of their level of English or because they're not very educated when they come to us in the first place they can't access these apprenticeships." (HE Progression officer in a secondary school)

Indeed, one participant noted that in an ideal scenario, some students could be supported to undertake apprenticeship type qualifications as part of their Secondary School education, where participation in paid work was already leading to disengagement and low attendance:

"For example, we got a kid in Year 11 and he stopped attending a few months ago and he works and we don't want to go the legal route and fine the family because they're struggling anyway. And he's not working because he loves to be in a carwash for 12 hours and doesn't want to be in school for 5 hours. He works because he doesn't have any other options, the way he sees it. So for him...I would be well, come into school for 3 days and for 2 days go to this garage and they'll pay you an apprenticeship rate and at least you'll ...make some money but you have to be 100% of the time or you won't get paid. So that's what I would do for him if I could but I can't because the law requires that he's in school in every day. So that would be a little solution for him... I can tell you 10 names from Year 9 to Year 11 that would fit into that little solution." (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Thus, while apprenticeships were identified as an ideal opportunity for some GRT young people, comments suggest that at present, limited promotion of these options due to gaps in knowledge of education practitioners, a lack of apprenticeships or other opportunities to gain practical work experience targeting younger age groups (16+ or even prior to this alongside secondary education), and difficulty meeting entry requirements, continue to form barriers to the uptake of these routes.

Gender differences

In common with our findings from young people from the GRT communities, professionals who took part in the study perceived gender norms as being influential over GRT choices surrounding further and higher education. While professional participants were in the main cautious how they phrased their responses, and did not wish to generalise by gender or ethnicity, one participant indicated that they perceived of GRT girls as generally more engaged with their education than GRT boys, connected in part with perceptions that young GRT men experienced greater pressure to enter employment and earn an income:

"I feel... with the girls, there is that keenness, definitely. There is this one student that I've spoken to, and she's very keen about her interests, that she likes science and she knows about different careers, whereas the boys, I feel like you see that disengagement difference, I guess. I think the girls are more engaged, but to be honest, I feel like that's the case with a lot of ethnic groups...when I've spoken to the boys, I think it's just they're not really thinking that far ahead. I don't think they can really reflect on what kind of subjects they like... Again, I think for boys, there is that pressure as well, where they want to work". (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Another professional suggested that they found it more challenging to engage with young GRT boys, with this potentially connected with the observation in the focus group, that widening participation is a female dominated field:

"I think for me, as well, which I probably haven't said before, it's the young males. How do you interact and engage the young males, because I think they were a more challenge to keep on track, to keep engaged? You saw them sloping off towards the end of the session and getting themselves in trouble with other things in the centre, as well" (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager, female)

Similar to the views expressed by GRT young people themselves, this participant also pointed to expectations that young men take up opportunities to work in similar occupations to their fathers:

"I don't want to generalise because you can't really say, but based on probably my two interactions with two students, because their fathers are working in the construction industry – I mean jobs are readily available because it seems like it's one of them – I feel like they want to go down that path. Then, to be honest, generally anyway, in our school, we have a really good construction department. So, I can, kind of see, why they want to do that because the teachers are really great." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

Again mirroring the narratives of GRT young people themselves, professionals also suggested that GRT young women sometimes experience pressure to get married rather than continue with their education:

"In the past the [Roma] girls in particular have... There are still cases where they have gone off to get married very young. So, they just disappear in Year 11 and sometimes before. So, I think that is a problem" (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

"And then we got the girls and low aspirations. We have problems with pregnancy, forced marriage, child marriage. We had Mums – I go on home visits, Mum's at the door saying, "Well, you've come for my daughter again. What's the point?" We have the mum saying this to us at the doorstep, "She's going to end up married, she's going to end up cooking and cleaning, why does she need to go through school?" ...We had a girl and she was top of her class, Gypsy Roma, fluent in English and dad said – she kept saying, "I want to be a doctor, I want to be a doctor." And dad was refusing to let her take her GCSEs because if she gets married she can't have a better paid job than her husband because it will bring shame on him. I'm like, "You're potentially missing out on a brilliant doctor here." I know she's 15, 16 but she's brilliant. She could get her GCSEs easy. She could go to college, Sixth Form, whatever she wants. She could go to University and dad was just refusing and refusing and I was sat with there with him and her and the Principal and he kept saying this and that and she's a girl, she has to do this. In our tradition we have to do this" (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Reflecting issues identified by young people themselves, the following professional drew attention to the complexity and deep-seated nature of this issue (which was in some ways perceived as relatively intractable), highlighting the potentially widespread ramifications of young women's' decisions to stay in higher education, for the whole family, in terms of their image and standing in the community, and access to the social and economic capital that this provides:

“Sometimes I'm like some traditions you take with you, some traditions you just leave in the past and you think about them. You don't have to carry every single tradition with you everywhere, especially when you've got a brilliant young woman here and you're putting her down because of a tradition that nobody is following and she doesn't need to follow it. Then it's the larger community and all that [pressure] and how they're going to be treated as a family and if they get kicked out of the community and ignored by everybody then they will struggle. They will struggle to find jobs if they don't speak any English, and people that are giving them jobs are people from the community. So it's about the bigger picture as well, but it is that issue with the girls. I don't know how to fix these issues” (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

This participant sought to deal with this by emphasising to young women the possibility that they can both get married and have a family, as well as continuing on in their education. In doing so, this participant aimed to counter the potential absence of family discussions about these choices, by boosting young women's confidence in their abilities and their aspirations during school:

“She's done it [left school to marry early] as well because she's not aware of how good she is because she's probably never been told that at home. So that's why we try to raise their aspirations in school as much as we can” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Indeed, and again echoing the discussions of young GRT respondents, encouraging young women to obtain qualifications in addition to marriage aspirations, was judged to be important in enabling exit from marriage should they wish to do so, or if they find that they are treated badly by their spouse. In light of the economic pressures experienced by some, apprenticeships were also

seen as useful in offering some financial incentive for families to accept the continuation of young women's (as well as young men's) education:

“At the end of the day these families, they need to survive and support themselves and they will take the money even if it comes from a girl. If a girl is working, at the end of the day they will take it. That's the carrot. While she's earning, she's learning. She's got the knowledge to make her own choices and she's finished her apprenticeship and she can say, “I'm going to go to Uni and I don't care what you say, because I'm 18 and I'm going to move out and I'm going to find a house and I'm going to live with people, I'm going to do this course.” For me that would be the ideal situation for these girls and the parents wouldn't even know what hit them” (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

Despite gender relations being cited as a strong influence on young people's decisions, participants also highlighted counter examples to the primary narrative of early marriage of young women, noting that they were aware of girls who articulated ambitions to undertake further study:

“I've not noticed it [a desire for early marriage], but I've not had those discussions with students. Like with [student mentioned previously interested in STEM subjects], it was very much she wanted to do science. She didn't really give any inclinations of wanting to settle down, but I've not spoken to all the students”. (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

As with any communities, it is therefore important to recognise individual differences in behaviour, and of course, variance between communities and family expectations around gender roles.

Pragmatic and flexible approaches to working with young people from GRT communities

Our professional participants working to support GRT young people into higher education identified a need to work at multiple levels to support their pupils and address barriers experienced by members of the community when considering remaining in education. This including engaging with families and young people in a flexible manner to alleviate lacunas in knowledge as well as very practical obstacles to finding and taking up further education places:

“It is just leading [them] there. Thinking about taking them there, making sure they get to interviews, making sure they get to open days, making sure that they are fully involved really. Just really hammering that home and taking them if they need to be taken. If it is a transport barrier, then we will provide transport and we support them as much as we can to get to actually start. Then follow-up calls and things like that....if finance is a problem we have a charity within school so that if they need specialist equipment, then we would make sure that they have that specialist equipment. For example, if they are doing a photography post 16 provision and they need a camera for it, we will buy them a camera out of our charitable budget. So, I think it is just trying to break down the barriers. I do not think there is one specific thing that I would say, “That really works.” (IAG/ Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School)

“What I do is behaviour and attendance and anything that's got to do with the community, so organise parent meetings, interpret or take them myself. Basically if there is a barrier for student's education I do my best to remove that. For example, in the past if they missed school because of dentist appointment, GP appointments I'd organise that or if they have to go and interpret for their parents and I know in advance, I would go in their place so they could be in lessons. I speak to parents about the financial situation as well and we try and support that way. So if they can't afford bus tickets, meals, uniforms, they will tell you and then I will try and support them that way. Basically my role as I see it is to just remove any barriers that there might be for a child to attend school” (Outreach and Student Progression lead in a Secondary School, male)

As such, sometimes this active role to support access to FE entailed taking a holistic approach, addressing the needs of families more broadly in order to enable parents and young people to focus more on a pupil's education:

“Through your home visits you're trying to sort it out, the different issues for the parents, and take that issue from the parent so they can focus more on something else. So, trying to establish, for example, benefits or housing or anything else... you take that from the parents so they can be more active around the education” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

It was thus abundantly clear that to best support young GRT people into FE and HE (and young people from other communities experiencing similar challenges or language barriers) it is crucial to provide dedicated outreach workers who have the freedom and flexibility to undertake these varied and in some cases very individually tailored activities or actions:

“There are things that I done that I thought I would never do. Like, yesterday – I go on home visits twice a week – yesterday I went and got a child's shoes to school, a student's shoes, so they could be in lessons and not separate from lessons, so that they could follow the school rules... So my job is, like, I make it up as I go. If I see a need, I try and fix it. At this school it's been really good, so I don't have a set timetable. I organise my own day and decide what needs doing and they trust me with that because as you know schools...can be very strict in terms of staff time and doing things...so I'm happy to do that and then show evidence for it, where I can, but sometimes I can't” (Outreach and Student Progression lead in a Secondary School, male)

Targeted and sustained careers guidance/support to think about options and applying for places

As was clear from the young people's data and comments above from professionals, for many GRT young people there was typically little awareness of career options and pathways, other than following in the footsteps of their parents or immediate family members. In some cases, (echoing survey findings) participants suggested that only very limited careers support was being provided to young people, and highlighted a need for GRT young people to receive much more targeted and sustained careers advice and support, which could also include information about further study. One participant provided an example of successful targeted WP engagement with another minority community:

“It's always the case with careers staff in schools. It's very limited. It's what the school [is able to support]... I feel like that needs to change perhaps in the future. You can't really have a student, a Year 11 seeing their career adviser once and that's it. So, it needs to be an ongoing process, at least... you need to have a follow-up... There's a lot advertised, but there's no, focused careers activities for Gypsy Roma communities or ethnic minority communities...I

think it was Cambridge or Oxford – they did one specifically for Bangladeshi communities which was really interesting, and a lot of people were a bit sceptical about it, because they were like, “Why was it just Bangladeshis and not Pakistanis?” but I think the whole point was....sometimes that’s needed... and I think something like that would be quite beneficial” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

A need was identified by several participants for more accessible information for young people and their parents on further and higher education options, which should potentially occur at a younger age, particularly to impact and reach young people who might leave school early:

“For young people especially at college age, I think there is not enough information... or they don’t know how to access the information. There are quite a few other organisations that can provide the courses...but I don’t think the young people they have enough information. That’s maybe one of the barriers as well, how they can access all this information? If [the young people] are not going into those providers, how else? And how are the providers targeting those people. What do they do?... so many young people they just finish Secondary School, and they don’t know what to do and that’s the time for all these providers to come and tell them, “Look, that’s what you can do.” I know they do ... workshops, well for the last year they couldn’t but I know they do workshops where they try to encourage young people, but I think that’s still not enough. There needs to be something more targeted.” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

Some examples of good practice were highlighted, including a more intensive and tailored careers development programme provided to Year 10 Roma students in a Secondary School in the region, with a view to raising awareness of further education and employment opportunities among these pupils. The project was delivered in conjunction with local businesses (including a supermarket, an accountancy firm and a creative arts charity), involving workshops delivered by and visits to these organisations, as well as a trip to a local University, and proved to be very popular with young Roma community members involved:

“It is a mixture of taught lessons by myself, showing them about their post-16 options, the grading system, linking that back to their actual reports from when they were in Year 9. The work that they have to put in to achieve those grade 5s and 6s for their GCSEs, which then opens up their options. I have got employers working with me...So, they are all going to be running sessions” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

However, overall, there was a clear sense that there is a currently a lack of sufficiently targeted and in-depth careers and education advice designed and delivered in a culturally competent manner with GRT young people in mind. Several professional participants for example highlighted generic examples of careers support which were delivered to GRT young people in the same way as all other pupils and which, whilst seeking to offer a range of individualised options, still may not fully engage with a reluctance to move outside of their community, peer group or geographical location, as reflected upon by professionals above and also in the young people’s interviews:

“We are very conscious that our students are not very mobile or some are not very aspirational, and some although they appear quite confident, maybe not [in practice be] so confident. Every student has a personal careers meeting. We do things like interview practices, so that everybody before they go to their college interview has a face-to-face interview...We still do work experience. We do taster sessions with the local colleges. We get the colleges to come in to speak to students. We go to a careers fair every year, so that students know what options are available to them post 16. We have a designated person who just does careers and work experience. So, that person is always in school... We also have an external careers person who does that personal interview with them”. (IAG/Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

One participant suggested that in their experience careers advice often tends to prioritise support for those who are deemed more ‘capable’ (as is the case, interestingly, with the above mentioned good practice example), and who are more certain about their career aspirations (which act as a barrier for some GRT young people), highlighting a need for such careers advice to be delivered more consistently to all students regardless of the pathway they may choose (e.g. further education, employment, apprenticeships, etc.):

“We need training for staff. I think that’s really important, just training in terms of learning more about different ethnic groups.” (HE Progression Officer in a secondary school)

“Lack of support is definitely a barrier, whereas students who know what they want to do and they’ve got a clear path, that support is pretty much given 120%, you know, especially students that are really bright. It’s good, but then it’s just students that don’t have that career plan and [the young person] is [just] doing their Maths and their English, for example, the Gypsy Roma community, the support is just at the level of the Maths and the English...not with careers” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

This participant also highlighted concerns that pressure to achieve academic results on schools which had converted to Academy status was adding to this tendency to home in on students who are performing well, as well as crowding out opportunities to engage young people in broader career development activities, potentially resulting in these becoming more ‘tick-box’ exercises:

Our school has turned into an Academy. I mean, that probably answers the question, but I do feel like the time thing is a big factor. I feel like there’s a lot of pressure on teachers to produce results, and that’s what I feel like. That’s the main goal, and I feel like sometimes, with things like this, it’s more of a tick-box exercise, and even with the whole career side of things, like the schools now have to follow the Gatsby benchmarks. So, again, it’s a tick-box, sort of, exercise, but in terms of that reflecting and actually embedding it, but the main focus I do feel like with academies is results really... Everything, I have to get permission, and another thing is, again, because we are an academy, it is very much, “We can’t work with Year 11s. You cannot touch Year 11,” because it’s very much GCSE-focussed. So, you need to get permission for a lot of things. So, it’s not that straightforward to work with particular year groups. So, that is a barrier...yes, definitely” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer)

Need for more staff training on GRT experiences and aspirations

Overall, particularly having reflected in interviews and focus groups on the practice in their settings, the support currently available to young people, and indeed at times on the gaps in their own knowledge, education practitioners described a lack of confidence in approaching and engaging with GRT young people. As such, these participants suggested that they would value more (and specifically tailored) training in order increase to their understanding of the experiences of and challenges faced by GRT young people, and the how best they could support these groups in remaining in education or entering into employment:

“I think we need training for staff. I think that’s really important, just training in terms of learning more about different ethnic groups [from that] background and how you can support them and the barriers that they face. So, I think training is key for staff members” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

“People are confused with the Roma community. People are confused with the Eastern Europeans and then of course even more confused with the Eastern European Roma. So, I think it’s a gap.... somehow we’re going to [have to] try to do something more about it to educate more teachers and other professionals. At the moment still, for example, you’ve got people still calling Czechoslovakia, right, so they don’t know it’s two different countries” (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

"I think just some insight into the community. I'll be honest: I grew up and didn't have any friends who were Travellers, who were Roma or anything like that. I live in a little village outside of [place] which is very, it sounds bad, but white, middle class. That's just what it is. You're just in your surroundings, aren't you? You get to know people who are similar to you, and that's who you have in, say, work as well... That kind of thing [training], to me, would make me feel more confident because sometimes I do feel like I lack confidence... It's very different from going into a school and delivering outreach, to going into the community and feeling confident speaking to a mature student who is looking to get back into education, and what their background might have been. What kind of challenges might they have had in the past with education or their life, their family in general? I think that would be really helpful for me" (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager in a Further Education college, female)

The identified need for further training and education were not limited to professionals working to widen FE and HE progression for GRT students. Rather, professionals we spoke with highlighted the need for education and awareness raising to be embedded in teacher training to proactively counter the prejudices evident in the educational system (and indeed highlighted by GRT young people themselves), which deny opportunities for young people:

"Generally, lack of awareness as well. I was on some training and there was a girl who was doing a PGCE somewhere and she was saying that her lecturer was telling her class that... What did she say? Something horrendous like, "Young Gypsy students will just leave education, they don't care about it anyway." She was sitting there from that background training to be a teacher thinking... So, yes, I think just the general societal view of the group is a problem isn't it?" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

"I think it's also about, maybe, training teachers and staff within schools about their background, about what to expect. I think it's like you said, my teachers always had a really high expectation of me, and I think that's what helped me progress and where I went to in the end. Nobody would have ever thought I'd have got to the Uni that I did, but it's about having that expectation of somebody that's high. Then that person will meet that expectation, I think, so I think, actually, we need to change expectations within schools, of these young people. We can do all this work, but it needs to start being embedded within schools" (Widening Participation and Outreach manager)

"I think, further to that, because often what we think about is CPD, which is coming once you've been teaching for quite a long time, but there is so much work, I think, to be done in terms of anti-racist work within PGCEs, within PGCerts, all teaching in higher education, as well as teaching qualifications, whether those are at degree level or postgraduate. I think that would be really helpful because...there are very narrow ways that people see racism. I can imagine that schools are not immune from that" (Widening Participation Manager, female)

Indeed this latter quote points to the need for widespread anti-racism and awareness raising training to be delivered to education and support staff across all career stages (embedding this in initial training as well as continuing professional development), and to the need for partnerships across universities, schools and colleges to implement this consistently.

Role models/mentoring

Echoing comments from GRT young people themselves, professionals reflected on the value of raising the visibility of successful role models from GRT communities, in order to inspire and motivate young people to achieve their own ambitions:

"We did find a police officer, we got them in and everybody was impressed because she had a session with the girls and they were really, really impressed and started dreaming a little bit" (Outreach and Student Progression officer in a Secondary School, male)

"I feel like there definitely needs to be more role models. I think that definitely helps" (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

One participant reflected on the difference that greater visibility and representation of staff from other minority ethnic communities had made in helping to break down perceptions among young people that certain career and study options were 'not for them' or were beyond reach, and expressed her hope that, over time this would also be the case for GRT communities:

"There's a lot more Pakistani staff members, whereas maybe, like, 20 years ago, it was predominantly White teachers. So, I think it does make a difference to see, and I hope to see it in a few years' time, like where you do get Gypsy Roma [staff], as in like it's very visible, because

that's what you want...I mean, even within the Asian community, we've had people that have done really well in terms of their education and they come back to school. This is for careers where they've become doctors and they've done really well, are successful in terms of whatever career they've chosen, and they've come back and spoken to the kids, and it's been very inspiring. So, I think things like that do help regardless of ethnicity. I think it's just you need role models, yes. (Outreach and Student Progression Officer)

The ability to relate to role models was not always dependent on ethnicity however, with a widening participation practitioner in a University suggesting that GRT young people had related more generally with young media make up student ambassadors during outreach activities, with this acting as a forum for some mentoring, and opportunities for young people to ask questions and seek advice on any challenges they were experiencing during these informal discussions:

"They did really appreciate, I think, somebody spending time with them, and giving them that half-an-hour conversation and actually asking how their week has been or, "How do you find school?" and, "If it's a challenge, do you think you could change this, or do you think you could speak to teacher about that?" I think it was just somebody who they could come and speak to, as well, and the student ambassadors. I think they just really liked that role-model element of somebody a bit older, but they thought the girls were quite cool with all the makeup, the nails, the hair. Do you know what I mean? The typical, it sounds bad, but media makeup students." (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager, female)

One participant also suggested that some of their GRT students had come to study a University course after having heard about and/or had the course recommended to them through word-of-mouth, from a member of the community who was known to them:

"We do have a couple of Travellers on the course...it's such a lovely success story in some ways – their families have... In fact, one of them, her son is at the University, in the same year group that she is. He's just in a different course, which is quite lovely....I know that the students who have been part of my course have found out about it through friends, trusted, reliable sources, and again reinforcing that idea of mentors and role models within the community" (Academic in a University, female)

This demonstrates the important influence of role models and way makers from within the community, but also the ways that trust may be built over time, and intergenerationally, where people are supported and welcomed within further education settings.

As is also evidenced in the report on findings from the discussions with young people, participating education professionals who themselves had GRT heritage, were in many ways acting informally as role models or mentors for the GRT young people they worked with:

"What I do when I go to schools, when I have a session with the students and also, as I mentioned, I said who I am [and share Roma ethnicity] and I said, "Look, do you know what? I'll take my badge off, I'm not a teacher, okay. I'm just here to have fun with you guys." ...It's so nice when you use these young people after the school on the street come to you, "Oh, when are we going to some music?" When we do this? When we do that? Even when they've left the school they keep in touch, they send me the video they recorded as a band and things like that. Yes, I would say, and this is all about I'm there to be some sort of role model for them, which is working great. That's what we want" (Inclusion Officer in a Local Authority, male)

"[Mentoring] has been totally informal...it's just how it has happened, basically, and it's through either my family's contacts or the students on the course. It is just it's, yes, serving a trustworthy position within certain aspects of the community. I think me being there has been helpful because at least I have an aspect of understanding, but it has not been a formalised approach to mentoring, although I would really like that to happen" (Programme Lead, female)

One participant did describe a more formalised 12 week mentoring programme that was targeted more generally at students with low confidence, but which had included some GRT students among the cohort selected, and which had appeared beneficial for the confidence and wellbeing of young people involved. This was attributed, in part to the programme helping young people to identify a focus or goal (beyond school) and see some purpose to learning and activities undertaken in school in terms of the opportunities that this can lead to:

"Our head of years are brilliant. They know a lot of their students. So, I spoke to the head of year and he picked students that we, kind of, identified that would benefit from this mentoring programme, in terms of that it would boost their confidence. We did have students that were from Gypsy Roma community. Like, we had a young boy who wasn't speaking initially in the first few sessions, but towards the end and... so, how it starts off is you do a series of mentoring sessions, you do an interview or a survey about how you feel about school, how you feel about yourself and your career. It's quite an in-depth survey. So, this boy put down that he wasn't happy, he didn't feel happy at school. It's not nice, but that's his reality in a sense, but towards the end, you know, he wasn't, like, happy, but he felt better... which is great. So, it was just working on things like confidence and looking at career, jobs and, again, bringing in role models about people that have done well. So, again, it's giving that focus, sort of, like career help and looking at things about skills. So, like teamwork, communication, what are your skills and little, kind of, like, activities that we did, and then at the end, we did do a placement where we did go out to a work placement... Again, sometimes as a student, you're in school and you're thinking, "What is the point?" Like, you're, kind of, just going through the motions, unless you have got a vision, but if you don't and you're just going through the system, it's really difficult to see, but when they went to this workplace, we took them to a hospital and they got to speak to different people with different job profiles. I think that was quite inspiring for them, to see an actual busy workplace that's

not school, and they wouldn't have had that through parents as well. So, I think that really helped." (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

One participant working in a University explicitly described plans to build peer support and role modelling elements into future work to support GRT communities into and through higher education (drawing on successful work implemented previously with care leavers), with these support networks again suggested as easier to foster within small University environments:

"Yes, 100%. We find it with just our ambassadors, if there's someone who they identify with, it does 10 times more than we can do as practitioners because we're always going to be the 'other'. We are the person from the University whereas if it's someone who they can [think], "Yes, that's like me, I can do that" [it makes a difference]. Definitely role models are going to be absolutely key, yes. I've had discussions with my line manager about maybe approaching the GRT student [at the University] and seeing whether they would want to be involved in any of this because if they're willing that's 100% what I want to do...We are thinking about replicating the work we do with our care leavers as in providing them with a buddy, they've got a named point of contact straight away who will deal with all aspects of stuff... we want to have a named point of contact for all these students. We want to buddy them up with someone on campus for the first month or so...It favours the nature of our University because we are small so we can build relationships" (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

"I guess it's trying to understand: what [outreach activities] do they want from us? What can we provide? Do we need to do something a bit more bespoke? I suspect we do. Yes, we're still getting our head around that, really." (Widening Participation and Outreach manager, female)

Adopting a less 'traditional' approach to outreach

As would be expected given the emergent nature of work in this field, while educational professionals working in further and higher education described examples of outreach activities provided for GRT young people, these were not reported to be widespread and as was highlighted above in regards to careers guidance provision, outreach activities were often not targeted at, or tailored to GRT young people specifically:

"I think, beyond that, we have a little bit of work that we've done in the past with [school], which also has a higher proportion of GRT students, but again the thing that comes out of all this work is that we're working with a school or we're working with a full class. It's not specifically targeted at GRT students" (University Widening Participation manager, female)

"[We're] developing outreach but not necessarily thinking about who you're targeting it [at]" (Widening Participation lead / STEM, female)

"I designed this youth group schedule that I put together for a community group ... but I'm going into this blind in what I'm thinking young people might enjoy" (Widening Participation and Outreach manager, female)

Indeed, most education professionals suggested that they would like greater insight into the outreach content that GRT young people would like to receive, so that they can respond more precisely (within the parameters of available resources and expertise) to these identified needs:

"I think it's having that kind of knowledge behind that to how to actually put on a session and how put on a schedule of events that is going to be... They're going to enjoy, and they're going to actually take something from it, and it's going to inspire them to carry on in education" (Widening Participation and Outreach manager, female)

"When I've worked with [organisation], they seem to take the approach that they'll let the young people decide what they want to do. That's fine, but you have to have some ideas in the first place to be able to respond to what they want. So, if they come up with some really crazy idea that we just can't do, then obviously we're going to be a bit stuck" (Widening participation lead/STEM, female)

While the ability of smaller institutions to foster close relationships and peer support among students was felt to be beneficial in working to promote access for GRT young people, the small size of organisations posed additional challenges in delivering tailored outreach due to limited resources, together with difficulties experienced (regardless of an institutions size) in terms of the need to adapt materials for small numbers of prospective students:

"But the other thing is one of the things that we have as a challenge, as a small, specialist, institution – we're really small, there are 3,000 students in total, compared to some of the bigger universities – is that, when we're creating outreach activity, we don't often focus the content of that activity on a specific underrepresented group. What we'll tend to do is create it and then target it so that we are accessing groups who are underrepresented, if that makes sense" (Widening Participation manager in a University, female)

"I think the challenge for us has been numbers. We're working with very small numbers of students...from when we did things on campus, right through to being online. We're talking, like, six maximum, probably, that we've worked with in one go. So, sometimes it feels like it's a lot of effort for a very small number of students, but maybe that's just how it's going to have to be... I suppose it's getting them to commit to coming each week. Everybody has other commitments. Things come up, don't they? So, it could be that you're never going to get a full turnout every week. ... I don't know, really. I don't think we've worked with them enough to really delve into those reasons" (Widening Participation Lead/STEM, female)

A perceived need to adopt a non-traditional and more informal approach to outreach when working with GRT young people, emerged spontaneously as a theme across both the focus group and a number of individual interviews with educational practitioners. Participants described weaving in information about further and higher education options very gradually during hands-on and engaging activities with GRT young people, to develop trust over time, as opposed to delivering detailed presentations about specific aspects of the University experience or application processes:

I think for this group, as well, and for a few other groups as well, traditional outreach just doesn't work. I think you have to take a step back and do an activity which they might think, "I'm just doing

some makeup,” for example. I’m thinking like glittery festival makeup that we did, but actually I had two ambassadors there who [were] talking about, “I do this at Uni. I do prosthetics as well. We do makeup for film.” They’re like, “Oh, really? You go to University and do this?” They’re like, “[Yes] you can do a course in this.”

I think, actually, it’s about having those conversations that are really important, and not the hard sell. I never go into this kind of group and I would never open a student finance presentation and start doing anything like that, because it’s not going to work. Then they need the week-by-week, softly approach of seeing me, as well. ... when I used to go in, the girls used to run up to me straightaway. They were a bit younger, some of them. Some of them were only, like, eight or nine, but I built that relationship up with them. They had trust in me going every week and bringing an activity, what they would enjoy (Widening participation and Outreach Manager, female)

“Yes, it’s more just we didn’t want to do anything intense with them, it was more just to come and feel comfortable in this space and enjoy the setting and not really, “This is student finance and this is UCAS.” Definitely more of a light touch” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

“We try to – especially on a day like their tour, when it’s going to be very light touch – to get them thinking about, “Well you could do these sports, you could join these societies, you might meet these people.” It’s less heavily academic focused” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

One participant suggested that when doing outreach, GRT young people seemed more hesitant to approach an information stand than young people from other groups:

“When we asked if we could go and run some different activities, it was always, kind of, “You can have a stall outside of the room,” or something like that, but then, obviously, they never had the confidence to come and speak to us like some other members of the [wider] community would do” (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager in a University, female)

While this informal approach was widely agreed to be useful in building relationships and keeping GRT young people engaged, participants also expressed concerns that that this approach would not have the desired impact in terms of increasing interest in, and ultimately access and participation to higher education for GRT (and other) young people, particularly when delivered on a one-off basis:

“But then, if you do an activity like that that’s fairly informal and more practical based, I sometimes think, “Has this really made any difference? Do they understand why they’re doing it?” Like you say, you’ve got the students there that can say, “Yes, I’m studying this at University, and this is actually a career that you can do.... ..I think that would be my worry – well, not worry, because at the end of the day, if they’ve had fun, they’ve interacted with some people from the University, maybe that’s enough. But it’s really about has it made any real difference to them thinking, “I would like to continue my education, I’m now aware that there are these careers, or these courses, or those types of thing”? A one-off activity, I doubt that would make a difference with anybody, regardless of their background and what community they’re from” (Widening Participation Lead STEM)

The approach to outreach, and the amount of information and emphasis and encouragement given to attending University was also noted to depend on the ages of the young people involved:

“I think it depends on the age group. If they were more older – 16, 17, maybe – I would have probably have been more pushy about higher education and the normal outreach that we do, but, because there were younger as well, it was more like, “Come and have fun after school and have a go at some activities.” But yes, I think the big thing is trust and trusting people” (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager, female)

While professionals generally described a need to adapt aspects of outreach provision when working with GRT young people, some also pointed to potential risks that holding events just for these groups may further stigmatise and ‘Other’ these communities, homogenise and overlook individual differences within these groups, and downplay some similarities in experiences across different under-represented groups:

“Do we want to put on events just for GRT students, then is that othering them in a way? It’s hard isn’t it?” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

“One approach isn’t right for everyone, is it? I think that’s sort of... That’s why having someone like [name] in the school, who knows the students, is so important when we’re trying to create programmes because we can do what we think is best but the person in the school who knows the students will always have a better idea of it” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

“Yes, I think there’re a lot of similarities between underrepresented groups. I think a lot of it is the fact that typically higher education is a White middle class environment isn’t it?” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

The challenge of raising University study when conducting outreach with families experiencing multiple and competing challenges was also identified by one participant:

“When they come into the group, they’ve got so many different other things going off in their life, like they’ve got younger siblings with them and they’re looking after them. They’ve got stuff going on at home and different things like that... we went to the community centres quite a lot and we generally just had conversations about other different things, because it’s centres where they go in and do, like, the Credit Union. They go and sort their Council Tax out. Do you know what I mean? If they’ve got no food, they can get referred to the food banks, I think, through here, so they’ve actually gone into the centres for other different things. So, I think we just used to have, generally, conversations about life and different things, but it was raising awareness about why we were there” (Widening Participation and Outreach manager in a University, female)

Collaborative and co-ordinated approach

Given the identified need to address barriers experienced by GRT young people within and across the whole of the educational system (within primary, secondary and further education), as well as challenges in regard to the small numbers of GRT identified students entering further education currently, a joined-up and collaborative approach was suggested as hugely important in promoting access and ensuring GRT students are supported

within further education. This begins with a co-ordinated whole school approach, and extends to partnerships between educational providers at different levels in the system and between statutory and NGO/civil society organisations:

“So, that is another reason why I say it is a whole school approach, right down from just attendance, community liaison officers, myself, teaching staff. Just a co-ordinated approach” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

“I think, for me, it has just been helpful to connect with other people and find out that actually I’m not the only one who worries about this work or struggles with this work. I think, hopefully, we can connect to move forward together now in Leeds, because... I think it’s good to collaborate, because I think, especially when it’s such small numbers and we need to move forward with something like this, I think that will give us the momentum to do it together” (Widening Participation Manager in a University, female)

“Obviously, if we’re wanting to do any support/networks, for one student that’s not like a network at all is it?” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Indeed, participants valued the opportunities and approach afforded by Go Higher West Yorkshire and Uni Connect in facilitating this collaboration:

“I definitely think the collaborative approach that is coming from Go Higher West Yorkshire... I think that is the way that we’re going to have to do it. Like I was saying, we only have one GRT student at [further education college] so we couldn’t monitor and report on them even if we wanted to” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

“The collaborative approach that is coming from Go Higher West Yorkshire... I think that is the way that we’re going to have to do it.” (Outreach Officer in a university)

“Having that Uni Connect connection really helps, as well. We’ve also done a lot of community work in the [community centre]. I’ve also done a lot of Friday night youth groups before COVID, at Harehills in Leeds, as well, where they have a big Roma community there as well” (Widening Participation and Outreach manager, female)

The involvement of NGOs was described as particularly important given the above noted need to build trust with community members and the need for outreach initiatives to be driven by community interests:

“I think a collaborative approach is going to be really important to it. Again, involving the community gatekeepers, trying to get the community involved as much as possible” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Probably getting in with the right community member, as well, somebody who has a little bit of respect in the community, who you could go to, to run these groups with, maybe to increase engagement as well (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager)

“I think one of the strengths is the fact...Leeds GATE is such a champion organisation. It would be great in terms of the collaboration if we could be doing something together, because obviously there are some parts that we overlap in terms of what our outreach provision would be, but there are also lots of different things that we can offer, and as many different things we could offer as there would be interests from the students. I think that would be really interesting” (Widening Participation Manager)

One participant suggested the idea of a collaboratively provided hub or regular forum to facilitate relationship building with GRT young people as well as between practitioners working in the area:

“It would be great to have something sustained that we collaborate on, where it can be not necessarily a one-stop shop that meets quite regularly, because I think, [name] what you’re mentioning there about developing these relationships is...” (Widening Participation Manager, female)

Collaboration more generally was also seen as important for sharing information and raising awareness among staff of opportunities available for young people in the region, with this particularly pertinent in the case of apprenticeships, which (as suggested above) some practitioners described having only limited knowledge of:

“Absolutely. I always think collaborative work is just the key really, because if you are tapping into other agencies... I mean, the good thing with my job is I work with other progression officers and outreach officers, and we do work with the [organisation] who look at job opportunities, apprenticeship opportunities. It’s that sharing of information. So, I feel like that is so key, whereas if you’re, kind of, just doing your own thing, you don’t know what’s out there. So, I think that’s so important, and you, kind of, like, bounce off each other and you can raise your concerns and find out what support you could provide for the students to be more effective really” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, female)

“So, it is like a whole new area in Leeds and we have got a link with them. We have done site visits and, like I say, a couple have got apprenticeships from it. It is quite a new thing, so a couple – not referring specifically to GRT – have got apprenticeships from it. It is just forging those links, so that we can develop our students hopefully and give them the best opportunities” (IAG/Careers Guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

Similarly, collaboration and communication across providers was also seen as important for tracking young people beyond school, enabling follow up and intervention at key transition points when GRT young people may drop off the radar; as well as providing opportunities for collecting data on student outcomes:

“Well, every student has a place somewhere when they leave here. Whether they then attend... You always get a drop-off or non-starting... But we do follow-ups in September and then you are relying on colleges to let you know if there is any further drop-out. But that is basically where it breaks down, because the colleges are..... Well, certainly Leeds City College is one of our main providers, and it is a very big organisation. So, the communication is not always the best” (IAG/Careers guidance worker in a Secondary School, female)

As such, there was clear interest and enthusiasm to consider and implement mechanisms for collaboration in the region among professionals who participated in the research, with Go Higher West Yorkshire potentially playing a key role in facilitating these partnerships.

Data collection and monitoring of performance for GTRSB communities

While some practitioners were able to accurately identify numbers of GTRSB students in their institutions, as is common across the education sector (as well as other public services), many highlighted an absence of reliable data on GTRSB young people in schools, colleges and universities as a key barrier to monitoring performance for these groups:

“I think also something that we’ve tried to do this year is, when we have applications going out to students, we have broken down the ethnicity to include our GRT [applicants] because we don’t know, previously to that, how many students would identify that way. So, we’re trying to improve that data.” (University Widening Participation manager, female)

“We’re also trying to figure out within our undergraduate population whether any students are there from GRT communities. So far, embarrassingly, I don’t think we have any, so I think there’s a lot for us to do. We’re at early stages in terms of putting something concrete in place” (University Widening Participation manager, female)

Again, this was connected with the need for efforts to ensure that GTRSB young people and parents felt comfortable to disclose their ethnicity:

“Yes, so pre-pandemic, so pre-March 2020 we had 240 Romanian students out of which 156 were ascribed Roma and I think of the 200 were actually Roma but the difference between 156 and 200 is people that either refused to say they’re Roma, maybe from past discrimination or whatever reason they have and people that weren’t asked if they were aware because it wasn’t me that took the initial meetings from the school” (Outreach and Student Progression Officer in a Secondary School, male)

Most higher education professionals suggested that either GTRSB communities were not included in their University Access and Participation Plan, that they were unsure whether these groups were mentioned explicitly, or that they were included but not listed as priority groups:

²⁹ <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge>

“GRT students are not mentioned in our APP. We target specifically on POLAR4, IMD, black, Asian and minority ethnicity, so where GRT fits within minority ethnicity, yes, but not explicitly... But, of course, what we want to do, as an institution, is work with all underrepresented groups. It’s just that they don’t appear in our access and participation plan” (University Widening Participation Manager, female)

“The APP just mentions ethnic groups, not GRT specifically” (Widening Participation lead / STEM, female)

“Especially with APP, it’s not a priority group on the APP. I bet you’re hearing that from a lot of different places as well... Even though exec might support it in theory, getting everything done on the ground is a different ballgame isn’t it?” (Outreach Officer in a University, female)

Similarly, none of the higher education professionals suggested that their universities were currently signed up to the pledge²⁹ to support GTRSB communities into and within Higher Education, though some institutions were currently preparing to do so:

“[We’re] just trying to get support from exec to join the pledge. They’ve given us preliminary support. They are supportive of it but it’s just getting all of the different departments, who would be involved, in the University on board with it as well. So speaking to student support, speaking to records, that’s the priority institution-wide” (Outreach officer in a University, female)

Work with mature learners

Given the legacy of negative educational experiences among previous and current generations of GTRSB community members which prevented many from fulfilling their educational potential, as well as above noted pressures to exit education early, participants highlighted a need to work with mature learners as well as encouraging and supporting young people from GTRSB backgrounds to enter higher education:

“But I think the move towards the Uni Connect focus on FE and mature students, because... I think you mentioned earlier that, if [students] are planning to have kids at a younger age, making sure that we’re able to access people in the community, rather than just schools, is a really helpful step forward for us” (Widening Participation Manager, female)

"I think, because my area isn't with mature learners, I know that is definitely an area that we could work on more" (Widening Participation lead / STEM, female)

This quote, along with the following comments, highlights a key challenge however, in regards to how best to identify mature learners and build relationships with these students which may lead to educational offers. Participants highlighted the importance of working with community organisations in order to engage this target group:

"But it's again, maybe, how they access those mature learners, because if you're talking about school-aged children working with somebody like Leeds City Academy, you know how to get there, but how do you get to the mature learners? I just wouldn't know, really, how to do that" (Widening Participation lead/STEM, female)

"I think through the community hubs, like [name] was saying, at the Reginald Centre they have a community group where, I think, the Roma women go once a week, I think, to do different activities. I think it's about them meeting up and coming together" (Widening Participation and Outreach Manager, female)

Earlier comments, which point to the provision of adult learning courses to GTRSB parents and families in schools, are another potential way of identifying and engaging with potential mature GTRSB students. The importance of flexibility in course timetables in order to ensure that these are accessible to mature learners was also identified as important:

"Yes. I think for us, as well, we're situated in a good area that we have, like, condensed timetables, so it's 2, 2½ days. It's very different from a traditional University. Being at a traditional University myself, it's totally different. I think that's why we attract a lot of mature learners looking to get back into education in that sense" (Widening Participation and Outreach manager, female)

Concluding Discussion

The findings from education professionals who are working predominantly with school age youth, should be read in conjunction with the findings from young people from GRT communities. As is evident, some areas of overlap were found, and

there were in-depth and nuanced reflections from educational professionals on the challenges afforded by resource stretch, barriers to engaging with young people, and (for Roma pupils) linguistic challenges which impact on the extent of education offered (focusing overwhelmingly on basic Maths and English at the expense of a richer, wider curricula). Thus there are a number of clear synergies with themes highlighted by young people.

There were however, also examples of incongruence in the accounts of professionals and GRT young people themselves. Despite the availability of counter examples, an ingrained narrative was evident in practitioner accounts that GRT students are generally less likely to be supported to undertake further and higher education by their families. Yet narratives of low parental aspirations were not reflected in the accounts of GRT young people, many of whom reported encouragement from their family to pursue further and higher education as a strong motivator in their decisions. This points to a potential risk that GRT young people, and their support requirements, are characterised in ways that do not necessarily align with self-representations and lived experiences for GRT communities overall. Indeed, particular caution is required concerning universalising narratives of 'low aspiration', given their recognised tendency to stigmatise by shifting responsibility or blame onto young people and parents for poor educational outcomes, while downplaying attention to external factors such as attitudinal, institutional and structural barriers which limit attainment for these groups (Harrison and Waller 2019)

What is also noteworthy, is that for professionals, whilst recognising the barriers for young people of accessing Further and Higher Education – including reluctance to travel, following in parental footsteps, limitations on knowledge of options, gender expectations – there frequently appears to be a gap in understanding of the depth and long-term impact of experiences of racism and bullying in school and other settings, which underpins much reluctance to move outside of peer groups, family settings or 'safe' environments such as the LeedsGATE youth/education groups.

To triangulate the findings from Professionals therefore and develop a richer picture, it is important to set the comments alongside those received from young Gypsies and Travellers who overwhelmingly stated a preference for learning amongst members of their own communities, or in NGO settings which are familiar to them. These reflections are presented in the preceding section of this report.

Educational professionals themselves (particularly those working in higher education environments in which there are often very few GRT identified students) also communicated a lack of confidence in working with GRT young people, and felt that they would benefit from more training in order to better understand and respond to the experiences and potential support requirements of these groups. In particular, staff working in higher education settings suggested that they were unsure of, and would value information on, the types of outreach activities that would be appreciated by, and effective, in engaging GRT young people.

Despite the gaps in knowledge and developmental needs articulated by professionals in the study, a number of examples and recommendations for good practice were identified. This included engaging with parents and family members of GRT young people (through informal open days, dedicated community liaison staff, or the provision of adult learning courses in schools and colleges, for example). Indeed, staff noted the importance of pragmatic, flexible and tailored approaches to working with families as a whole, in order to alleviate barriers to engaging with education (i.e. by providing transport, acting as translators for young people's relatives, home visits, and assisting with broader

issues around housing and benefits). Staff also highlighted a need for more targeted and sustained career development activities to be provided to GRT young people, with this delivered equitably regardless of the particular route (vocational or otherwise) that young people are interested in.

As with the young people involved in the research, professionals suggested that financial concerns and pressure to earn were important barriers preventing more GRT young people from going on to further and higher education. While apprenticeships were therefore suggested as potentially preferable for some GRT young people, practitioners felt they lacked enough information in order to appropriately inform young learners about these options. In addition, more post-16 apprenticeships were also thought to be needed in order to avoid young people potentially becoming lost to education between school and post-18 apprenticeship opportunities becoming available to them. Lastly, as indicated by GRT young people engaged in the study, practitioners highlighted the importance of raising the visibility of role models from within the communities, as well as the provision of mentoring programmes in order to help young people see further and higher education as a viable and achievable option.



Policy and Practice Recommendations

In the final section of this report, the key recommendations – based on the findings discussed extensively in the earlier sections – are summarised. This element of the text should be read in close conjunction to the detailed discussions presented above, which contextualise and frame the evidence under-pinning these proposals

For all Stakeholders

1. It is important to **work collaboratively** (drawing on the expertise of local NGOs, school and college staff and local authority specialists) to **scope out the preferences of the particular community/demographic** they are aiming to attract and engage in education and training. E.g. different Roma groups, Irish Travellers and Romani Gypsies may have different preferences and needs, predicated by the circumstances in which they are residing – e.g. on sites, housing, as well as their choices being impacted by opportunity, desire (or family intention) to relocate to another country.
2. As noted elsewhere in this report no data has been collated on **Showmen or Boaters** in West Yorkshire and **it is recommended that these groups are also consulted** to explore their options and preferences (which for Showmen may include remaining within the family trade, or for Boaters, a decision to move to the land) impacting access to further or higher education.
3. It is important to **develop a holistic longitudinal education and training plan** with children, young people and parents, with such work plans beginning from a young age, so as to ensure that higher education opportunities feel as though they are realistic options for someone from GRT communities.
4. Working collaboratively, **it is recommended that regular regional meetings are initiated** as part of **a programme of inter-agency education activity to support GTRSB young people** in and out of formal education, as well as providing scope to identify trends, opportunities (including mentoring) and consideration of expansion of Apprenticeships in relevant areas.
5. It is important to **enhance staff training** to ensure greater awareness of issues/challenges/cultural practices and priorities of (differentiated) GRT students and families.
6. There is a necessity to **review the curriculum** in schools, FE and HE settings **to be relevant, inclusive and anti-racist** (linked to GTRSB into HE Pledge themes).
7. **Strong action is required around anti-GRT bullying**, and recognition of racism towards GRT pupils which may be misrecognised by staff in school, college and university settings.

For Go Higher West Yorkshire

1. It is important to **build a specific, bespoke strategy in partnership with NGOs**, (in particular the LeedsGATE team supporting their Homework Club, as well as working with regional Roma community groups/ family and youth support agencies working with young Roma) and specialist in-reach teams based in local authorities, **to support HE progression** for GTRSB communities.
2. As is clear from this report, these **communities have a distinct set of needs** (differentiated by ethnicity/community), and are in a particular educational context **which demands a specific strategy** which both builds on good practice in the field of widening access and yet is tailored towards the cultural preferences of the groups.
3. As part of this recommended strategic approach, we advise that **GHWY should work with member HE providers to construct a specific progression curriculum for GRT communities** which builds upon the work that specialist organisations and HEPs are

doing (e.g. homework clubs) and the strengths of these communities (for example, multi-lingualism for Roma communities) and skills in art, music and entrepreneurialism. Additional research is required to engage further with the needs of Showmen and Boater communities should GHWY wish to include these groups within such strategic development activities.

4. It would be useful (if possible) for HEPs to offer help with funding of such co-produced tailored support, as well as offering opportunities to staff and students to provide volunteer tutoring, trips, and engagement activities in higher education venues, to **ensure that HE is not an alien experience for young people** from these groups. Open events could be held at Leeds GATE (recognised as a 'safe' environment) for parents to learn about different education options and build trust with providers e.g. Leeds City College, and similarly through exploring with agencies working with Roma young people in West Yorkshire, the opportunities for similar **in-reach activities to take place in their preferred community venues**.
5. **When developing the specific progression curriculum** for GRT communities, it is necessary to **include parents and siblings** too, given the cultural and practical importance of the whole family experience. Ensure dissemination of educational opportunities more widely amongst GRT groups can be undertaken through building relationships with parents from age 5+ and longitudinally, within (often extended) families.
6. Building on the good practice that has been developed in online in-reach work during the pandemic, a progression curriculum can place an emphasis on **combining on-line learning as well as face-to-face teaching** to enable young people who may be abroad, working with family, travelling and still access educational opportunities to keep them engaged with FE and HE. Account must be taken of access to IT software and hardware requirements for pupils/students who may be digitally excluded, potentially through access to specialist grants, loans of materials or through engaging in collaborative fund-raising with schools/FEs, Universities and NGOs to support technology and data requirements for digitally excluded pupils.
7. Consideration should be given to co-funding or **embedding a HE progression link worker in agencies** such as LeedsGATE. Such an individual who builds trust with young people, helps them with applications and looks after them in their first term/year at university would work closely with HEP or FE staff as a conduit of information and support (e.g. similar to

the mentoring proposed in the GTRSBintoHE Pledge). It is noted that in the past Leeds County Council used to provide such a mentoring/ support service for looked after CYP to support transition to FE and HE, but this ceased. It is recommended therefore that such an activity may be considered for co-funding and transfer of responsibilities for delivery of such in-reach support to HEPs in West Yorkshire, tailored to support GTRSB pupils and students.

For Higher Education Providers in West Yorkshire

1. Work with Uni-Connect consortium should be undertaken to initiate multi-sector local fora which focus on the progression of GTRSB learners into higher education. This would **bring together schools, colleges and HE providers in partnership** with parents and specialist NGOs to collaboratively drive forward the agenda on progression to HE.
2. There is scope to **identify additional role models** and examples of successful GRT people/current students to engage with youth in a variety of community and NGO settings, so as to showcase their narratives and variety of career paths, work, education, FE and HE experiences, trades, entrepreneurialism and also (not-infrequent) return to HE at a later age using alternative technical qualifications or foundation degrees as an entrance point.
3. **Develop mentoring programmes and peer support work** for Children and Young People who stay on in education so that they don't feel isolated, and can share their experiences, be encouraged in their education and recognise they are not alone. Such mentoring is well placed to occur through NGOs and is particularly important to support young people who may be subject to peer pressure to leave school or don't know other members of their community who are in FE/HE.
4. **Facilitate a local/regional expert network** to disseminate advice/resources on GRT communities, experiences and cultures working with the JiscMail #GTRSBintoHE network; ACERT, the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), LeedsGATE and Roma agencies in the West Yorkshire area.
5. Consider officially **partnering with the LeedsGATE Homework Club** (as well as regional Roma community groups or agencies working with young Roma people) to support the development of bespoke access and participation work as described above under recommendations for Go Higher West Yorkshire.

6. Give consideration to exploring co-funding or **embedding an HE progression link worker** to be based at agencies such as LeedsGATE as described in the recommendations for Go Higher West Yorkshire above.

For the Office for Students

1. Support or **facilitate a national expert network** to disseminate advice/resources on GRT communities, experiences, culture etc. e.g. through membership of the JiscMail #GTRSBintoHE network and via information sharing of the work and knowledge on supporting these communities which are available through ACERT, NEON and LeedsGATE and Roma agencies in the West Yorkshire area.
2. In the next phase of Uni-Connect resourcing, **identify ring-fenced funding for work with GRT communities** via a national initiative that can support and underpin the localised work of Uni-Connect consortium.

For Schools and Colleges

1. Create space in the curriculum to focus on **supporting GRT young people at key transition points** i.e. primary to secondary school; end of Key Stage 3 and end of Key Stage 4 to address risk of early school leaving amongst members of these communities.
2. **Sign up to an anti-bullying pledge** that clearly states their inclusion of GTRSB young people and supports discussion within school and college settings of the fact that GRT young people are ethnic minorities, as well as the types of racism/discrimination and exclusion to which they and Showmen and Boaters are subject.
3. Undertake **a review of curriculum to ensure that it is inclusive for GRT young people** and anti-racist in content.



For the Department of Education

1. **Develop a version of the GTRSBintoHE Pledge for schools and colleges** and actively **encourage the adoption of such a commitment**. The Pledge outlines a number of tangible commitments that HE providers agree to make in order to support progression into HE for learners from GRT communities. It has been signed so far by 8 HE and 1 FE providers, with a number of schools and Academy chains enquiring about how best they can engage with the core elements of the Pledge in a format suitable for compulsory educational settings.
2. As part of the new national careers strategy, **develop tailored careers information for GRT young people** which is alert to preferences and attitudes to 'earning whilst learning' amongst many young people, whether this is through choice or necessity; as well as highlighting and supporting more traditional educational paths. It is crucially important to embed (in a non-judgmental way) awareness of preferences and concerns over family support/potentially earlier marriage than in many 'mainstream' communities and preference for local study/employment – as well as the impacts of bullying/racism and often complex Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), particularly those involving bereavement, frequent movement and victimisation through racism.
3. As part of the new national careers strategy, the **funding for dedicated careers advice service/workers** who can engage with GRT young people in specific NGO contexts should be encouraged (e.g. through the Connexions scheme a worker was embedded at the LeedsGATE NGO in the past, with significant success).
4. **Ensure apprenticeship providers** with a focus on entrepreneurial and skills training **engage with local networks supporting GRT learners**, so that there are options to expand 16+ apprenticeships for young people from these communities. Similarly, apprenticeship providers may wish to consider endorsing the Pledge in a format suitable for their environment to encourage greater awareness of GTRSB cultures and to diminish work-place discrimination, bullying or racism.
5. Enable the **sharing of good practice learning** from schools with large Roma populations or Gypsy and Traveller student groups where 'staying on' has occurred, as well as capturing case studies from Colleges offering post-14 programmes for GRT children and young people from the communities who are out of school.

Conclusion

This extensive report, despite the breadth of activities and range of methodologies utilised, to a large extent is exploratory, and only able to respond to a number of the questions asked within the study brief, given the general paucity of evidence and relatively under-developed networks of engagement with GTRSB communities within West Yorkshire, albeit that rich pockets of excellence and engagement in school and NGO settings, have been identified.

As explored above, under the methodological section, recruitment for this study proved very challenging, due not only to the context of Covid-19, but also given the emergent nature of work in this field, and therefore the relatively limited number of professionals and activities currently available to support GRT young people with their education in West Yorkshire (as indeed is reflective of the picture nationally).

Indeed, the challenges in in-reach and identification of communities, as well as the non-contact with Showmen and Boaters in the study locality, forms an important finding in its own right. However, through this project not only have pockets of excellent and innovative practice been identified, but networking between agencies and individuals who were in a number of cases unknown to each other before this study has been prompted, and a broader interest and appetite from professionals to do more work in this area has been generated. Accordingly we argue that this project (particularly when coupled with the recommendations above) has helped to foster connections among these stakeholders in order to generate a foundation for further collaboration to address the educational inequalities experienced by GRT young people.

Despite the difficulties in recruitment and the need for innovative and flexible practice, the team has managed to generate some rich and nuanced data from the fieldwork with GRT young people and educational/support professionals, which has yielded important insights for the research questions which we set out to address. Although not all questions have proved amenable to the provision of in depth responses, we attempt now to briefly reflect upon each of these core research questions, at all times bearing in mind that further research and depending networks of practice, will allow the socio-archaeology of the communities and their educational preferences and needs to become more self-evident, and local practice to develop more responsively in the future.

Addressing the Research Questions

1. **What do GRT communities look like within West Yorkshire and its educational landscape (i.e. how are they comprised, where are they located, and which schools do young people from these communities attend)?**

As discussed in the body of the report, access to data on the precise make-up of the communities and localities in which they reside has been hard to establish. It is however known that there are large numbers of Roma school pupils resident in Leeds and Bradford, and that Leeds also has a deep-rooted population of Irish Traveller and Romani Gypsy communities, many of whose young people would appear to be out of education at a relatively young age. In the demographic discussions in this report we have attempted to analyse which localities have the largest number of pupils from the GRT communities and disaggregate Roma and Romani Gypsy pupils where possible. No evidence has been gathered – as not collected in any educational administrative statistics – on Showmen and Boater young people in education.

2. **What are the potential barriers to HE progression for these young people and how might HE institutions address these?**

As discussed in depth in the report, a number of key barriers to progression have been identified, including early school leaving, experiences of racism and discrimination leading to reluctance to a) self-identify and

b) remain in education; low prior educational attainment and/or a preference to employment over further study (for both cultural reasons and due to financial pressures) has also been consistently identified as a barrier to remaining in education. In our recommendations for policy and practice, a considerable number of suggestions for supporting young people into further and higher educational pathways are provided, including ensuring that mentoring and familiarisation with FE and HE occurs, WP in-reach and partnership working within trusted NGO/community settings, and enhanced use of mentors and role models are considered highly likely to act as effective mechanisms to support HE progression for young people from the communities.

3. When GRT young people do go on to Further and Higher Education, what is their experience of these institutions and how might that intersect with their individual and/or cultural identities?

Very limited evidence was gathered in relation to FE and HE experiences of young people from GTRSB communities within this study, other than data collected from community workers. This is likely to be a result of the low numbers of young people in West Yorkshire who currently proceed to FE and HE who are members of the communities, but we would suggest that there is still a considerable reluctance to self-identify as GTRSB amongst such students arising from concerns over discrimination or 'standing out' in educational contexts. Evidence collected in a range of contexts including GTRSBintoHE research and to some extent this study, suggests that many young people or students from the communities fail to see themselves reflected in curricula or their cultures respectfully acknowledged, creating the potential for alienation from FE and HE or exacerbating the likelihood of 'passing' and failing to self-identify. The absence (in the main) of visible role models in HE who are members of the GTRSB communities, creates something of a vicious circle, meaning that students from the communities often feel isolated, alone and invisible, whilst also dealing with the anxieties over access to education experienced by many other non-traditional students.

4. Do young people from these communities self-identify as GRT in educational contexts, and if not, why not?

This project has gathered extensive evidence that unless there are relatively large cohorts of peers or young people are already 'known' to be of GRT heritage as a result of place of residence, or having relatives in a school, that there is a considerable reluctance amongst Gypsies and Travellers, and to a lesser extent perhaps Roma pupils, to self-identify in school settings. Although we did not access enough students in FE /HE from the communities to make an informed assessment in the West Yorkshire context, other studies and expert knowledge of the research team suggests that this also holds true in FE and HE settings. Where an institution is known to be GRT friendly – for example – committed to undertaking the Pledge or known to have a cohort of GRT students – emergent evidence elsewhere in the country suggests that this enhances self-identification as a community member in educational contexts.

5. What kinds of educational practice are at play within GRT communities, and how might pedagogical strategies within HE be developed to be more inclusive?

Under the section of this report which deals with policy and practice we make a number of recommendations for developing a more inclusive curricula – not least ensuring that accurate, appropriate and celebratory representations of the communities are included in a range of programmes and contexts. Recommendations in the GTRSBintoHE Pledge provide further detail on how curricula in programmes such as health, education, social work and arts can be adapted to be more inclusive and in the body of this report we have provided some examples of local West Yorkshire schools based practice such as educational trips to settings which are culturally congruent or of interest to young people, representations in visual and other contexts of the communities and celebration of GRT History month etc. All of these activities create a welcoming environment where young people see themselves represented in curricula and a range of educational contexts, as does the use of role models from the communities, and in-reach to trusted NGOs who may co-deliver activities.

6. How can pre-entry activity support the retention and success of these young people when they do progress to Higher Education?

Very limited evidence was available to the research team from West Yorkshire in relation to how pre-activity supports retention and success for GTRSB young people in education, given the dearth of

information and limited student numbers. NEON and Greenfields from this research team are however undertaking some work on behalf of the OfS which will consider the evidence base on working with small cohorts of students/potential students – including GRT young people and this evidence will be available in 2022/23 to underpin future recommendations and developments in practice.

7. How has Covid-19 impacted GRT communities' access to education and have their needs changed because of this?

Evidence gathered from Professionals indicated that there has been significant disruption in access to learning for many Roma pupils during the pandemic, including as a result of return migration to countries of origin, poor access to IT, and challenges in studying sometimes in difficult circumstances. This it is believed may perhaps lead to early school leaving in some cases. Although evidence of Covid related disruption is less evident for Gypsy and Traveller pupils/students in West Yorkshire, we would once again emphasise that our young interviewees from these communities were out of formal education. We gathered evidence suggesting that there was less engagement than usual from some young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities with agencies such as LeedsGATE during the pandemic and some interviewees referred to the fact that parents with literacy challenges were unable to assist them with their education during lockdown. We suggest that although greater national level data is still to emerge on the impacts of Covid on GRT young people's education, it is likely based on data we have gathered that there may be an increase in early school leaving and even poorer attainment /educational disruption for this group of pupils than many other impacted young people

8. What understanding do GRT young people have of their future educational options and choices?

Finally, as became self-evident during this study, many young GTRSB people have limited understanding of the range of options and choices which may be available to them. To some extent the sense of exclusion and barriers to educational progression identified by young people (particularly Gypsies and Travellers) are grounded in a lived reality assessment of the challenges they face in proceeding to education if they have left school early with no, or limited, qualifications, and financial necessity impacting on decisions around seeking employment. However, as explored by both professionals and young people themselves, there is still remarkably limited knowledge of the potential for 'earning whilst learning' via apprenticeships, that loans for education do not need to be repaid until an earnings threshold is passed, or indeed that universities offer programmes of study beyond traditional professions. Sadly some young people were concerned that they would not be welcomed in higher education settings purely because of their ethnicity, with this stance predicated by experiences of racist bullying in compulsory school settings. The recommendations for policy and practice presented in this report therefore suggest ways for meaningfully engaging with young people from the GTRSB communities and the steps which universities and colleges can take, in partnership with mentors, role models and NGOs who employ university experienced/graduate GTRSB community members

In conclusion, although this multi-level study has revealed that that in West Yorkshire, active work around supporting young people from GTRSB communities into FE/HE and Apprenticeships is relatively under-developed, there is clear scope and considerable interest in building upon localised good practice to develop cohesive interagency networks, and robust, supportive models which are culturally congruent, speak to the needs of the communities, and allow scope to enhance the educational and life-opportunities for young people from these under-represented populations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Demographic characteristics of participants – young people

	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Location in West Yorkshire	Accommodation type (where known)	In/out of school	Focus groups					Targeted activity sessions	
							1	2	3	4	5	Floristry workshop	Community mapping exercise
Participant 1	Romani Gypsy	13	Female	Leeds	Housed	Out of school	X	X					
Participant 2	Romani Gypsy	14	Female	Leeds	Housed	Out of school	X						X
Participant 3	Irish Traveller	13	Female	Leeds	Housed	Out of school	X	X				X	
Participant 4	Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller	14	Female	Leeds	Local authority site	Out of school		X					
Participant 5	Romani Gypsy	11	Male	Leeds	Housed	Out of school						X	
Participant 6	Irish Traveller	17	Male	Leeds	Local authority site	Out of school							X
Participant 7	Roma	14-15	Male			In school1			X				
Participant 8	Roma	14-15	Male			In school			X				
Participant 9	Roma	14-15	Male			In school			X				
Participant 10	Roma	14-15	Male			In school			X				
Participant 11	Roma	14-15	Male			In school			X				
Participant 12	Roma	14-15	Female			In school				X			
Participant 13	Roma	14-15	Female			In school				X			
Participant 14	Roma	14-15	Female			In school				X			
Participant 15	Roma	14-15	Female			In school				X			
Participant 16	Roma	14-15	Female			In school				X			
Participant 17	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		
Participant 18	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		
Participant 19	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		
Participant 20	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		
Participant 21	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		
Participant 22	Roma	13-14	Male			In school					X		

Appendix 2: Demographics of respondents to the stakeholder survey

Responses to the survey ³⁰ were received from individuals with the following job titles:
Head of EAL (Secondary School)
Alternative Provision and Home Engagement Manager (Secondary age)
Assistant Principal (Secondary School)
Translator working in educational settings (they are themselves Roma)
Youth Worker (Local Authority setting)
Higher Education Progression Officer (University based)
Assistant Director Careers +
Higher Education Progression Officer (part-time) (Academy School)
Higher Education Progression Officer (Schools based)
Head of Student Success Services (University based)
GHWY Outreach Officer (University based)
Gypsy Roma Traveller Outreach and Inclusion Manager (Local Authority)
UniConnect Outreach Officer (Schools based)
Deputy Head of Schools & Colleges Liaison (University based)
Careers Leader (6th Form College)

The quality of data (extent of completion of the survey) varied considerably, with some respondents asking the research team for additional information or advice in the qualitative comments section, others noting that they did not have enough information to complete some elements, or that they had to make ‘guestimates’, whilst several participants with considerable experience of working with the communities were able to provide extremely detailed information on pupils and students from different ethnic groups broken down by age range and gender. Analysis of responses to the survey are presented below.

Respondent demographics

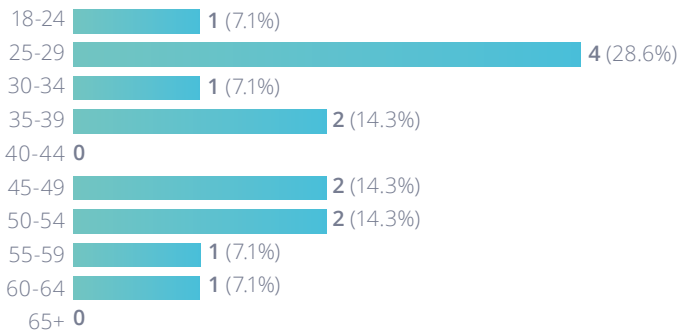
Ten respondents identified as female and four as male; none as non-binary or transgender.

Ten respondents identified as White British; two as South Asian (Pakistani and Bangladeshi); one (Romani

30 Not including one ‘out of area’ response excluded from analysis

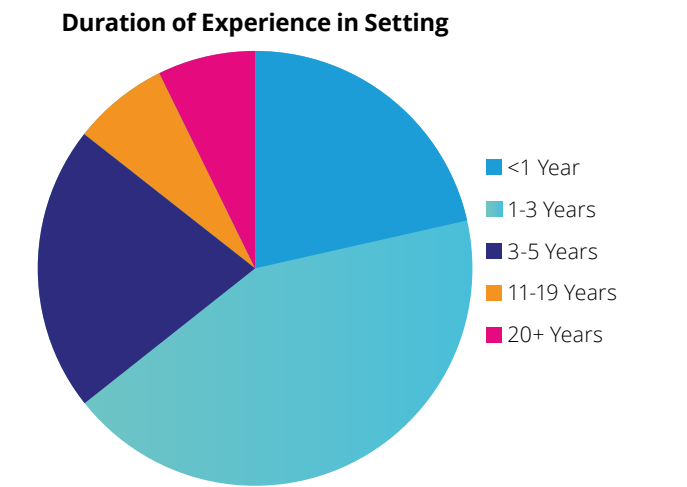
Gypsy) and another as ‘Other White ethnicity’. None reported that they were living with a disability.

The age-range of respondents was fairly widespread with most respondents (4) under the age of 30; three in their 50s and the remaining survey participants spread across other age categories as illustrated below.



There was no overall correlation between age/ years of experience and greater knowledge of GTRSB communities, although those who had been working in educational contexts for a greater number of years were unsurprisingly perhaps more likely to say that they had some prior contact, or experience of working with young people from the GTRSB communities, although this may have been in earlier roles.

Overall 12/14 respondents (see below) had less than 5 years of experience working in their current role, whilst two respondents (a careers specialist with several years additionally acting as a UniConnect officer on a part-time basis; and a youth worker) had respectively over 20 and 30 years of experience in their profession.



Level of Knowledge/Experience of working with GTRSB communities

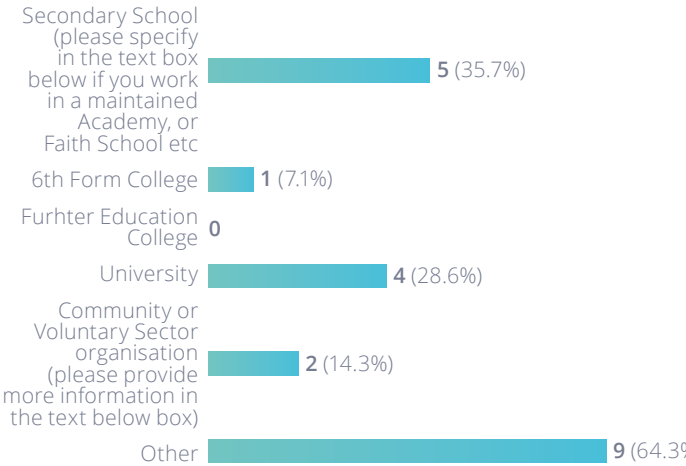
In total four respondents – ranging from early to late-career – provided additional information which suggested a relative high level of experience in working with members of the communities. This ranged from 5 years of provision of language support to Roma children in a previous role and acting as EAL in their current school; to comments from a specialist working in alternative educational provision noting “*I have previously worked as an Education Welfare Officer and Pastoral Manager in a mainstream setting in Bradford with a large proportion of GRT students*”; a former Educational Welfare Officer, now in a school leadership role and a highly experienced youth worker.

Two further participants stated that they had prior (minimal) contact with some of the communities when working in previous roles, for example a Higher Education Progression Officer indicated that they had “*worked with a handful of students on the Prince’s Trust mentoring project*” whilst another University based outreach officer referred to “*Minimal contact with GTRSB students in previous NCOP role*”.

The remaining eight respondents had no substantive knowledge of the GRT communities and culture, in some cases explicitly stating they had “*no knowledge or experience*”, even if in some cases they were able to identify that data indicated that some children and young people from the communities were in their educational settings.

Respondents’ Place of Work

As can be seen from the chart below (which totals more than 14 as clicking ‘other’ permitted respondents to provide more information on their workplace) secondary schools are the most common setting for respondents, followed by universities.



One respondent worked in a secondary age Pupil Referral Unit (PRU); another in a 6th Form college and the remaining two participants working in ‘community/voluntary sector’ agencies were respectively employed by a local authority in a specialist outreach roles to support Roma migrant families, and as a youth worker.

Appendix 3: Characteristics of professionals who were individually interviewed or participated in a focus group:

	Job role	Organisation	Gender	Location
Participant 1	IAG/Careers guidance role	Secondary School	Female	Leeds
Participant 2	IAG/Careers guidance role	Secondary School	Female	Leeds
Participant 3	Outreach and Student Progression Officer	Secondary School	Female	Bradford
Participant 4	Outreach Officer	University	Female	Leeds
Participant 5	Inclusion Officer	Local Authority	Male	Leeds
Participant 6	Outreach and Student Progression Lead	Secondary School	Male	Leeds
Participant 7	Widening participation and outreach manager	Further Education college	Female	Leeds
Participant 8	Academic	University	Female	Leeds
Participant 9	Widening participation lead/STEM	University	Female	Leeds
Participant 10	Widening Participation manager	University	Female	Leeds

Appendix 4: Research Consortium

The engagement of the leading national (West Yorkshire based) Gypsy and Traveller civil society agency, LeedsGATE was fundamentally core to the entire project, bringing both specialist local knowledge and networks as well as close working relationships with other partner organisations and individuals, to the programme of work. The consortium undertaking this study consisted of academic partners with substantial experience in research and policy development to support GRT students into HE (Greenfields, Forster), specialist NGOs (LeedsGATE and the Advisory Council for the Education of Romani and other Travellers (ACERT)), education experts and community members (Cunningham, Forster, Rogers and Lisa Smith) and the National Education Opportunities Network, whose CEO (Atherton) has both undertaken research into universities outreach and support for GRT students, and brings extensive experience and knowledge of Uni Connect partnerships through his role in NEON and (previously) AccessHE. Finally, central to the entire consortium Sherrie Smith, acts as a bridge between diverse elements of the consortium, being a university experienced community member who has founded and works with specialist NGOs, as well as being employed in an academic role as a peer mentor and Research Assistant working on the national Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman and Boater into Higher Education programme of activities³¹, hosted by Buckinghamshire New University.

31 <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge>



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