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Report of a Roundtable Meeting on Access to Higher Education for members of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) communities

10 September 2019, House of Lords

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Note: while recognising that diverse communities self-identify using different terms, for consistency the acronym GTR is used throughout this report of the event.

Welcome by Baroness Whitaker

Baroness Whitaker welcomed the speakers and participants to the House of Lords and the roundtable meeting (see Appendix 1 for details of the intention of the session). She extended her thanks to Bucks New University—Professor Braisby for speaking, Professor Margaret Greenfields for driving the organisation of the event, and also to Gill Brown, special advisor to the project.

This roundtable was an opportunity for experts to share their lived experience of the challenges facing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) and other travelling communities entering into Higher Education. It was well-recognised that GTR communities have the worst outcomes of any ethnic grouping in terms of health, housing, and education. These communities also continue to face significant levels of racism and prejudice both in society and from official institutions and agencies. Access to higher education offers a way through these injustices.

Baroness Whitaker welcomed Kalwant Bhopal, Professor of Education and Social Justice from the University of Birmingham who undertook the role of Chair of the event.

Introductory remarks

Professor Kalwant Bhopal (Chair)

Professor of Education and Social Justice, University of Birmingham

Professor Bhopal expressed her thanks for being asked her to Chair this important event focusing on GTR communities' experience of higher education. She referred the participants to the briefing paper for the meeting (Appendix 2) but stressed that it was her intention in her introduction to focus on the research which underpins such inequalities in educational experience.

The Equalities Act 2010 is important to GTR inclusion as it protects Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers as distinct ethnic groups (recognised as such by the courts). There is a legal framework to protect the right to advance equality of opportunity. In reality this does not happen. From a societal point of view, accommodation issues make it difficult to for members of the community to obtain stable accommodation and settle for long enough to support access to education. Accommodation tenure for GTR communities living on sites is as follows: those on socially rented sites, 33% of community members living in caravans; residence at privately owned (rented and owned) sites 54%; unauthorised (including roadside) sites 13%.

Often members of the communities have no choice but to move location on a regular basis. This results in critical disadvantage—particularly in terms of education, health, poverty, and employment—leading to reduced social mobility and life chances. The number of GTR members of the community in

prisons is very high, and once in prison, they are often victims of violence and bullying, with a higher likelihood of suicide experienced by this prisoners.

GTR members of the community are significantly less likely to be in positions as “decision makers”, for example, there are only two GTR local government councillors in the country. Media bias and caricature further encourages negativity in society.

GTR people have the lowest levels of educational achievement of any ethnic group and are less likely to thrive in childhood. They achieve the lowest outcomes in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE (2016 5A*-C GCSEs: Gypsy Roma 1/10, Irish Travellers 1/5). GTR children are more likely to be absent from formal education and to have ceased attendance by the age of 16. This is often due to racism from students and teachers, or exclusion from school. Schools often fail to use anti-bullying policies to investigate claims of abuse. GTR children are also less likely to attend secondary school due to a failure in the sector to understand the needs of members of these communities.

GTR people are therefore less likely to obtain the cultural capital needed to access and navigate higher education. There is poor data on those transitioning into higher education but it is estimated that in 2015/16 there were c.200 GTR students in higher education. An additional layer of caution is needed when utilising these figures, as it is known that there is often a reluctance by community members to disclose ethnic identity.

Professor Bhopal concluded by asserting that education is a right, not a privilege and that she hoped very much that this forum would provide impetus for a new collaborative approach to addressing this.

She introduced the keynote speaker Chris Millward, Director of Access and Participation at the Office for Students.

Keynote

Chris Millward

Director for Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students

Chris Millward thanked Professor Bhopal for the introduction, Baroness Whitaker for hosting and Bucks New University for the organisation of the meeting.

He posed the question – *why is this topic of interest to the Office for Students (OfS)?*

As the independent regulator for the higher education sector, (as set out in legislation—Higher Education and Research Act 2017), the OfS has a duty to promote equality of opportunity and participation (including attainment and employment). The first objective of the OfS is that all students should be able to access higher education. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are required to have an Access & Participation Plan as a condition of their registration with the OfS—they are required to analyse equality at all stages of the student lifecycle for all defined groups. Where there are inequalities, HEI are required to propose and pursue an ambitious programme of measures to mitigate and eliminate these.

What evidence is used? OfS has a duty to promote best practice; to develop toolkits; commission research into ‘what works’; and to encourage collaboration between HEI, with agencies and with students. The OfS is very interested in exploring what it can do to promote best practice in GTR access and participation. Chris indicated that he is often asked why progress is slow and refers to the many barriers experienced in incubation of opportunity. He believes the main challenges are:

- School attainment, entrenched gaps, inflexible University decision-making practices
- Parental and student expectations, personal and financial barriers
- Lack of flexible entry routes, especially for those with caring responsibilities

- Non-inclusive curricula and difficulties in developing a sense of belonging

However he recognised that although categories used by OfS are helpful to analyse performance, all students—including those captured within the category ‘GTR’ students—are individuals with different needs and their own voice.

As Professor Bhopal had stated, only about 200 GTR are in higher education in the UK—this is 3-4% of GTR 18-30 year olds, as compared to 43% of 18-30 year olds in the whole population attending university. The Race Disparity Audit shows that this is a reflection of the worst outcomes in society, particularly in terms of housing; health; and school attendance leading to reduced exam success. The dominant issue of low school attainment makes it very difficult for GTR young people to ‘catch up’ educationally. Other influencing factors include cultural norms and identity; parental knowledge; itinerant communities; lack of understanding of ‘academic life’; concerns about cost and debt; and a lack of trust in government advice.

The OfS is confident that overall there is a growing body of good practice and vocal advocates for improving access into higher education for all. Although there is *some* emerging practice, there is less confidence that this is the case for GTR communities.

So what next? The OfS suggest these priorities for the sector:

- Tackling discrimination at the application stage
- Improving data and disclosure
- Holding open and honest conversations
- Reviewing categories used to define communities which may self-identify in different ways
- Outreach work which focuses on different routes to education, e.g. home educated
- Greater understanding of cultural norms
- Flexible learning options including open and distance learning
- Inclusive curricula

GTR students are a priority group for the OfS and all HEI are expected to implement measures to close the gap in GTR access and participation. The OfS are producing briefing advice and will shortly seek to develop case studies and promote test beds/collaborative pilot projects in universities. Chris concluded with the hope that this event was the start of this collaborative approach.

Panel: The Experiences of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma Students and Academic staff in Higher Education

Chrissie Browne

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Student Lead in the Widening Participation Department, KCL

Chrissie Browne is a student at King’s College London (KCL) and is also employed in the Widening Participation Department. She wished to tell the room what it is like to be a Gypsy and a student. She said that when she heard stories from peers of the influence of ‘role models’, she could not respond with similar experiences. No teachers stuck in her memory, let alone as role models. She came into higher education as a mature student on an access course. At personal tutor meetings, Chrissie has not experienced support—but her personal tutor does not know her identity so Chrissie acknowledges that all students probably experience this. She worries about unconscious bias and thinks that you either have to try to forget this so that you are not isolated—or you have to educate people on your ethnicity. Chrissie feels that stereotyped perceptions about her community mean she is often explaining to people why she isn’t a ‘bad human being’. As a caution she warned that when using a GTR student as a representative or case study they are often represented as a ‘messiah’ or ‘beacon’,

this placed a lot of pressure on such students. This is difficult, as although it is good to try to show people 'the way', not all GTR students want to be activists. She stressed that GTR students don't to be 'lab rats' or used to 'tick boxes' for HEI. They are humans getting an education. Accordingly, platforms need to amplify voices but not speak for them. Everyone (HEIs and community groups) needs to think about how to do this, not just one person in one role in a university. Finally it should be remembered that when 'activists' go home, they can't switch off as 'activists'.

Dr David Smith

Reader in Social Policy, School of Education and Social Care, Anglia Ruskin University

Dr Smith explained that he comes from a Gypsy lineage on his father's side but was brought up settled in housing. He grew up in a council estate which was frequented by Travellers. He did not live nomadically and experienced a similar education to those who grow up in working class areas. He was largely absent from school after the age of 14 but did obtain two O-Levels. He was expected to work from a young age. In the 1990's he was unemployed and entered higher education via an access course, attending an upper-middle class, red-brick university. He faced prejudice based on his class and accent. David noted that it is considered unacceptable to mock a Caribbean accent but that his accent (even currently) is still 'fair game'. David studied Sociology and Social Policy throughout his academic career. Although he noted that the staff tried to make him feel welcome, most students did not. He argued that the identified barriers impacting GTR students need to be addressed but so too does the issue of contempt for working class or 'othered' students emanating from more privileged students.

David has worked in academia for 20 years in different universities—some more welcoming to GTR students and staff than others. Most GTR students (and staff) don't declare their ethnicity. He noted, aligned to Chrissie's points above, that such students are there to qualify, not to 'celebrate their identity'. He has observed that many GTR females pursue health and social care programmes and males often favour sports related programmes—with a strong preference for vocational courses and hence Post-92 universities offering such courses. Increasing access is laudable but it is important not to put the 'cart before the horse'. If school attainment is not 'fixed' then it will be difficult to support access into higher education for GTR young people.

Dr Aleksandar Marinov

Research Fellow (Romani Studies), University of St. Andrews.

Dr Marinov shared his experience of higher education and the importance of mentorship, Romani culture, and money.

Dr Marinov was born as a member of the Roma community in Bulgaria. His father who had a high school diploma was a 'great dreamer' and supporter of education. In response to the negative perception of Roma common in his country, and to prove his community's 'mental ability' he invested highly in his son's education. In addition, Dr Marinov's spouse, who was a Masters student when they met, directed his ambition when he was uncertain and unaware of his next steps in academia. She encouraged him to attend conferences and publish papers and to develop his academic life further (linking to discussions elsewhere in this paper pertaining to cultural capital and knowledge of how best to achieve in the 'academic system').

Dr Marinov emphasised how important it is to understand the Romani culture and value system. 'Family is everything' and children are not raised to question parental decision-making but to be respectful and mindful of them. For example, it was his father who took the decision for his son to pursue his higher education, moving him away from Bulgaria after his graduation from High School – a decision which Aleksandar could not understand or appreciate at the time, however, this was one which has given him a completely different life-trajectory, compared to all of his Roma peers. There

were examples during Aleksandar's years as a student which demonstrated the deep-rooted prejudices even of well-educated and senior academics towards Roma people, both in the East and of the West. Some of these academics have unconsciously revealed their deep-rooted beliefs that it is characteristic of Roma people/culture to have low educational abilities and achievements, and that his relatively good academic performance was regarded as 'exceptional for a Roma'; indicating the low expectations of his community.

Finally, he wanted to emphasise that his father had been well-aware that to qualify for access to respectable universities who would be respectful of his community, it was important to support his children from their early years in school. Thus, he helped to ensure that his son accessed private tutoring, extra curriculum activities and ultimately funding to pursue his academic career. Dr Marinov stressed that he has had a mostly positive experience of higher education and appreciated his well-intended tutors who have helped him navigate academia.

Panel: Introduction to Institutional Best Practice approaches

Professor Nick Braisby

Vice Chancellor, Buckinghamshire New University

Professor Braisby started by thanking Margaret Greenfields for bringing the challenges faced by GTR communities to his attention. In his view a key limitation in ensuring access and equality of attainment is that of poor data quality for these communities, for example in HESA coding. This is compounded by a reluctance by many GTR students to self-disclose. This makes it difficult to track the success of GTR students. At Bucks, Professor Braisby does know that most GTR students were part-time, mature, female and studying health and social care programmes. Most are direct entrants and local to the university. They demonstrate good attendance, and high VLE access to materials. Data also shows that most engage with the Student Union for sports and volunteering. However, what the data cannot show is progression into employment or conversion from application to enrolment. This is something which needs to be urgently addressed.

Professor Braisby suggested that there should be a pledge, supported by ACERT and other NGOs, which HEIs could sign up to, akin to the Armed Forces Covenant. Such a pledge would include addressing the priorities which Chris Millward discussed in his keynote. Other elements could include a commitment to celebrate GTR History Month, support relevant student societies, establish relevant support services, ease the transferring of credits for prior learning, and include specific staff training to ensure that unconscious bias and lack of knowledge amongst staff are addressed. Professor Braisby pledged that Bucks New University would work with others to establish such a pledge.

Dr. Joan O' Mahony,

Senior Advisor (Learning & Teaching), Advance HE

Dr O'Mahony urged HEI to look at other HEI's Access and Participation Plans as well the valuable OfS good practice guidance and to learn from each other. She had four key points to make:

- Outcomes are not the same as experiences. There is too much focus on the former, and not enough on the latter. Good outcomes do not mean people are happy and may not equate to a positive student experience. Equally a positive experience does not equate to good outcomes.
- It is important to know your students and promote their presence. Dr O'Mahony agreed with Professor Braisby about the poor quality of data. Staff often do not have enough information about their own students, and descriptive statistics about the makeup of the whole-HEI community (students and staff) are typically released after the end of the year, though there is

scope to do this earlier. An inclusive and appropriate Curriculum is important but the whole University plays a part in building and supporting a learning community, including professional and service staff.

- She stressed that the term “*Nothing about me without me*” is crucial to designing-in GTR community support in the institution, and this includes input from staff, who need to be involved from the beginning to ensure success. “*No responsibility without power*” is also crucial—staff must not be asked to commit to initiatives unless they are resourced and supported by their institutions.

Anne-Marie Canning

Director of Social Mobility and Student Success at King’s College London.

Anne-Marie Canning asked what it means to make change; and suggested that she herself was a ‘realistic optimist’ in social mobility. As a big fan of data, she also recognised the difficulties faced in this area. A LMKco report commissioned by KCL published a few years ago and attracting mainstream publicity, promoted her to start conversations, including some with Chrissie who had become a student at KCL.

Anne-Marie stressed that we need to explore people’s lived experience as students and staff, as it is these stories which ‘open people’s hearts’. There is also a need to cultivate distributed leadership and co-production. For example, Chrissie is a student but is also paid to work at KCL as an expert. KCL doesn’t pursue programmes to please the regulator and does nothing particularly ‘ground breaking’. It works with community groups, charities, and informal groups; runs taster days; hosts lectures—sees what works and recalibrates. She felt the ‘smartest’ thing the have done as an institution had been to guarantee GTR students places on particular pre-existing programmes. She emphasised her belief that HEI need to evaluate their own activities within their own context and communities, and see what works. This might be contextual admissions; an emphasis on happiness as well as attainment; or a focus on addressing the barriers to obtaining employment in the ‘best’ jobs.

Themed open discussion

Professor Kalwant Bhopal (chair)

Professor Bhopal summarised the discussion thus far before inviting contributions from the group:

- There is a need for greater understanding of the **barriers and challenges** facing GTR communities.
- There is a need for HEI (and Further Education) to start **collaborating** with each other more. Universities also need to work collaboratively with GTR organisations in a more coherent fashion.
- There is a need for HEIs to work out the best routes to **outreach** and recognise the different needs of the mature student when compared to school leavers, as well as understanding the influence of subject choice. The views of **NGOs and the community** need to be heard and a tailored approach taken to supporting communities at local and strategic level.
- Inclusion and social justice models, emphasise that the agenda must be about **experiences** as well as outcomes.

Synthesis of contributions from the floor organised by theme

Understanding barriers and challenges

Paul Roberts (CHEER Sussex), felt that the acronymic category 'GTR' is problematic and welcomed the opportunity to explore alternatives which take into consideration the way different communities and individuals identify. He also considered the need to include itinerant groups which don't fall under specific ethnic group categories (see further the Briefing Note, Appendix 2). Tyler Hatwell (ACERT) emphasised that not all itinerant communities are ethnic minorities, for example members of his own 'Showmen' community. These populations are not disaggregated in the sector data (e.g. as Showmen and Boaters) although they still face similar issues to those students who are categorised as 'GTR' within data sets.

Collaboration and evidence base

Paul Roberts (CHEER Sussex), asked Chris Millward of the OfS whether this area of work with GTR communities was a potential area of interest which could be the focus of an 'OfS Challenge' funding call. Chris was supportive of exploring this idea. OfS has funding to shape innovative responses to the big cross-cutting challenges which it identifies through its work. Enough evidence would however need to be gathered to frame a call and this would require a collaborative event to refine the process.

Pauline Anderson (Director of Learning and Skills at Derby City Council; and also a Traveller Movement Trust) who is an Irish Traveller community member, felt that there was already an existing but unrecognised evidence base to support the work needed. If policy is to drive positive behaviours, she asked, *whether universities been encouraged by the OfS to network with regional councils of Gypsies such as the Traveller Movement, HertsGATE and Leeds GATE?* She suggested that engaging with schools to encourage access to higher education is a flawed approach, as they are often considered to be racist institutions and there were better ways to access communities.

Jess Darnell (NCOP Project Officer), indicated that the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is considering supporting such a networking hub and is already working with Leeds GATE, rather than working with schools on this priority.

Sarah Mann (FFT), too reiterated that there is already much research and best practice in existence. The different threads of this need simply to be pulled together into a comprehensive research base.

One participant¹, working on the care leaver covenant at their institution, suggested that universities should take a similar collaborative approach, so that outreach activities offers a breadth of options to potential GTR students beyond individual course or institutional offering.

Chris Millward suggested that OfS could consider funding a test bed to help create these collaborative networks. He suggested that this conversation should be continued with the emerging group, with a view to taking this idea forward.

Many participants felt that although the discussion was focused on collaboration and building evidence, there were simpler things which could be undertaken easily and which would offer significant impact and positive change to support GTR learners.

- Sarah Mann (FFT) asked that HEI leaders make public, visible commitments which make it clear that GTR students are welcome at their University.

¹ The name of this speaker was not recorded but if they wish to contact us we will ensure that it is inserted into an updated version of this report.

- Tyler Hatwell (ACERT) also proposed that as well as commitment from universities, some student commitment to engaging with and acting as peer supporters for GTR students — possibly facilitated by the NUS—would help break down barriers.

Outreach and engaging communities

Alethea Melling (Director of the Centre for Volunteering & Community Leadership, UCLAN), described what her institution were doing to reach out to GTR communities. UCLAN has strong engagement with the residents of the Traveller site adjacent their campus, with some students engaged in projects with young people from the site. Alethea held up KCL as an example of an institution with a wealth of good practice and asked **Chrissie Browne** from KCL (panel member) what could be done better to engage communities in HE.

Returning to the theme of **simple approaches**, Chrissie felt that it was important to ‘just start engaging’ with communities, and Gypsy, Traveller and Roma NGOs to build relationships. There isn’t always a need for big programmes or initiatives, but OfS can encourage HEI to have conversations about, and to tailor their engagement towards, specific communities in their local area.

Lisa Galloway (Blackpool & Fylde College Programme Leader Health & Social Care), who is of mixed Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller heritage, told the group that she had a ‘bad time’ at school and was consequently home educated before studying at UCLAN, where she is now undertaking a doctorate on GTR educational outcomes. As an example of simple approaches, Lisa described how she has visited sites and spoken to people directly about higher education. She has held ‘family evenings’ and got people interested in engaging in higher education who are now studying in FE and HE.

Tyler Hatwell (ACERT) challenged the participants, by highlighting that there was much discussion about ‘going onto sites’ in the belief that this is where all GTR live. He stated that most GTR do not live on ‘sites’. Many live on council estates and this focus on ‘people who live in caravans’ is unhelpful. Different approaches to outreach are needed.

Dr David Smith responded that it was not difficult for outreach initiatives to find non-site based GTR communities, as most have long historical associations with particular areas and local councils have this information on where communities are most likely to reside (see for example his work with Margaret Greenfields on Gypsies and Travellers in Housing where it was identified that many GTR community residents living are living on close-knit council estates very close to former traditional ‘stopping places’).

Chrissie Browne emphasised that it was *not* enough to reach out to communities and that it was important to have a strong ‘offer’ before starting communications. For example, rather than just holding a generic ‘taster day’, hold a bespoke conversation with students about personal statements to support their applications and what they may experience in HE. There was a suggestion from the group generally (speakers and community members present in the audience) that HEIs employ community members as outreach and support experts.

Professor Judith Okely proposed that university staff should automatically receive training on how best to engage with GTR students. She cited the example of a Liberal Studies programme at Anglia Ruskin which had invited mature students in to study the history of their trade (e.g. brick laying) and another programme which asked students to write an essay exploring their experience of a different culture as good practice opportunities which supported positive discussion of communities and background of students.

Martin Gallagher (University of Northumbria, Research Assistant), is involved in a research project which showed that most GTR students who entered higher education did so after what he described as ‘surviving school education’. As a result of prior negative school experiences, they did not enjoy education and were not attracted to ‘academia’. He stressed that to be effective role-models, GTR students need to be seen as the faces of initiatives and projects, not simply allies of Universities. The

curriculum should carry relevance for GTR students and their families to see the benefits and relevance to them. For example he proposed 'boutique courses' on subjects such as Romany history and language should be on offer.

Alice Young (Travelling Community Support Team Leader - Julian House), stated that there has been little research into 'Boaters' overall and educationally in particular. The current Canal and River Trust rules on continuous cruising distances have a potential negative impact on boater children's schooling and opportunities to proceed to higher education. Some Boater families are facing increasing pressure from the CRT given the lack of permanent moorings and high cost of these, and are facing making a very difficult choice between complying with their cruising licence conditions (breach of which risks them losing their boat/home) or prioritising their children's education by staying closer to school by only cruising a short distance to enable children to remain in stable education.

Lived experience

A significant number among the participants at the roundtable were of GTR heritage (as well as Boaters and Showmen) and they greatly welcomed the opportunity to share their lived experience of barriers and successes in formal education.

Janie Codona, MBE (De Montfort University), is a mature student currently studying at her fourth university for a doctorate. She told the room that she would not be there, working for her PhD and attending the meeting if it had not been for the support she received at her first university, Bucks New University. She had previously obtained some basic level formal qualifications but did not have the courage to go to university. She said that there were role models at Bucks New University who supported her academic journey and that staff helped her gain confidence, ensured she attended through putting support in place, and helped her to cross barriers and face challenges so that she succeeded. She said that some other students hadn't thought she should be there when she commenced her Foundation Degree, but they were challenged and educated by staff and GTR students working together. Janie emphasised GTR students are equal to others, may be just as bright as any other students, and want the certificate to prove the academic value.

Her experience was that GTR children go through school often, but then worry that they won't be accepted at university as a result of prejudice. They thus often hide their identity, not sharing this until people get to know them and can be trusted. It is also difficult for some GTR community members to know how to get back into education, some years after leaving secondary school. Mature students also require different access routes and different formats to support them to achieve than do many younger students.

Clifford Codona felt that HEIs need to understand GTR culture and needs better. He had never been to school but supported his wife Janie in her education and has 14 grandchildren currently in education. He stressed that higher education isn't for all GTR people. Boys are usually expected to leave secondary school early and get a job. Girls may be taken out of education due to fears about what they may be exposed to (e.g. non culturally acceptable values etc). As they become adults, some GTR adults may then wish to go back into education. Role models are important to GTR (e.g. Tyson Fury). HEIs *must* understand this and also the level of prejudice which GTR members of the community face, as achieving an education still won't give them access to jobs if this high level of prejudice continues in the outside world. Cliff emphasised that HEIs should find role models who have succeeded (e.g. GTR doctor) as case studies to support discussion on how GTR people can achieve through education.

Sam Wilson (Education Advisor Hants. Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service) is a Romany Gypsy. He found that going to University isolated him from his community as they (he and his peers) lost a common frame of reference. He felt that HEIs should offer pastoral support for those who have moved away from their community through entering into education.

A number of other community members present, joined in this discussion point from the floor. One GTR woman², said that her family now relied on her for all official business such as form filling as a result of her having attended higher education.

However, another participant³ stated that many community members feel as though they are living in two different worlds, particularly if they have experienced social mobility—for example, being the first in their family to attend university. The role of the HEI should also be to allow students the opportunity to reflect on this challenge, and to work on strategies to enable GTR students to keep their community connections rather than suffering a disconnect.

Dr. Siobhan Spencer, MBE (National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups) wished to record her thanks to three universities who had helped her into higher education which their tailored approach to her needs: UCLAN, Derby and Anglia Ruskin. She also thanked Margaret Greenfields from Bucks New University for her long-term work in this area.

Next steps

There was great interest in what would be the next steps following on from the roundtable. Margaret Greenfields responded that a report would be published and circulated to all delegates as soon as possible, and that it was hoped that the participants could work on ways of drawing together best practice and exploring ‘what works’. The idea of a pledge which Professor Braisby had referred to would be developed in the coming months and it was hoped that this would be something which other HEIs would be willing to support. She noted too, that as some participants had suggested, it was also important to look at definitions and categories and to ensure the inclusion of Showmen and Boater families and communities. Finally there was a need to develop an inclusive, co-produced strategy at both national and regional level and collaboration between communities, HEIs and NGOs, was crucial to this. This meeting was the start of these conversations.

Concluding remarks

Professor Colin Clark (rapporteur)

Lead for the Strategic Hub for Society, Policy, Governance and Justice, University of the West of Scotland

Professor Clark thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and Baroness Whitaker for kindly hosting it. On a personal level, he stated that thirty years ago he would never have thought that he would be in the House of Lords at an event such as this. At that time, he was 18, a member of the Communist Party and someone who came from a Scottish Traveller background. It was another world from Higher Education and the House of Lords. He commended the younger generation who are visible and know ‘who they are’. Professor Clark stressed that his generation were told to hide who they were (their ethnicity) and to be quiet about their identity. He picked up also on the potential ‘gaps’ between being a member of the GTR community and the experiences and expectations of peers, stating that even today, despite having a Doctorate and being a successful academic, his mother teases him for not working for himself, and points out that his time is not his own. Colin Clark emphasised however that he is *still* a Traveller, but he has an education and the bit of paper to prove it (a point which reflected the comments of Janie Codona).

² The name of this speaker was not captured. Please get in touch if you wish to be named and the report will be accordingly updated.

³ The name of this speaker was not captured. Please get in touch if you wish to be named and the report will be accordingly updated

Professor Clark emphasised that would like to get to a point where the higher education of GTR people is not considered anomalous or exceptional. The group attending the meeting need to hold on to the commitments which universities have made (particularly commending the concept of a pledge suggested by Professor Braisby) and encourage institutions other to make similar commitments. The new norm needs to be that GTR education is a 'good thing' and that the distance between 'those who stay and those who go' from the community is broken down.

Professor Clark agreed that 'family is everything' but noted that family expectations can also hold GTR people back and this can unfortunately lead to estrangement. This aspect of potential conflict over aspiration and identity needs to be handled with great care. There is no 'magic wand' but institutions (and communities) can get better at listening to people as they provide their testimony. The emotional labour of GTR role models should also not be taken for granted as expressed by several speakers. He noted that 'lived experience is everything so let's make it fun while we get our bits of paper'. Colin Clark also stressed that it is also important that GTR community members feel able to accept the support of their allies and champions.

Finally, he noted, there also needs to be recognition that when looking at 'categories' of student and exploring outcomes, there is in fact a nexus of race, ethnicity and class at play—(something particularly relevant to Showmen and Boater communities who are invisible in categories available for self-attribution).

Professor Clark concluded by thanking Margaret Greenfields for the briefing paper which he felt was excellent. He also thanked Baroness Whitaker for hosting, the speakers and all the participants. It was noted that a report of the roundtable would be published in later October⁴ and at which point, a start on the co-production of developing a 'pledge' for Universities to sign-up to, would commence.

⁴ Unfortunately delayed as a result of circumstances beyond the organising team's control

Appendix 1 - Invitation to Roundtable

Access to Higher Education for Gypsy Traveller and Roma communities Roundtable September 10th 3 pm – 5.30 pm Room G House of Lords

Thank you for responding to the invitation to attend this event which is being hosted by Baroness Janet Whitaker in collaboration with Professor Margaret Greenfields of Buckinghamshire New University.

A short briefing note in relation to the policy background to the event is attached, as is an Agenda.

Hard copies of attached materials will not be provided on the day for environmental reasons so you may wish to print these out, or ensure you can access the Agenda, etc. electronically.

As there is a lengthy waiting list to participate in this roundtable if you are unable to attend (or in the case of HEIs/NGOs need to send a substitute) please will you inform us urgently, so that your reserved place can be offered to someone else, or names of attendees can be updated on security lists.

Please enter Parliament via Black Rod's entrance, number 11 on this map <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/facilities/maps/colmap.pdf>. It is a good idea to bring a copy of this invitation with you to show during security checks. On entering Parliament you will be directed to Room G which is near to where you enter the building. Access to the room is from 2.30pm where tea, coffee, and biscuits will be available. We will start the event at 3 pm precisely.

We very much look forward to meeting you on the 10th of September.

**Sent on behalf of Baroness Janet Whitaker
and Professor Margaret Greenfields**

Roundtable on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) Communities in Higher Education, 10 September 2019

BRIEFING NOTE

Introduction

This briefing note summarises the present situation in relation to GTR communities' participation in higher education, reflects on the lacuna in participation data, and highlights key themes for consideration within the roundtable event.

It argues that there is a special need to engage in ways of widening access and participation through co-production of appropriate and effective methodologies with community members who have experience of academia (staff and academics), specialist NGOs, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Such approaches, systematically applied, can be effective in removing barriers, and providing on-going support mechanisms within and across Universities. It is argued that through utilising effective policy and best practice, and working closely with specialists supporting both GTR young people and mature students returning to education, it is possible to encourage access to higher education and successful outcomes for students. Effective design, implementation, and sharing of existing good practice methods which enable university education and academic career paths to be more open to BAME people as a whole¹; may, potentially, if appropriately adapted, have particular pertinence to GTR community members who are students, academic staff or considering entering into Higher Education. Similarly, use of proven approaches to engaging, retaining and

¹ This briefing note does not seek to engage with the broader literature on, and well-evidenced disparities experienced by BAME students and staff – for example see further: Universities UK/NUS (2019) <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>; Advance HE (2018) <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/research-insight-evaluating-the-achieving-race-equality-in-higher-education-programme/> and Bhopal, K (2018) *White privilege The myth of a post-racial society*, Policy Press: Bristol; but locates the experiences of GTR communities and challenges faced by them in ensuring equality of access and outcomes, as a specific group of students within broader BAME groupings.

supporting BAME staff (for example through access to high profile staff networks, or indicating that recruiting institutions particularly invite applications from GTR academics), may also increase the numbers and visibility of members of the communities, who are at present significantly under-represented within academia.

This briefing note is intended for higher education senior leadership, widening participation and policy specialists, as well as current and future students and staff from Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities. This paper is intended to act as an initial point of discussion which will lead to the co-production of debate, tangible commitments and concrete actions to enhance equity in higher education; remedy the shortfall in participation and engagement; and support GTR community members across their academic and professional careers.

Throughout, this briefing recognises and applauds the actions of individual universities which are already actively engaged in identifying best practice to support GTR students and staff, for example through exploring ways of overcoming barriers to participation, and actively engaging with inclusive practice². Similarly it celebrates the achievements of students and graduates from GTR communities³ who have overcome many the barriers outlined below, to enable their participation and successful achievement in Higher Education.

Current Situation

The recent publication of the Office for Students advice and guidance note on GTR people in higher education (which in addition to Romany Gypsy, Traveller and Roma

² See for example the work emerging from Kings College London through their 'Rom Belong' outreach activities https://medium.com/@outreach_88279/introducing-the-rom-belong-programme-by-kcl-widening-participation-department-81688af1659b and the University of Sussex CHEER programme <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/researchprojects/rise/knowledgeexchange>

³ A number of whom are present at this roundtable and will be discussing their personal experiences of academia

communities also includes Showpeople, Live-Aboard Boaters and New Travellers who are not captured in any extant ethnicity based data-sets), further emphasises the critical necessity and social justice imperative of supporting students from the above communities into and within Higher Education.⁴

The poor quality of available data in relation to GTR students (and staff)⁵ in higher and further education, and hence the ability to ascertain the size of the populations and attainment gap (presuming this exists), is highly problematic for a number of reasons. Although the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and University and Colleges Application Service (UCAS) have included ethnicity categories for 'Gypsy and Traveller' students since 2012, no code exists for Roma students, rendering them effectively invisible. Data returns on Gypsy and Traveller students are included as a subset of 'White' students in the above data sets, although disaggregated data are available on request to individual HEIs. Because of the small number of such students (and staff), definitive numbers of such individuals are particularly likely to be suppressed under data protection requirements (where figures are less than 5 individuals) when access to data is sought.

Despite the possibility of self-identification by ethnicity⁶, strong evidence exists of the reluctance of many GTR students, either in college or university, to declare their identity, as a result of concerns over discrimination⁷. This pattern also appears to

⁴ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/>

⁵ Currently data is only captured by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in relation to self-identified ethnicity of certain categories of GTR students/staff : Irish Traveller (14) or Gypsy or Traveller (15) and hence excludes other communities whom the OfS include in their guidance as coming within the GTR rubric (see note 1 above).

⁶ An option which is not available to Occupational groups such as Showpeople or other mobile communities such as Boaters and new Travellers who are included in the OfS briefing under the generic term GTR (see note 2 above),

⁷ In relation to experiences of discrimination and racism in educational settings (predominantly in schools) see for example, Foster, P. and Norton, B (2012): *Educational equality for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people in the UK* https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/ERR8_Brian_Foster_and_Peter_Norton.pdf;

pertain in relation to School Census returns⁸. Evidence of progression and attainment at school may be taken as a proxy measure for likelihood of proceeding to post-compulsory education, particularly when taken in conjunction with possession of other widening participation (WP) characteristics such as low socio-economic status, school exclusion, etc. which are known to act as barriers to entering HE⁹. Abundant evidence exists of disproportionate school exclusion rates experienced by GTR students; early school leaving, multi-domain socio-economic exclusion, experiences of racism and discrimination and frequent enforced movement impacting school careers¹⁰. Children recorded in School Census data as being Gypsy/Roma or a Traveller of Irish heritage, consistently have the lowest attainment scores of all groups of pupils at Stage 4/GCSEs. In 2018, children recorded as being Gypsy/Roma or Traveller of Irish Heritage accounted for 13% and 19% respectively of young people achieving Grade 4/C GCSEs in English and Maths, as opposed to 64% of the whole population¹¹.

Derrington & Kendall (2008) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/challenges-and-barriers-to-secondary-education-the-experiences-of-young-gypsy-traveller-students-in-english-secondary-schools/58E82A3A4F8995DA6238BF8D26711C50> ; Traveller Movement (2019) *A Good Practice Guide for improving outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in education*:

<https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=122:a-good-practice-guide-for-improving-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-education> and Lane P. Spencer, S. and Jones, A (2014) *Experts by Experience: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma: reviewing UK progress on the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies*. The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups and Anglia Ruskin University

⁸ See for example: Women and Equalities Committee Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities Seventh Report of Session 2017–19.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html> Chapters 4 'Data Gaps' and 5, 'Education' ; Traveller Movement (2019) op. cit; and Wilkin, A; Derrington, C & Foster, B (2009) *Improving the Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils Literature Review* DCSF Research Report RR077 London: DCSF <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11361/1/DCSF-RR077.pdf>

⁹ http://www.parliament.scot/Research%20briefings%20and%20fact%20sheets/SB_10-07.pdf and <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poorer-children%E2%80%99s-educational-attainment-how-important-are-attitudes-and-behaviour>.

¹⁰ House of Commons Briefing Paper (May 2019) 'Gypsies and Travellers'

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8083#fullreport> and House of Commons (2019) Women and Equalities Committee Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html> Chapter 5, 'Education'.

¹¹ House of Commons Briefing Paper (May 2019) op. cit.

From such indicative evidence as does exist, it is ascertainable that GTR students (and staff) are, perhaps unsurprisingly, significantly under-represented in FE and HE in the UK. Research undertaken by LKMCO (2017)¹² suggested 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. This finding is based on a best estimate of the Gypsy/Traveller population size (as noted, no measure exists for Roma or other groups such as Showmen¹³) calculated from the School Census data and the 2011 Census, which are both widely acknowledged to be flawed data sets¹⁴ which significantly underestimate the size of the communities. Data from HESA returns¹⁵ released in 2016 suggested that only 3 to 4% of GTR young people aged 18-30 accessed HE in 2014/15, whereas 43% of the national 18-30 year old population did so.

As noted above, it is highly likely that a greater number of young GTR people than are enumerated in official data, are in fact overcoming considerable barriers to entering, and attaining within FE and HE institutions. Strategies of ‘passing’ as a member of the majority community and non-disclosure of ethnicity, may in fact be pertinent and effective in relation to academic career progression, sense of belonging within academia/student bodies, and assessed attainment, as has been anecdotally suggested in some forums. However more verifiable evidence is required in relation to the

¹² Mulcahy et. al. (2017) The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education Research brief A report on barriers from early years to secondary and beyond London: LKMCO https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_brief_proof2.pdf

¹³ Limited evidence exists in relation to the experiences of Showpeople and education across the life-span but the Showman’s Guild notes the importance of Traveller Education Services distance learning activities (and tangentially the impact of educational service cuts) for their members. <https://showmensguild.co.uk/education/>. Good practice examples for schools with Show families on the roll has been produced by Education Scotland, National Improvement Hub: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/travelling-showmen>

¹⁴ <https://pad.basingstoke.gov.uk/documents/4753/01/07/37/01073789.PDF> and <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/resource/a-good-practice-guide-for-improving-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-education/>

¹⁵ See Mulcahy et al. (2017) p21. op.cit. HESA returns from 2014 suggest a total of 200 self-identified GTR students, somewhat higher than the above figure identified by TM through their FoI request pertaining to 2016/17.

experiences of students and staff to be able ascertain how common such strategies are and the actual impact of such practice.

Freedom of Information responses provided by universities to the Traveller Movement (TM) in 2018 in relation to a question on numbers of GTR students in HE in 2016/17¹⁶, indicated that there were only 169 such self-identified students in the whole of the UK. Only three institutions (one in Northern Ireland and one delivering education online) recorded having a GTR student population in double figures, and only two institutions reported including GTR ethnicity within staff surveys. Of these, only one HEI returned a figure of more than 5 GTR staff members. Whilst this will be an undercount of GTR students for the reasons noted above (as well as some HEIs not responding to the TM FoI requests), it is clear that all available evidence indicates that significant under-representation exists in relation to Higher Education participation by members of the GTR communities. As noted above, no mechanism exists for monitoring numbers of Roma, Boater and Showpeople¹⁷ in HE. Further, there is a lacuna in evidence in relation to progression rates of GTR students (both at undergraduate level and taught post-graduate/doctoral studies), and how this translates into sustainable academic careers. The impact of tuition fees (although this does not appear to necessarily negatively impact students from all minority ethnic groups) may act as a particular disincentive to GTR students and is worthy of further exploration¹⁸.

¹⁶ Unpublished figures from a work in progress – please check further with the Traveller Movement if wish to cite.

¹⁷ Two newspaper articles in 2015, referred to young women from Show families who have achieved outstanding academic results at elite universities, but no other publicly available data exists in relation to general trends in education for this community. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11695522/Funfair-to-Oxbridge-What-its-like-being-a-traveller-at-university.html> and <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/11690332/Traveller-who-studied-at-Oxford-to-return-to-work-on-familys-fairground-after-completing-degree.html>

¹⁸ For a discussion on financial issues potentially impacting BAME students see Universities UK/NUS (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap*. London: UUK/NUS <https://www.soas.ac.uk/bame-attainment-gap/file140448.pdf> (p19) and Universities UK/NEON (2018) *The Financial Concerns of Students* London : UUK <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/the-financial-concerns-students.pdf>

Greenfields (2007)¹⁹, in an Aim Higher study, found that young Gypsies and Travellers focused extensively on issues of cultural/family expectations impacting on the perceived feasibility of university education and training²⁰. A number of young people expressed a sense both that certain career paths were precluded to them, and that universities were not accessible to them as a result of lack of qualifications, cultural isolation, fear of experiencing racism and discrimination (typically based on prior school experiences) and an erroneous belief about the types of courses on offer – with academic programmes often not seen as relevant to GTR people. Concerns about moving away from family support networks, particularly for young women who referred to wide-spread taboos relating to living away from home before marriage, were also prominent. These themes were also identified as major barriers to access to HE within the 2017 LKMCO study on WP and GTR communities undertaken on behalf of KCL²¹, and were again reiterated within a workshop day on co-producing inclusive learning with GTR communities, hosted by UCLAN in May 2018²².

Whilst it is recognized (LKMCO 2017; Greenfields, 2007; Danvers, 2015; Bhopal, 2018²³); that GTR students are particularly likely to have one or more widening participation characteristics which potentially negatively impact access to FE and HE, even less is known about the experiences of more ‘hidden’/unenumerated

¹⁹ Greenfields, (2007) https://leedsgate.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/aim_higher_final.pdf

²¹ LKMCO (2017) https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_brief_proof2.pdf

²² UCLAN 2nd May 2018 1-3pm "Co-producing inclusive learning at UCLan: A request for guidance from GTR organisations" workshop

²³ LKMCO (2017)op. cit.; Danvers (2015)

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sussexheimreport-uk--final.pdf&site=41> Greenfields, (2007) op. cit. Bhopal (2018) op. cit.

communities included within the OfS definition of GTR populations - including Showpeople²⁴, live-aboard Boaters²⁵ and new Travellers²⁶.

Further, intersectional issues impacting the diverse GTR populations within HE are essentially invisible. Thus for example, we are not able to identify evidence (including within grey literature) in relation to the higher education experiences (or barriers to access to FE and HE) of GTR community members who are living with disabilities or who identify as LGBT+. Possession of more than one protected characteristic or intersectional identities, has in the case of students and staff from wider BAME populations, been noted (particularly in relation to gender²⁷) as having a potentially detrimental effect on access, retention, outcome and career progression in HE even where supportive, proactive and inclusive educational environments exist.²⁸ It is to be presumed that experiences of GTR students and staff mirror those of other

²⁴ See above note 17. Only one academic in the UK (Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Director of the National Fairground Archive) <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/collections/oconnortoulmin> is publicly known to be a member of the Showpeople's community, but it is likely that significantly more staff and students are within academia.

²⁵ A newspaper report of September 2019 refers to the experience of a family of live-aboard Boaters in South-West England whose children's secondary education is being disrupted as a result of stringent 'continuous cruising' requirements imposed by the Canals and River Trust <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/houseboat-eviction-canal-river-trust-ctr-steve-holder-wiltshire-a9087246.html>. It can be presumed that considerably more live-aboard boater children experience these challenges to remaining in education. See further a news story from 2016: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-36046323>

²⁶ There has been no substantive research into HE and FE experiences of new Travellers but Greenfields' collation of anecdotal evidence suggests substantially higher access to HE for these children who grew up on sites, often following their return to house-dwelling. Such access to HE and FE is potentially as a result of prior parental experience in housing/mainstream education impacting decisions and knowledge. The Children Society in the 1990s operated support programmes with this community in South West England, and (unpublished) identified barriers to accessing school education which bore similarities to those experienced by other GTR populations, with eviction and bullying in school settings, commonly cited as reasons for disrupted learning.

²⁷ Universities UK/NUS (2019) op. cit; and in relation to disproportionately low numbers of female Black Professors in UK Universities see further: Rollock (2019) *Staying Power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors* London: UCU https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10075/Staying-Power/pdf/UCU_Rollock_February_2019.pdf

²⁸ Equality Challenge Unit (2017) http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Research_and_data_briefing_2_Intersectional_approaches_to_equality_research_and_data.pdf Tate, S. and Bagguley, P. (2017). 'Building the anti-racist university: next steps'. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 20:3, 289-299; Bhopal, K (2018) op. cit. Gilbert P (undated) Changing Mindsets web-portal <http://mindsets.port.ac.uk/?p=1511>

BAME communities²⁹, albeit with particular and specific circumstances (for example wide spread acceptance of casual racism towards their communities³⁰, limited community wide experience of higher education, and an almost total lack of positive representations in print or broadcast media³¹) impacting them even further.

Identified Barriers to Recruitment, Retention and Attainment for GTR Students

The issues summarised below³² are anticipated to be prominent within presentations, thematic discussions and debate within the round-table session, although it is anticipated that further themes will emerge within the event and follow-up activities.

- Perceived lack of relevance of university curricula to GTR cultures and career preferences
- Fear of discrimination and prejudice³³

²⁹ Whilst fully recognising that People of Colour from other BAME communities do not have the option of ‘passing’/ or failing to be recognised as members of ‘non-White’ communities through non-declaration of ethnicity. Hence experiences of discrimination may occur as a result of visible recognition of ethnicity, or having a name which may not be present in the White ‘mainstream’ (see further: Bhopal, K (2018) op. cit; Curtis (2005) <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2005/nov/30/accesstouniversity.highereducation..>

³⁰ Even within liberal education institutions where clear conceptualisation of equalities exist and robust policies are in place, there is plentiful evidence that casual (and direct) racism can still be enacted within the student body. See for example recent news reports on students’ experiences of racism within HEIs:

<https://glasgowguardian.co.uk/2019/03/14/far-right-group-targets-glasgow-university-lecturer/>;

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jul/05/a-demeaning-environment-stories-of-racism-in-uk-universities>.

As detailed within the 2019 Women and Equalities Committee report (particularly Chapter 8 ‘Discrimination and Hate Crime’); GTR community members are particularly at risk of experiencing hate speech and hate crime, as well as discrimination (direct and indirect) from service providers.

³¹ Okely, J (2014) <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/recycled-misrepresentations-gypsies-travellers-roma.pdf>

³² The bullet-pointed themes have been identified from a range of publications cited in this briefing, emergent evidence on successful initiatives to support and engage GTR students, debates with GTR students and community members/experts in a variety of contexts, and evidence provided to the Women’s and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry. House of Commons (2019) Women and Equalities Committee *Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities Seventh Report of Session 2017–19*. In particular, Chapter 5, ‘Education’.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html>

³³ See for example evidence provided to the Women’s and Equality Committee Inquiry (op. cit.) and Lane P. Spencer, S. and Jones, A (2014) *Experts by Experience: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma: reviewing UK progress on the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies*. The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups and Anglia Ruskin University

- Issues of inclusion, recognition³⁴, identity and sense of belonging within HE (potentially linking to issues of exclusion common to broader BAME communities; and self-identified first-generation/working class students³⁵)
- Absence of GTR community recognition/inclusion/respect and awareness of cultures within the curricula
- Lack of ‘academic cultural capital’; tailored support services and guidance, for students and their families pertinent to entering HE (e.g familiarity with ‘academic language’, technical issues pertaining to applying for student loans, or accommodation etc.) which impacts the confidence of students in accessing support and entitlements.
- Lack of visible role models from GTR communities or supportive peer communities.³⁶
- Lack of culturally competent and co-produced engagement and support initiatives to work with GTR communities, families and students.
- Poor perceptions of universities (and in some cases formal education more generally), particularly in relation to whether academic qualifications offer ‘value for money’ over time.
- Debt resistance and concern over long-term financial implications/inability to continue working within family businesses or trade.
- Caring responsibilities, particularly for mature students.

³⁴ For example, (anecdotal evidence) fear of being ‘outed’ by peers/staff as a member of a GTR community and hence exposed to negative comment or discrimination.

³⁵Clarke, P & Beech, D eds. (2018) *Reaching the parts of society universities have missed: A manifesto for the new Director of Fair Access and Participation* London: HEPI and Whiteside https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HEPI-Brightside_WP-Manifesto-for-OfS_FINAL-Report-106.pdf; Barrs et. Al. (2016) *The underrepresentation of white working class boys in higher education: The role of widening participation*. LKMCo: London <https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/The-underrepresentation-of-white-working-class-boys-in-higher-education-baars-et-al-2016.pdf>

³⁶ Whilst some HEIs are taking active steps to ensure greater visibility of role models from the communities – e.g. the RomBelong programme at KCL (op.cit note 2) which are part of a package of WP activities impacting recruitment and retention, there is a clear need for expansion of such activities which will support and encourage self-identification of GTR students and staff in HE.

- Widening Participation and engagement initiatives which are currently targeted at GTR students have been largely focused on Russell Group and Oxbridge institutions, which may leave more vocationally inclined students feeling that HE is not appropriate for them. This latter point has relevance also to the experiences/perceptions of students from other BAME and students who identify as working class³⁷.

The Case for Change

The arguments for focusing on widening participation, and delivering support and equality of opportunity appropriately to GTR students and staff, are first and foremost a matter of social justice. However, it is also worth emphasising that apart from widening personal and community networks, enhancing social inclusion and individual life-chances, the HEI sector, the economy and society as a whole, benefits from the inclusion of diverse experiences and perspectives. Removal or mitigation of the barriers identified within this briefing paper, could go a considerable way towards increasing the low numbers of self-identified GTR students and staff in HE, with anticipated positive impacts across multiple domains.

GTR communities are overwhelmingly absent from both positive discourse and inclusion within the HEI policy focus but it is hoped that this opportunity to bring together a range of GTR community members (academic staff and students) with expert experience of academia; HEI representatives, and education policy experts, will place us in a strong position to share good practice, and openly discuss challenges and solutions. Accordingly the anticipated aim of the GTR people in HE

³⁷ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/05/10/new-report-calls-universities-take-radical-steps-make-higher-education-accessible/>

roundtable, is to facilitate and commence co-production of a strategic best-practice sector-wide approach to ensuring inclusion and equality of opportunity for GTR students and staff in academia.

Margaret Greenfields - August 2019

With thanks to critical readers of earlier versions of this brief: Professor Colin Clark; Dr. David Smith and Dr. Siobhan Spencer.

We are also grateful to the Traveller Movement for permission to cite from their unpublished FoI data on GTR students in HE.

Appendix 3- Comments from community members who were unable to attend the event

The following comments have been received from community members who wished to have their support for this initiative recorded and sent on these brief comments pertaining to their own experiences.

Mrs Shirley Barratt (PhD student, Member of the Romany Gypsy community)

"I am keen to be involved [as this initiative proceeds] and would like to be invited to any future meetings. Sadly I am unable to attend this event (10th September). I would like however to be involved in this worthwhile work, as the first person within my family to attend school and complete my main stream education, plus throughout my life having attended various courses of study.

At the moment I am attending a part-time PhD [programme]. Whilst I have found the studying to be rewarding and fulfilling, I have also found, I feel, isolated and the lack of cultural awareness by fellow students and staff can and does make it difficult to keep motivated [at times]".

She adds: *"I have to say my experience is that HEIs presume [community members] are going to know the system etc. [whereas lack of prior experience or networks where people have knowledge of HEIs can prove problematic for GTR students]"*

Dr Steven Horne (Theologian, member of the GTR Community)

"I would of course love to be involved in this process moving forward, and I send my apologies to all those attending for my absence. My new role will eventually see me taking responsibility for areas of policy and management within the NHS, in which I fully intend to continue the educational path for other professions too - such as Nursing and Social care. Collaborating on these pathways and ensuring that not only are GTR people accessing health care but are also entering education to fill healthcare roles (nursing, midwifery etc.) is one of my long-term priorities. So yes, I'd very much like to not just stay in the loop, but continue to be more and more involved."

He added that he greatly welcomed the initiative as: *"Unfortunately many Higher and Further educational institutions that I've encountered... 'talk the talk' but do very little in the way of 'walking the walk' [and there is therefore a great need to move such initiatives forward]"*.

Rosamaria Cisneros, MA (Coventry University, Senior Research Fellow; Dance Historian and Critic, Roma Scholar, Flamenco Historian and Peace Activist).

Rosa who is a member of the Roma community is involved in various EU funded projects which aims to make education accessible to vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities.

"Really sorry that I am unable to attend the 10th of September event. What a pity, but congratulations on organising such an inspiring event! It is impressive to see that this is happening and it fills me with hope.

Really excited by the next steps [concept] and please do let me know how I can help. Thank you again for everything"