

GTRSB Pledge Project Report



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1. Introduction

This project set out to provide research evidence on reasons for and practices to counteract the huge disparity in access to Higher Education for Gypsy, Irish Traveller students, Roma students, and students from Showmen and Boater communities (GTRSB). The research constituted a literature review, and a small-scale NU-funded engagement project with local Roma families. The aim was for the results of the research to inform practice, in light of NU's desire to sign the Universities' GTRSB into Higher Education pledge) **GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge | Buckinghamshire New University (bucks.ac.uk)**). The project also set out to communicate with other local HE Institutions who had either already signed the GTRSB pledge, or who had expressed an interest in doing so. A small interest group was set up to hold discussions about the research, including colleagues at Newcastle University, and local HEIs.

The research project aimed to interrogate:

- the main reasons for the huge disparity in access to HE in England for GTRSB communities,
- actions which can be taken by HEIs, which are known to work and/or are sought by GTRSB communities, to improve access, retention, and successful completion of a degree by students from GTRSB backgrounds.

Based upon this evidence, and in consultation with partners in the interest group, the project aimed to:

- provide recommendations and associated guidance for suggested new practice and improvements to existing practices.

It is hoped that this guidance will support the University's commitment to signing the GTRSB pledge which commits HEIs to supporting best practice in:

- the development of widening participation practice to support GTRSB students and potential students,
- inclusive pedagogy,
- representation in the academy,
- the effective use of monitoring of data.

This report summarises the literature review and evidence from the engagement with local Roma families, before providing an outline of the main recommendations. Firstly, however, it is crucial to explain the communities included within the acronym 'GTRSB'

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2. Who are students from GTRSB communities?

Students from Gypsy Irish Traveller and other Traveller communities, Roma communities and from Showmen and Boaters communities are a heterogeneous group of students, who come from a diverse range

of nationalities, socio-economic situations and who have varied languaging practices. The following chart from Mulcahy et al (2017, p.11), provides a useful starting point for understanding this:

Ethnic Travellers		'Romany Gypsies'	
Cultural Travellers	English or Welsh 'Romany' Gypsies (or Welsh Kale)	Sometimes referred to as 'Romanichal' these people have a long history of living and travelling in the UK. It is suggested that they originated in India, although their ancestry had been disputed in the literature (see Okley, 1997). Many speak one of seven distinct languages, primarily Anglo-Romanes and Romani, as well as English.	
	European Roma	Though descended from the same ancestry as British Romany Gypsies this group arrived only recently in the UK from central and Eastern Europe, following the expansion of the EU to include Eastern European countries such as Romania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Roma includes a great variety of groups, distinct in their language, culture and values. This group often rejects the term 'gypsy', preferring 'Roma'. This creates a problem of under ascription when they are asked to identify in a group under a term which includes 'gypsy'. Generally, the European Roma have only limited interaction with other Romany Gypsies.	
	Irish Travellers	Also called 'Pavee' and 'Minceir', these travellers often move between the UK and Ireland and are of Celtic descent. They speak 'Cant' or 'Gammon' also known as 'Shelta'.	
	Scottish Gypsy Travellers	This subgroup consists of further subgroups and was only recently recognised as a separate ethnic group. They may also refer to themselves as 'Nachins' and 'Nawkins'.	
Occupational Travellers	Showmen: fairground and circus people	Showmen have a long history in the UK where fairgrounds have been popular for many centuries. Showmen own and work on fairgrounds and circuses and travel to different sites for seasonal work.	
	Bargees and boat dwellers	Those who live on boats, primarily narrowboats, on canals and waterways. Historically bargees and boat dwellers travelled for employment.	
New Travellers	Though the term 'new' is seen as offensive to some, it is used to differentiate travellers who adopted the travelling lifestyle since the 1970s by choice. Often this group simply call themselves 'travellers'.		

TABLE 1: GTRSB IDENTITIES (Mulcahy et al, 2017, p.11)

It is also important to know that Gypsy, Roma and some Traveller communities are recognised as being ethnic groups protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010

"others, such as New Travellers, have either been deemed not to be protected or have not tested their rights in court. Migrant Roma are protected both by virtue of their ethnicities and their national identities." (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2019, p.4).

Although the acronym GTRSB suggests an itinerant lifestyle, the reality is that

"the majority of the group [GRT families] live in settled accommodation and do not travel, or do not travel all of the time, but nonetheless consider travelling to be part of their identity." (Atherton, 2020, p.19).

2.1 GTRSB student characteristics: statistical evidence

From the outset it is critical to understand that whenever statistical evidence regarding ethnicity is collected, and when this relies upon self-ascription/self-identification, as in schools, it is unlikely that this data will be accurate.

Looking more specifically at the data for pupils from GTRSB communities:

	2019/20		2020/21	
	Headcount	Percent	Headcount	Percent
White - Any other White background	558,877	6.7	565,893	6.8
White - Gypsy/Roma	28,091	0.3	26,045	0.3
White - Irish	22,443	0.3	21,898	0.3
White - Traveller of Irish heritage	6,578	0.1	6,197	0.1
White - White British	5,432,991	65.4	5,410,043	64.9

TABLE 2: SCHOOL PUPIL NUMBERS AS RECORDED BY DFE 2019-2021

(Create your own tables, Table Tool – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

As Crozier et al (2009, p542) put it:

"Fear of discrimination and both physical and verbal abuse has led to a reluctance to self-identify on the part of Roma/Romani people (including Gypsies and Travellers)"

The government's own ethnicity facts and figures website explains the complexities of evidencing people from GTR heritage, especially Roma, but they reference a study which estimates the migrant Roma population as being as large as 500,000 (Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)).

Pupil ethnicity is recorded in state schools: the DfE's statistical first release shows pupils aged 5-18 who are "are of any origin other than White British" in 2020-2021* as:
 33.9% in primary schools (unchanged from 2019/20)
 32.1% in secondary schools (down from 32.2%)
 30.5% in special schools (up from 30.2%)
 24.6% in PRUs (down from 25.5%)

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

National demographics from the 2011 census also show that "35.8% of people in the Gypsy and Irish Traveller group were aged under 18 years" and this was the highest rate across those in the white category. (Age groups - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)).

A freedom of information request to the DfE revealed that more than 35% of Gypsy and Roma pupils are eligible to receive Free School Meals.

Data requested from Newcastle City Council drawing on SIMS Capita school data shows that there are currently 500 pupils who have self-identified as Gypsy Roma in Newcastle Schools, which is likely to be an undercount for the reasons articulated above. 243 of these pupils are in secondary schools. There are a further 1,719 self-identified as of any other White background, which may include Irish Traveller pupils, whose recorded numbers are extremely low.

Data requested from NU Partner's scheme reveals that 4 Partners students who accepted an offer to study were from GTRSB backgrounds (2 self-identified as Gypsy and 2 as Traveller), studying modern languages, business management, mathematics, and geography. Out of the 13 who applied and self-identified as either gypsy, Roma or Traveller, 3 were Roma, 5 were Traveller and 5 were Gypsy. All but one of the 13 received an offer.

3. Literature Review - practice evidence: GTRSB students and Higher Education

The main sources of evidence came from 'grey' literature, some of which in turn drew on published research evidence or new empirical data. This is because as Morley et al (2020, p.6) report, "there is a noticeable lack of both scholarship and empirical data that details the particular issues and requirements faced by GRT communities studying in UK institutions and young people thinking of accessing higher education in the future." The sources of grey literature were initially identified through the reports and documents section of resources on the Office for Students website on a briefing into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities: Resources - Office for Students. From this longer list, on which the authors often overlapped, the following sources proved the most useful:

- House of Lords (2019), Report of a Roundtable Meeting on Access to Higher Education for members of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) communities
- CDIUK Career Matters 24 (2021) GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER STUDENTS IN FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION
- LKMCo (2017) The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education A report on barriers from early years to secondary and beyond (Commissioned by KCL)
- EHRC (2016) England's most disadvantaged groups: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma An Is England Fairer? review spotlight report (1 of 4)
- Communities and Local Government report: Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers
- DfE Report (2010): Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: final report
- HEIM Impact Report: Including Roma Communities in European Higher Education: Celebrating Successes and Identifying Challenges Impact Report (2016)

- House of Commons Library Briefing Paper: Gypsies and Travellers (2019)
- Women and Equalities Committee Report: Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (2019).
- Danvers, E. Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility (2020): Inclusion, Equalities and Innovation: Supporting Roma Students in Higher Education. Briefing Report on Higher Education, Internationalisation and Roma in the UK

Please see the bibliography (page 33) for full details of each publication.

This body of literature revealed what is commonly referred to as enablers and barriers to higher education for some or all of the communities encompassed by the GTRSB acronym. Evidence from this literature revealed that the barriers which most of the communities faced in general, could largely be captured by five inter-relating issues.

Material realities: work exploitation, poor housing (note most Roma are settled communities) or limited and unsatisfactory official Traveller sites; socio-economic deprivation, and social invisibility.

Understandings, values and experiences: poor internal organisation of the GTR group; language and system knowledge; cultural norms and identity; parental knowledge; itinerant communities (not usually Roma); lack of understanding of 'academic life'; concerns about cost and debt and debt aversion; a lack of trust in government advice and fear of institutions such as HEIs.

Prior education: Roma and Traveller pupils achieve far less well at all stages of schooling in comparison to pupils from all other ethnic groups; they are also more likely to be excluded (fixed and permanent) – see section 3.1 below.

Prejudice and discrimination: even when successful in school, there are concerns about not being accepted at university as a result of prejudice; experience of being bullied in school leading to exclusion or self-exclusion (see section 3.2 below); as a result, some will not self-ascribe as GTRSB in HE.

HEI issues: Lack of flexible entry routes, especially for those with caring responsibilities; non-inclusive curricula and difficulties in developing a sense of belonging; sense of exclusion from HE; unconscious bias in HE admissions; inaccurate figures which need disaggregating; lack of trusted person in HEI from whom to get advice; lack of role models.

To further interrogate some of the above barriers, further evidence was collected for this NU project.

3.1 Success at school – statistical evidence

To summarise results of school assessments at the end of key stage 1 (up to 7 year olds), and key stage 2 (up to 11 year olds), the government's ethnicity facts and figures website released this comparative graph:

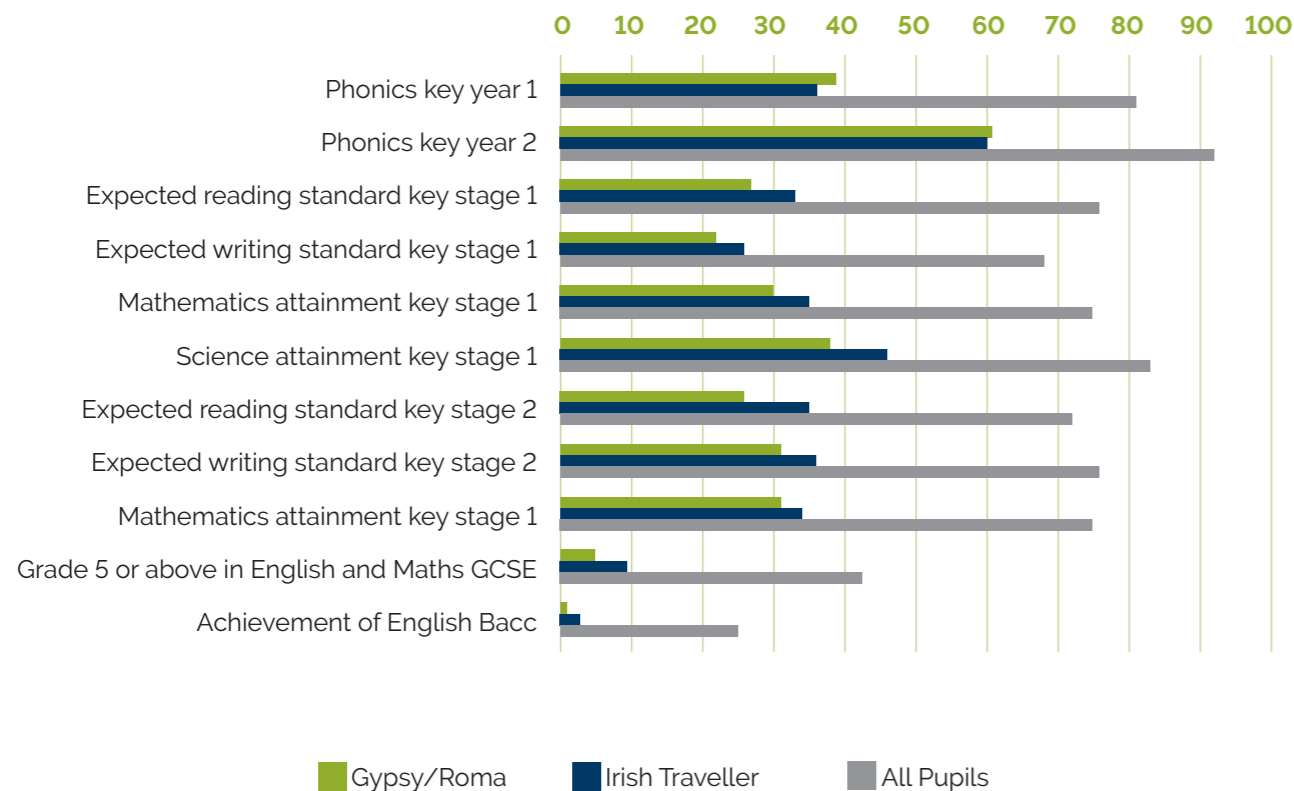


FIGURE 1: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR GYPSY/ROMA AND IRISH TRAVELLER COMPARED TO 'ALL PUPILS' 2016-2017. (Source: Ethnicity Facts and Figures)

For more updated figures (not last year due to Covid) for the SATs tests at the end of key stage 2:

Title: Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, by ethnicity. Location: England. Time period: 2021 to 2022 school

year. Source: Key stage 2 attainment | Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK

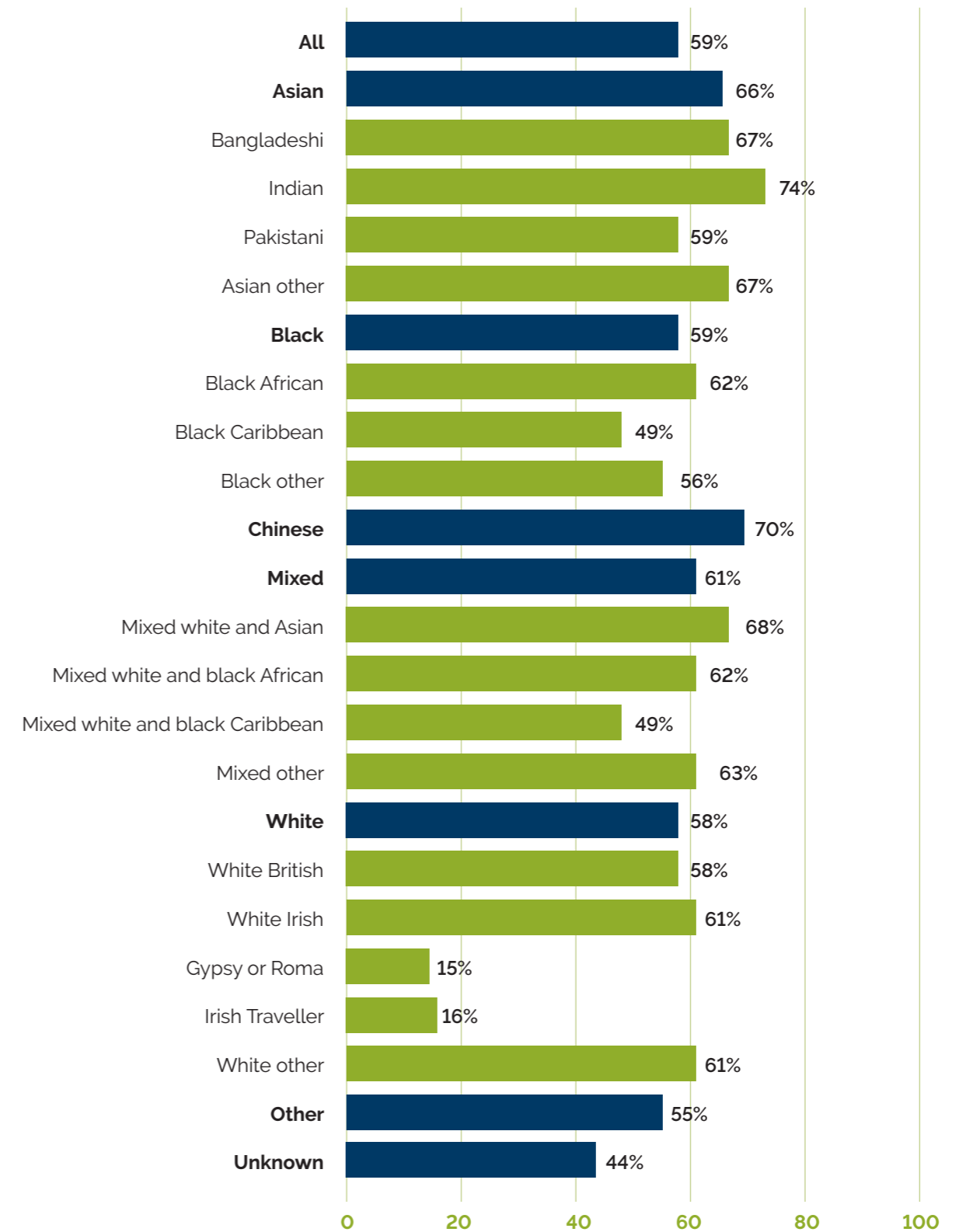


FIGURE 2: SATS RESULTS FOR KS2 2021- 2022 BY ETHNICITY (Ethnicity, Facts and Figures)

"white Gypsy and Roma pupils had the lowest percentage meeting the expected standard in reading (29%) and maths (25%), reading, writing and maths combined (15%), and grammar, punctuation and spelling (23%)

[P]upils from an Irish Traveller background had the lowest percentage achieving the expected standard in writing (23%)"

School results for 10 to 11 year olds - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

By the end of key stage 4 (up to age 16), the pattern continues as shown by this graph which is the average attainment 8 score (a mix of 8 GCSEs or equivalents):

Title: Average Attainment 8 score (out of 90.0), by ethnicity. Location: England. Time period: 2021 to 2022 school year. Source: Key stage 4 performance, academic year 2021 to 2022 | Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK

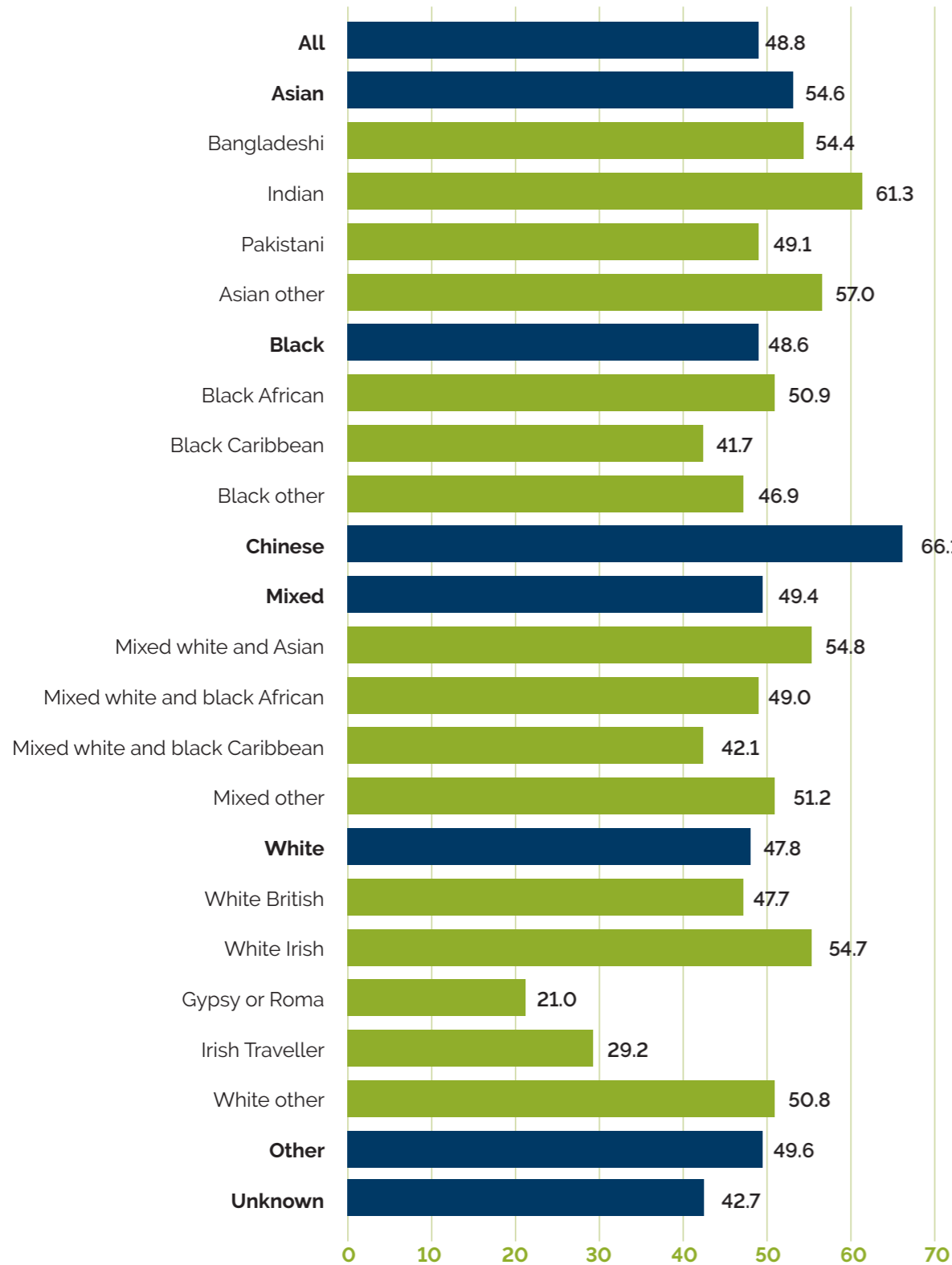


FIGURE 3: AVERAGE ATTAINMENT 8 SCORE AT KS 4 BY ETHNICITY (DFE)

Government statistics reveal that "Gypsy or Roma students were least likely to get at least 3 A grades at A level, with 10.8% of students doing so in the 2020 to 2021 school year. 20.0% of Irish Traveller students achieved at least 3 A grades, compared to the national average of 28.9%. The figures for Gypsy or Roma (61) and Irish Traveller (19) students are based on small numbers, so any generalisations are unreliable." (Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)).

A report by Greenfields et al (2022) showed government figures for A' Level results specifically for GRT pupils:

A Level results England 2018-9

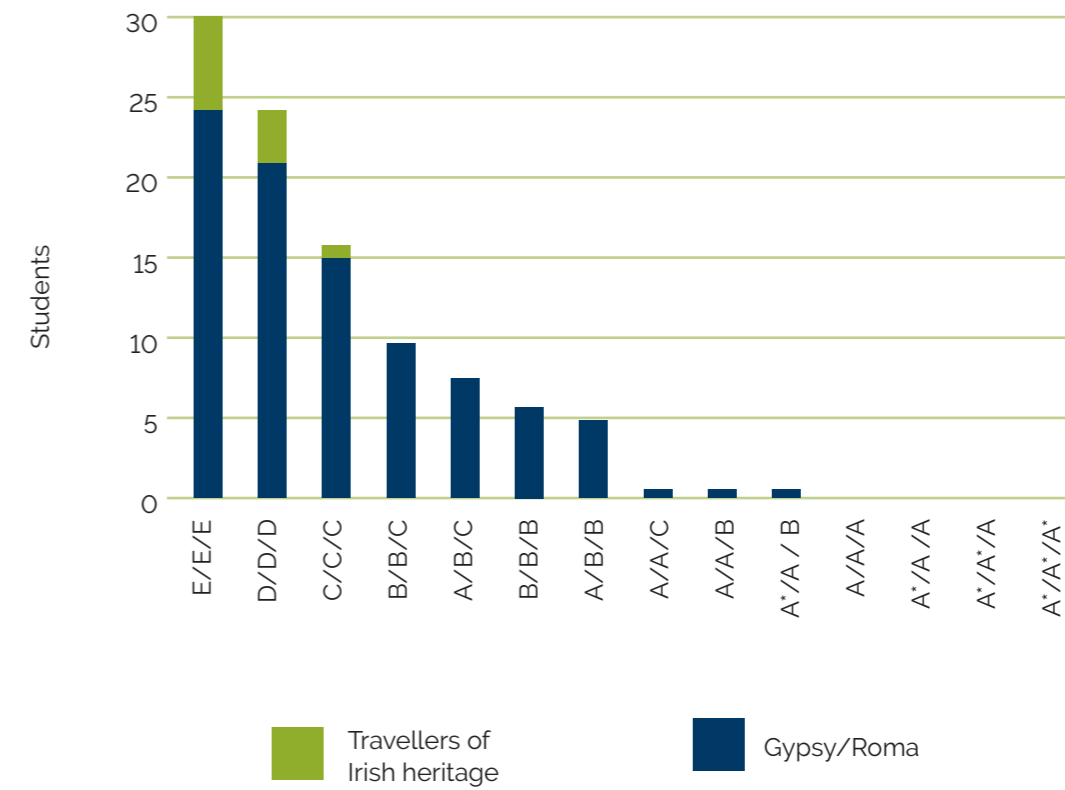


FIGURE 4: A' LEVEL RESULTS IN ENGLAND 2018-2019 BY ETHNICITY

When considering exclusion rates, the graphs are effectively inverted in that exclusion rates are the highest for pupils from GRT backgrounds, as in this graph of fixed period exclusions:

Coverage: State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, England, 2016/17 and 2017/18

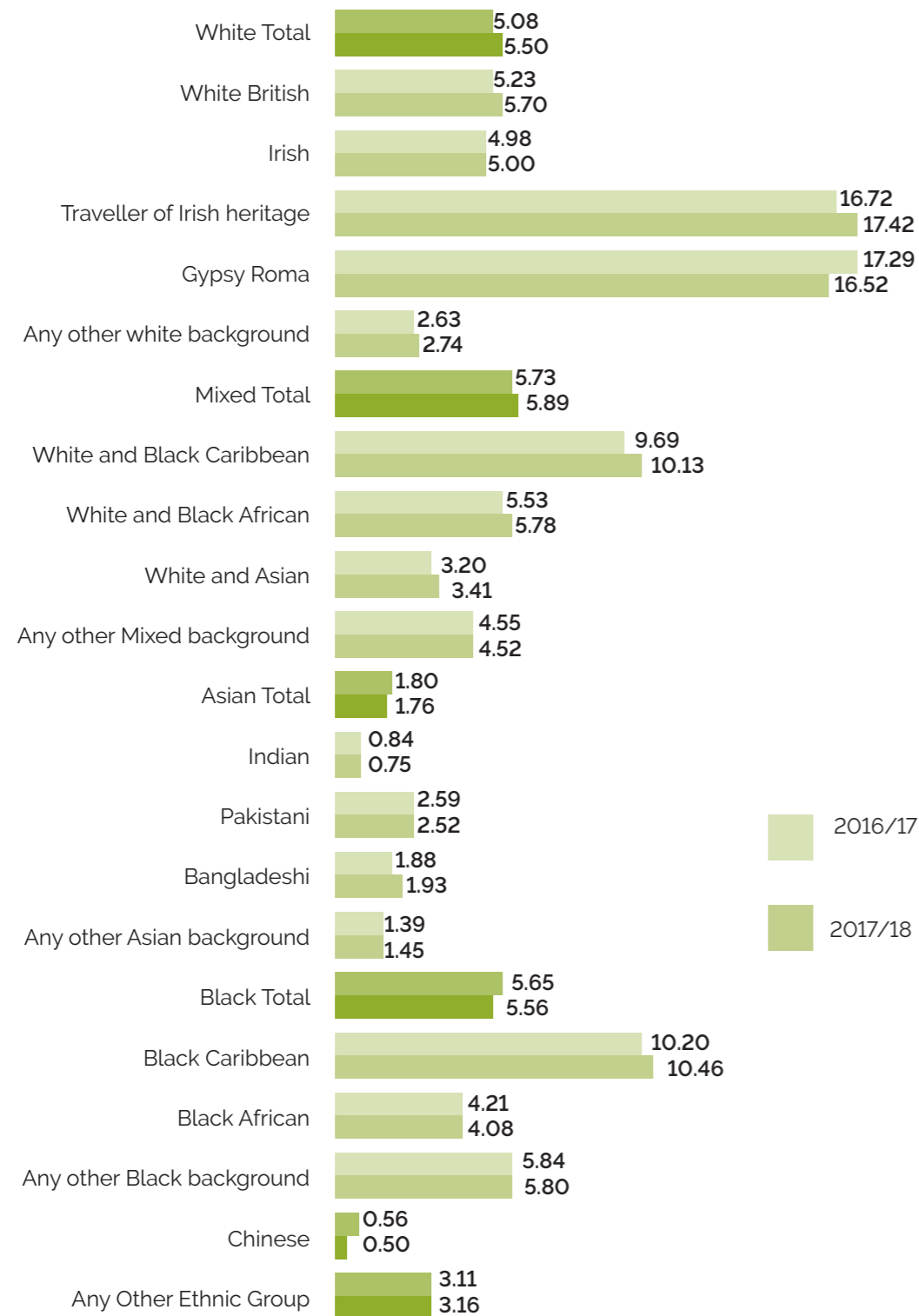


FIGURE 5: Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England: 2017 to 2018 (Dfe)
(Permanent and fixed period exclusions 2017 to 2018 - main text (publishing.service.gov.uk))

*Rates vary by ethnicity:

- As in previous years, pupils of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage ethnic groups had the highest rates of both permanent and fixed period exclusions.

- White British, Mixed and Black Caribbean fixed period exclusions rates have increased. Black Caribbean rate disparities when compared to all pupils are similar to 2016/17." (Permanent and fixed period exclusions 2017 to 2018 - main text (publishing.service.gov.uk))

Recorded absences from school also reveal that pupils from Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller heritage were the most frequently absent from school.

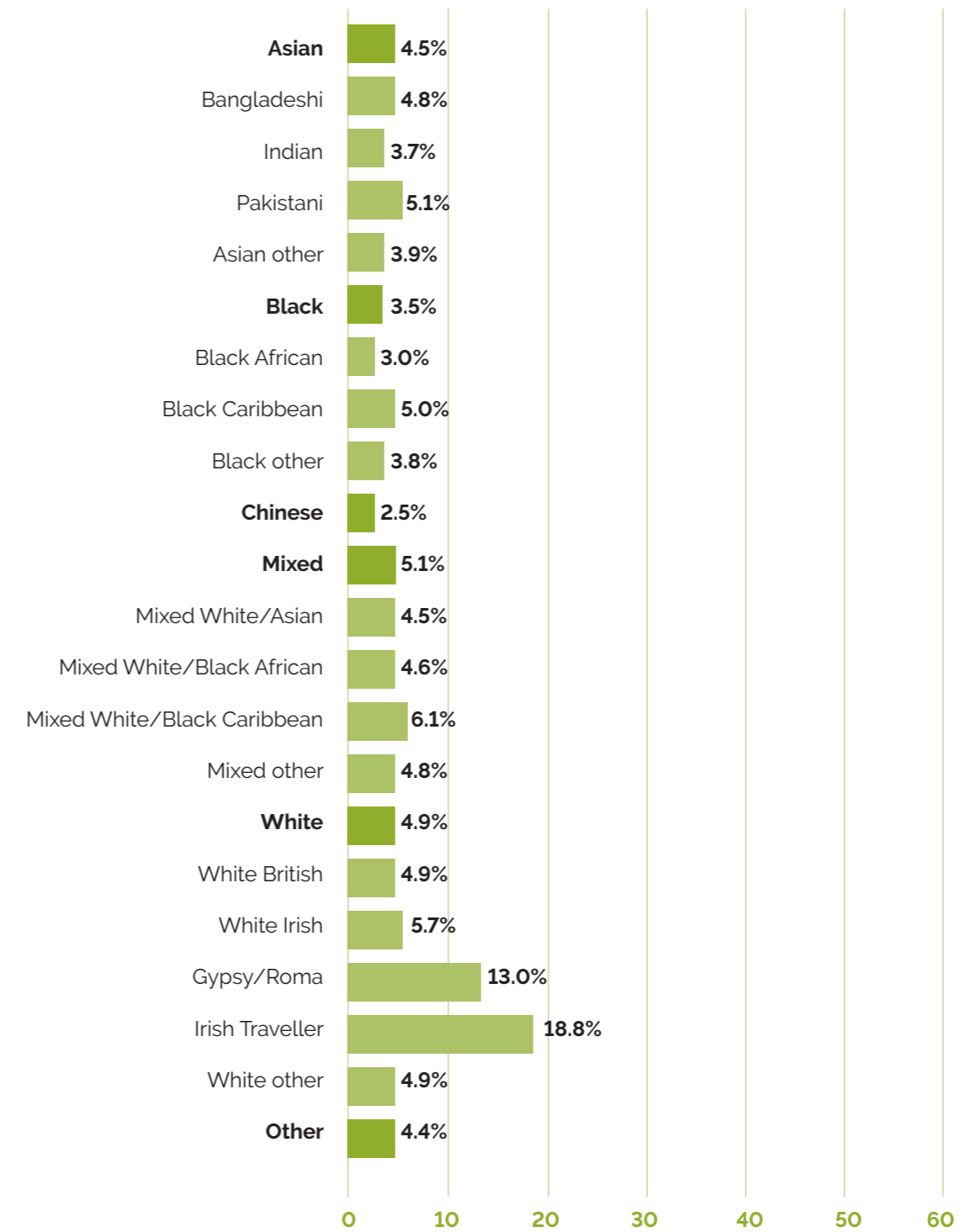


FIGURE 6: OVERALL ABSENCE BY ETHNICITY IN ENGLAND 2017-2018 (DFE)
(Absence from school - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk))

Recent concern has been expressed by Traveller groups and education professionals about a sharp rise in the number of pupils from GTRSB backgrounds opting for home-education (**'Concerning Rise' In Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils Being Homeschooled | EachOther**). In 2009, the Badman review claimed, "It is a matter of some concern that despite a number of research studies and reports, it was not possible to identify with any degree of accuracy the number of children and young people currently educated at home. Our own data concurred with the DfES (2007) report, that there are

around 20,000 children and young people currently registered with local authorities. We know that to be an underestimate and agree it is likely to be double that figure, if not more, possibly up to 80,000 children." (p.22).

A report by The Traveller Movement (2020, p.5) in which peer researchers interviewed forty-four 15-25 year old Travellers in London about the barriers they have faced in education, revealed a range of reasons for leaving school early, chief amongst which for both boys and girls was bullying:

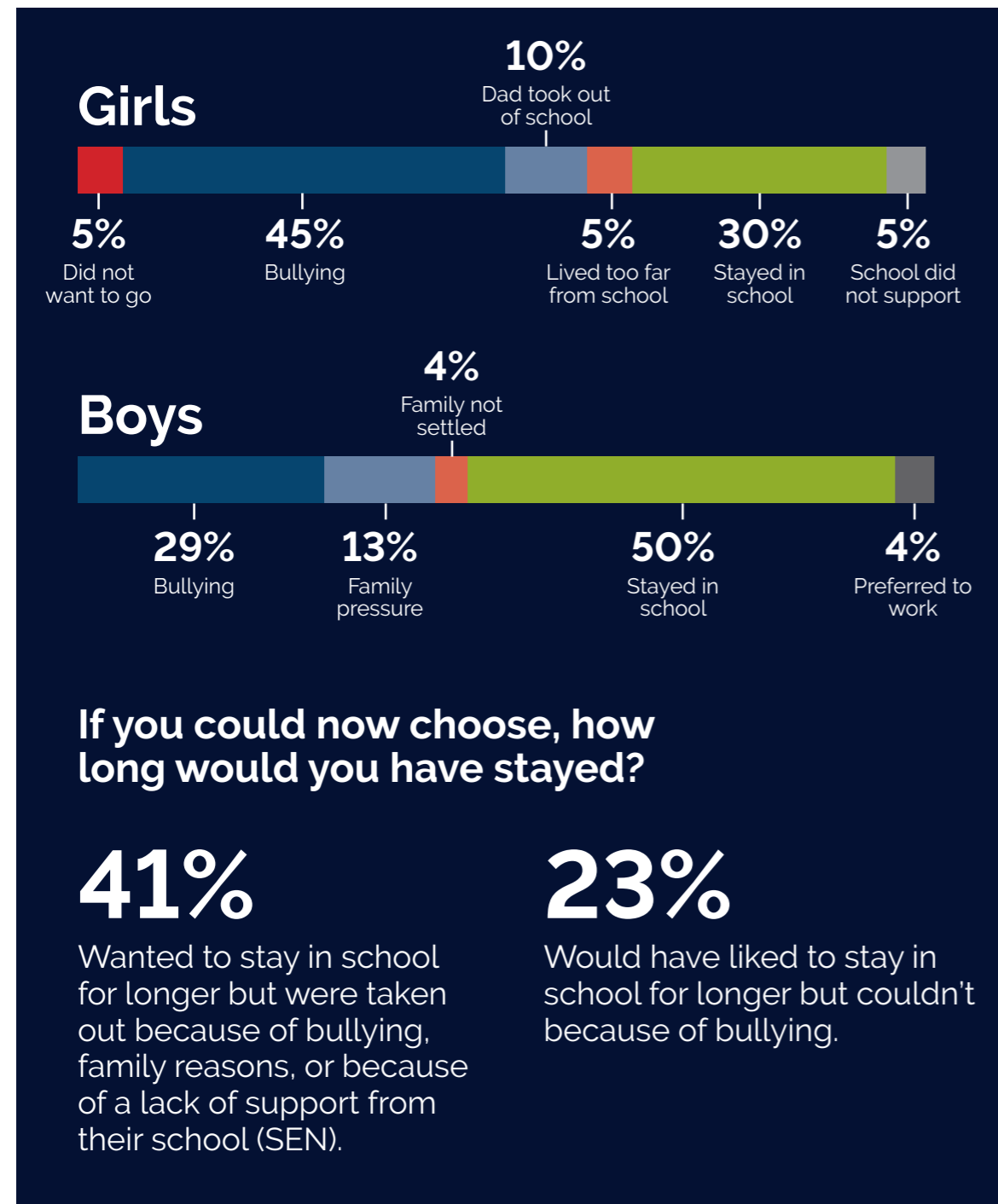


FIGURE 7: REASONS FOR GRT STUDENTS IN LONDON LEAVING SCHOOL EARLY

3.2 Prejudice and discrimination: a lived experience

To understand disparities in school outcomes, engagement and exclusions, one must consider the well documented evidence of the types and frequency of bullying, racism and discrimination against members of GTRSB communities. Mulchy et al (2017, p.40) note evidence that "50% of British people admit having an 'unfavourable view' of Roma people and 1 in 3 admit personal prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers". This is critical to understand because it impacts on access and participation of students from GTRSB communities in HE in two significant ways. Firstly, it is an important explanatory factor of a lack of success at school and of exclusion and self-exclusion from school: "Some researchers have suggested that fear of discrimination is the primary reason for Gypsies and Travellers self-excluding from the education system, and that the perception of parents' disinterest in education conceals a fear of discrimination (Bhopal, 2004)" (Mulcahy et al, 2017, p.40) And secondly, it explains the reticence of communities to trust institutions and particularly education institutions, including HEIs.

A 2014 report by the British Association of Social Workers claims that nearly 90% of children and young people from a GRT background have experienced racial abuse. (House of Commons Library briefing paper, p.64)

In a report by Thompson and Woodger (2020) analysing the UK submissions to Report Racism 2016-2018, they found that 77% of the 115 cases of incidents were reported by people from GRT groups and 23% by third parties (few people from GRT communities reported incidents and this was reported as largely being because they did not think the police would take it seriously).

The aforementioned report by The Traveller Movement (2020, pp.6-7) presents two graphics about the bullying students reported facing in school, which paints a stark picture of pupils' experiences in school at the hands of both other pupils and teachers:

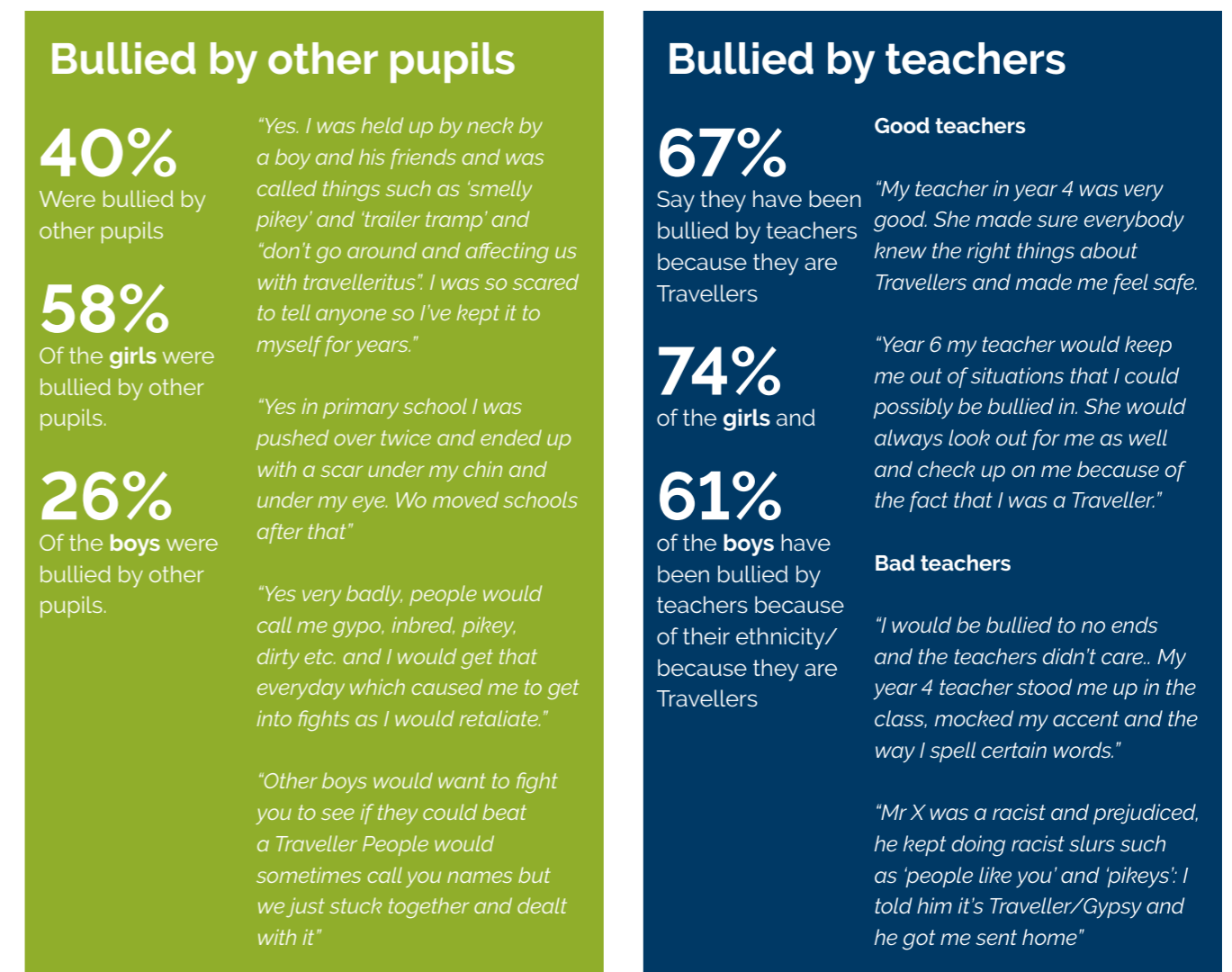


FIGURE 8: BULLYING REPORTED BY GRT STUDENTS IN LONDON

Greenfields and Rogers (2020, p.10) present survey and interview data as "a preliminary evidence base for the significant anecdotal evidence that highlights the 'ripple effect' of experiencing hate crime on mental health, suicide and para-suicide" which provides alarming evidence of the prevalence of online hate crimes against GTRSB as well as interpersonal racism. They found 78% of survey respondents suggest that incidents of hate speech/crime happen very often (with some comments suggesting this took place on a constant or daily basis); 18% selected 'often' and only 3% of respondents indicated 'sometimes'. 94% of this was experienced as "exclusion and discrimination from and within services (e.g. health, education) experienced". In terms of schooling, "78% of respondents highlighted school bullying as significant hate related incidents experienced by themselves and/or their children". They describe the relationship between such experiences and success in school and in further and higher education:

"The inescapable fact is that hate incidents start in childhood, and in response GTR children may either be removed from school at a young age by their parents, or typically may seek to hide their ascription to prevent school bullying. Such responses (withdrawal, or 'passing') often becoming lifelong protective strategies. In the

alternative 'fighting' (as young men in particular were noted to do) to obtain a measure of respect or to at least be 'left alone' by bullies were noted as common reactions, often leading to school exclusions or being labelled as a 'trouble-maker', which in turn could lead to contact with the criminal justice system and the beginning of a downward spiral for the young person in question." (Greenfields and Rogers, 2020: p.12).

Patterns of underachievement and exclusion at school is one factor leading to the huge disparity in access and participation rates in Higher Education for students from GTRSB backgrounds.

3.3 Access to Higher education in England

The school results go some way to explaining the current statistics for progression rates into HE, which the following graphs reveal. Firstly, Atherton (2020, p.27) draws on data from the Department of Education Widening Participation in Higher Education 2019 dataset, to show progression to HE for 15 year old students from white backgrounds at age 19 from 2009-10 to 2017-18:

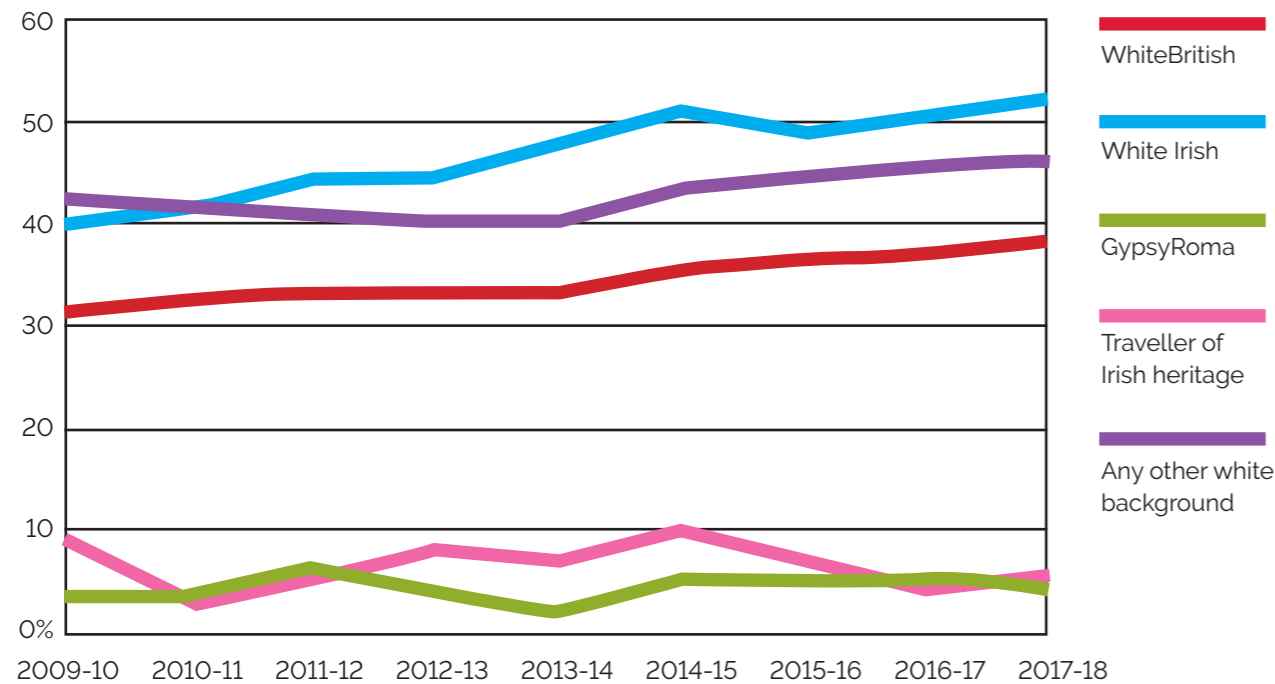
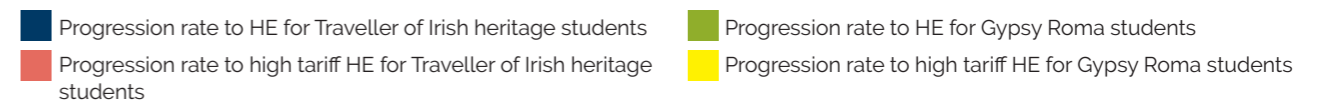


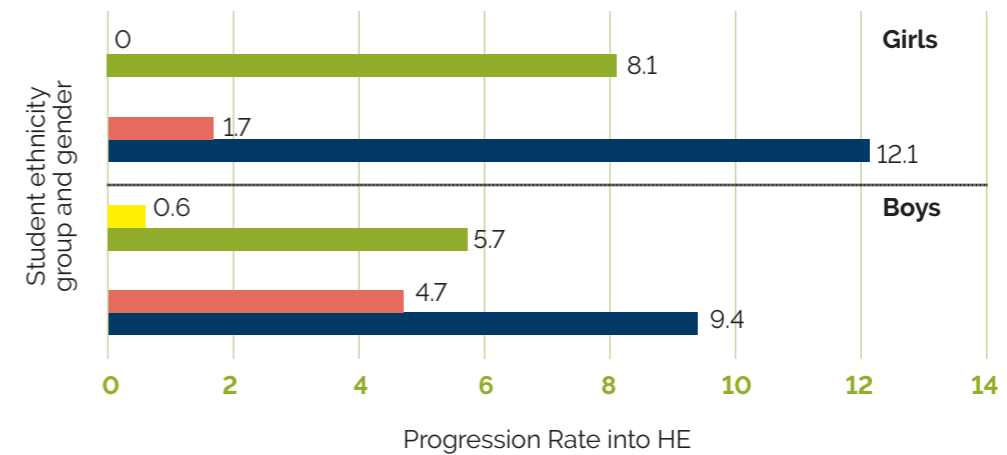
FIGURE 9: Progression to HE for 15 year olds students from white backgrounds at age 19 from 2009-10 to 2017-18

Analysis undertaken for this project, drawing on data from the government's explore education statistics online service, shows progression rates into HE

(high-tariff and other) for all GTR students and for those entitled to free school meals:



Progression rates into HE/high tariff HE for GTR pupils in England 2019-2020

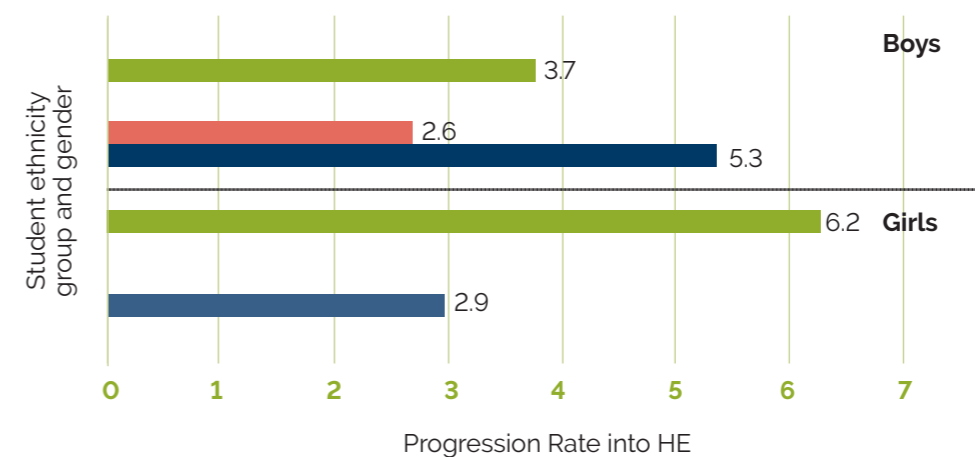


Statistics taken from: Explore our statistics and data - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (exploreeducation- statistics.service.gov.uk)

FIGURE 10: PROGRESSION RATES INTO HE/HIGH TARIFF HE FOR GTR PUPILS IN ENGLAND 2019-2020



Progression rate for GTR students entitled to free school meals into HE in England by gender in 2019-2020



Statistics taken from: Explore our statistics and data - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (exploreeducation- statistics.service.gov.uk)

FIGURE 11: PROGRESSION RATES INTO HE/HIGH TARIFF HE FOR GTR PUPILS ENTITLED TO FSM IN ENGLAND 2019-2020

This reveals that there are no Gypsy Roma students and no female Irish Traveller students who are entitled to free school meals who entered high-tariff HEs in 2019-2020.

Another way of looking at this data is to compare sustained participation in education after Key Stage 4, across ethnicities, as in Atherton (2020, p. 25):

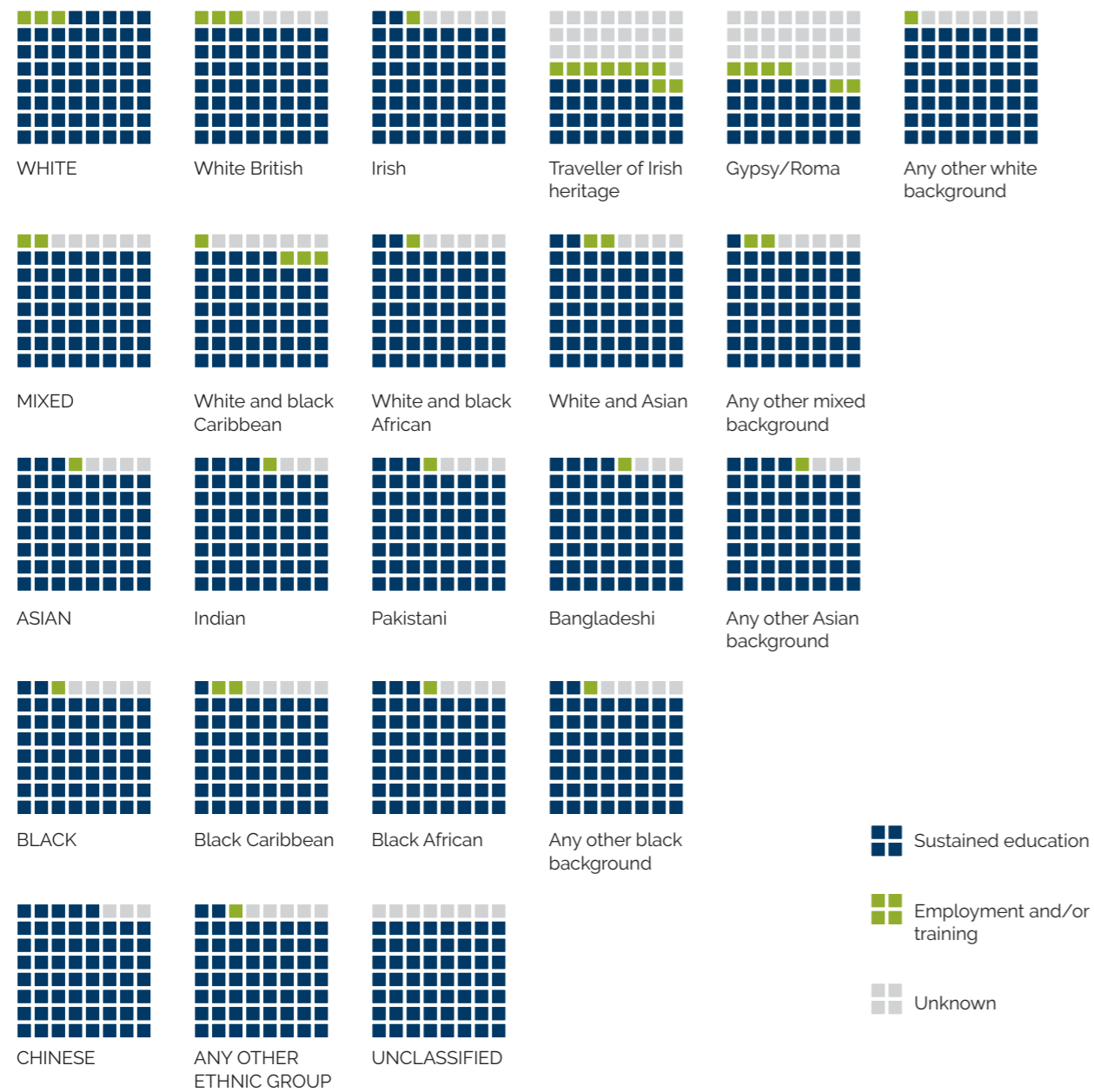


FIGURE 12: Sustained education and employment destinations after Key Stage 4 by ethnicity

Results compiled for the report by Greenfields et al (2022, p.17) show "a clear upward trend in participating in HE and electing to self-identify"

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

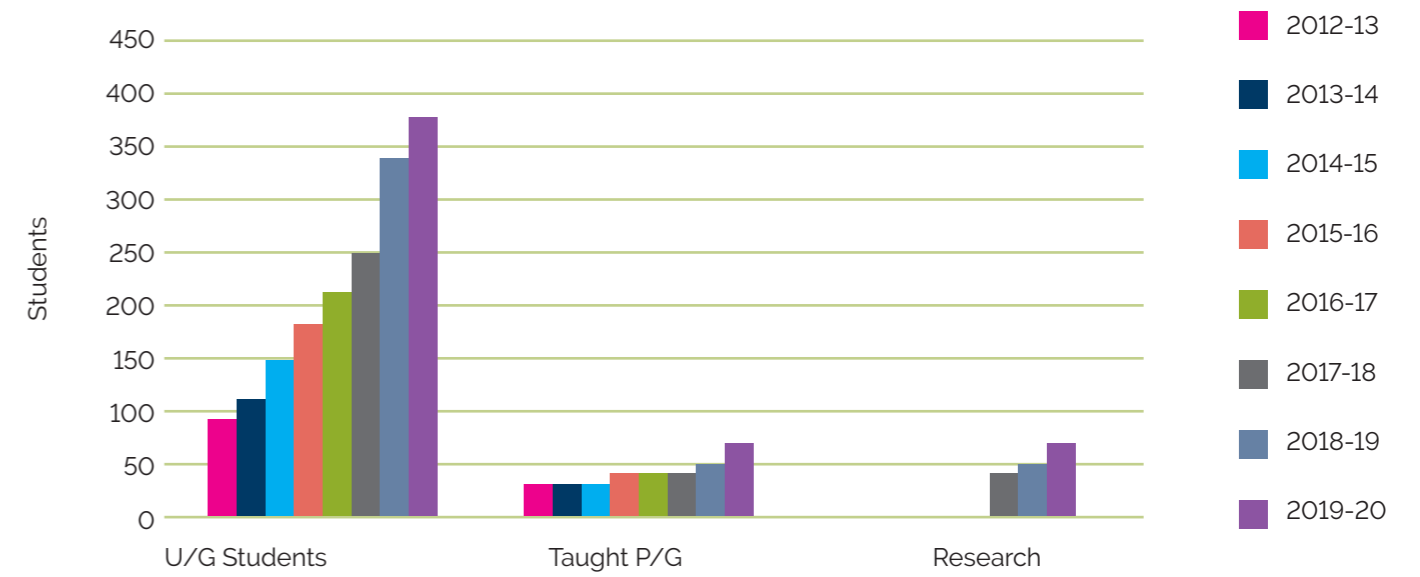


FIGURE 13: A' LEVEL RESULTS IN ENGLAND FOR GYPSY ROMA AND IRISH TRAVELLER PUPILS FROM 2012-2020

Nevertheless, these statistics reveal that we have a very long way to go to make Higher Education more accessible and successful for students from GTRSB communities.

3.4 Enablers for GTRSB students accessing Higher Education in the UK

The literature review also revealed several enablers which HEIs could implement to begin the process of remedying this situation. These were categorised into sub-groups relevant to HEIs for the purpose of this project, as in Table 3 below:

Recommendations General principles

Inclusive curricula - the whole University plays a part in building and supporting a learning community (recognition of the hidden curriculum), issues of belonging and feelings of isolation

Role models, but be wary of pressure on individuals - Role models are important to GTR; 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.

Amplify voices but do not speak for communities

"Nothing about me without me"

Staff must not be asked to commit to initiatives unless they are resourced and supported by their institutions

Massification of higher education means that increasing access is not enough. Support programmes and networks are necessary.

Ask critical questions such as - How can Roma communities trust that there are benefits of participation in higher education when formal education systems have been long complicit in their oppression? What if there are no jobs after graduating?

System Changes: admissions, training and ascription

The discrimination and prejudice towards GRT groups must be recognised and acknowledged, and formally stated as needing to be eliminated

Specific staff training to ensure that unconscious bias and lack of knowledge amongst staff are addressed

Widening participation teams, and indeed all colleagues involved in widening participation in recruitment, admissions, teaching and support, should understand the barriers to HE access faced by GRT groups in order to better address these issue in their policies.

Admissions staff must be trained to recognise any conscious or unconscious prejudice against GRT applicants to ensure GRT applicants are treated fairly.

Improve data and disclosure

Review categories used to define communities which may self-identify in different ways

System Changes: reaching out to communities

Ease the transferring of credits for prior learning and publish and highlight new approaches to different but equivalent entry qualifications.

In addition to standard recruitment and admissions support, hold a bespoke conversation with GRT students about eg personal statements to support their applications and help them understand more about HE.

Include a statement of intent in prospectuses and recruitment material to promote GRT inclusion

Provide specific resources eg make a DVD with a Roma soundtrack to explain the UK education system

Provide information that explains HE and its potential benefits in translation where necessary and work with specialist organisations such as ACERT and The Traveller Education service to disseminate these resources to GRT families

Emphasise entry requirements for courses where a portfolio of evidence of work, experience and skills is especially important

System Changes: support networks for current students

Establish relevant support services - "Nothing about me without me"

Employ community members as outreach and support experts - with expertise on GTRSB students' needs, e.g. isolation, feeling in-between worlds.

Long-term changes

Outreach work which focuses on different routes to education, e.g. home educated - initiatives should inform parents about financial support and loan systems, as well as antidiscrimination and inclusion practice and the pastoral support offered to students at university.

Develop flexible learning options including open and distance learning more compatible with mobility - Mature students also require different access routes and different formats to support them.

Work with community groups, charities, and informal groups.

Seek to enable GTR students to keep their community connections rather than suffering a disconnect.

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

Link with local schools, e.g. university day in the timetable.

Additional Suggestions

Support relevant student societies

Network with regional councils of Gypsies such as the Traveller Movement, HertsGATE and Leeds GATE?

Identify 'Diversity Champions' so that students who may fear discrimination understand that staff are available to support them and address any instances of discrimination

TABLE 3: Enablers for GTRSB students accessing Higher Education in the UK

3.5 Access to Higher education in Europe

Andrzej & Redzepi (2020) provide statistics for the Roma Education Fund's RISP (Roma International Scholarship Programme), which was set up to provide partial financial support for Roma students to study at all levels from Bachelor to Post-doctoral, outside their country of residence. Since 2007, REF (Roma Education Fund) has supported 149 RISP students, and granted 265

scholarships, 52.3% of the total of whom were women. In this period, 73 students successfully graduated, and 55 failed graduation, with the rest still studying. This is an exceptionally high failure rate, which suggests that access to HE alone is insufficient and that support (academic and financial) is needed during study. Other statistics reveal the countries which the Roma students come from and those in which they choose to study.

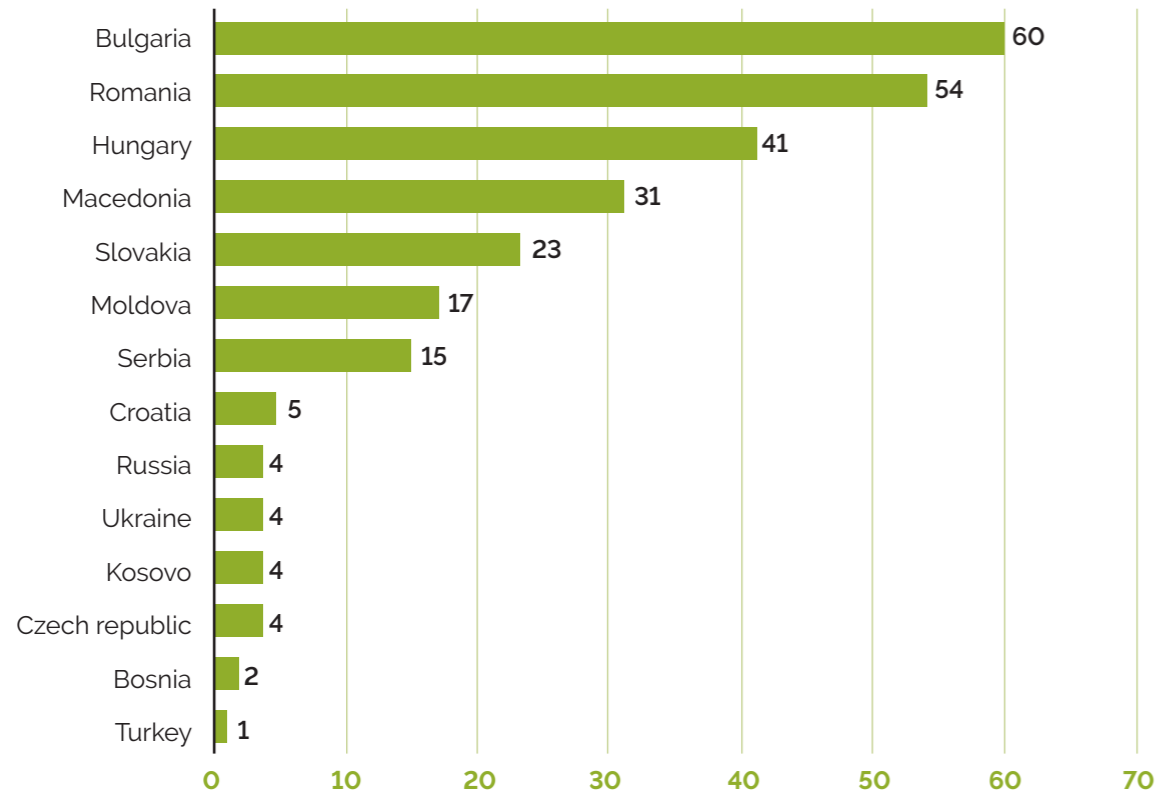


FIGURE 14: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN FOR REF-FUNDED ROMA STUDENTS SINCE 2017

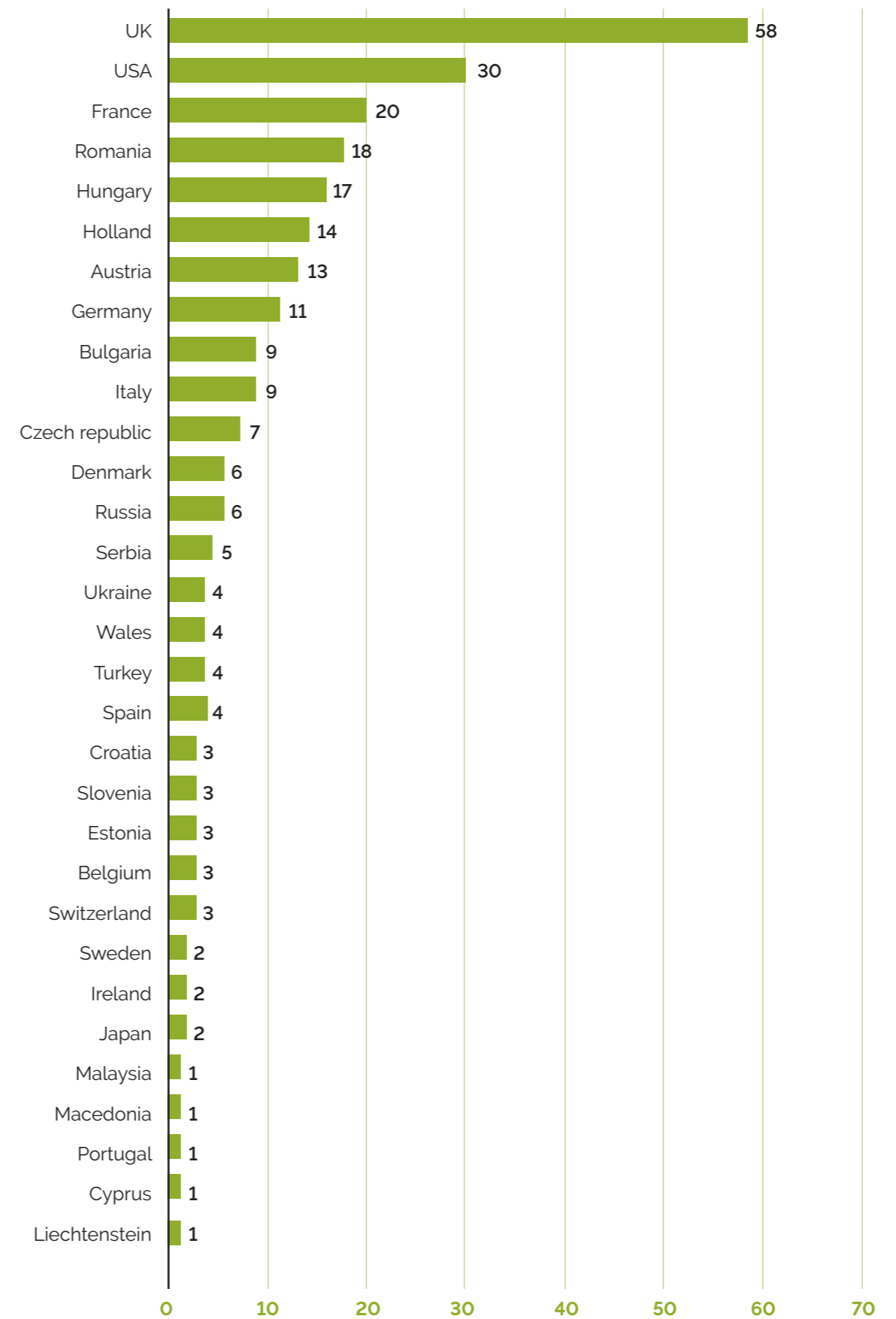


FIGURE 15: DESTINATION COUNTRY OF STUDY FOR REF-FUNDED ROMA STUDENTS SINCE 2017

We can see that the UK is by far the destination of most of the RISP students. However, as Andrzej & Redzepi (2020) remind us, the majority of young European Roma study in their home countries, rather than travel abroad.

4. Literature Review GTRSB students and Higher Education: research evidence

Much of the academic literature focuses on school level education for pupils from Gypsy, Roma, Irish and other Traveller heritages. This literature is also important, however, in understanding the pattern of educational outcomes for pupils from GTRSB backgrounds so that HEIs can work forwards in their own practices but also in 'outreach' work with schools.

4.1 Research into Statutory School-Age Experience and Practice

Wilkin et al's (2010, p.102) study, which tracked national school data collected as part of their comprehensive research of an entire cohort of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils over a five-year period, found that "Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils tend to be concentrated in schools with below average results", and, in common with the statistics presented earlier, "even when controlling for gender, free school meals, deprivation and special educational needs, they make considerably less progress than their peers. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils have significantly lower levels of attendance and one in five pupils from these communities fails to make the transition between primary and secondary school." Several studies have attempted to reveal the reasons for these school level disparities. Of particular concern for progress to higher education, is Wilkin et al's (2010, p.103) finding that "an estimated 80 per cent of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils nationally transfer between primary and secondary school" and that this varies greatly region to region. Indeed, as reported by Bhopal and Myers (2009), poor attendance and underachievement of pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage has been officially acknowledged since the Plowden Report in 1967.

4.1.1 Reasons for disparities in attendance, transfer to secondary school and exclusions

Teacher perceptions and (mis)understandings

Crozier, Davies and Szymanski (2009) found in working closely with schools with GRT pupils in one region of England, an abundance of teacher misunderstandings

and stereotypical perceptions operating to effect practices laced with prejudice. For example, teachers identified pupils as Roma by drawing on bodily inscriptions relating to their skin shade or 'distinctive looks', and in so doing drew comparisons between "those [Czech pupils] who were engaged with school (that is they were well behaved, listened attentively, worked hard and attended regularly) and those who were not, with the latter group being assumed to be Roma" (p.542). The teachers also drew comparisons between GTR boys who were seen to be displaying macho and defiant behaviours, and girls who were more compliant. Levinson and Sparkes (2003, p.599) speak about 'discontinuities' between home and school-based learning, which have particular consequences for Gypsy Traveller boys for whom schools are seen as "inculcating boys with an altogether less masculine identity".

The teachers in Crozier et al's (2009) study also suggested that Roma were reluctant to integrate. In terms of home school relations, despite the presence of family members at the door of the school every morning, the authors found "an underlying assumption ... that the Roma families did not value education." (p.544). Further, teachers accused parents of not wanting to learn English, which was as a barrier to parental involvement. The authors point out, however, that neither the schools nor local authority had received any training in working with GRT pupils, and that such training was also predominantly absent in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. Lloyd and G. McCluskey (2008, p.340) also found that "teachers are confused about what constitutes Gypsy/Traveller cultures and may sometimes either deny that difference is a factor or construct difference as deviance". This lack of cultural recognition towards a tendency of assimilationism is, they argue, part of sustaining "the continuing ignorance of individual teachers and of official bodies."

Cultural Dissonance

Derrington (2016) relays that cultural and community factors are often used to explain education disparities. These factors may include, for example, customs such as attendance at traditional horse fairs, or social norms, where family matters take precedence over school, or core values and belief systems. For example, there may be differences in the perception of age appropriacy in attending schools, where a 5 year old may be considered too young to attend school, whereas a 13 year old may be considered too old for official education. Similarly, Lloyd and McCluskey (2008, p.337) talk about family concerns about "wholesale integration into regular schooling from 5 to 16 years of age [which] may lead to their children increasingly adopting the values and mores of the wider peer group with a consequent lessening in valuing their own Gypsy/Traveller culture". They also found evidence of fears about bullying and assault in schools, not only by fellow pupils, but also "the often tacit and sometimes open support for such harassment by some teachers". Finally, Lloyd and McCluskey (2008) also noted a strong support for the basic maths and English education found in primary schools, "while remaining sceptical about the relevance of much else that is on offer particularly for older children and young people".

However, Wilkin et al (2009), as also reported in Derrington (2016), found that the picture is more complicated and that several other interrelated factors are also at play, relating to:

- Safety and trust
- Respect
- Access and inclusion
- Partnership
- High expectations
- Flexibility

4.1.2 Research evidenced solutions

The literature into schooling for pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Irish and other Traveller backgrounds, also evidences research into improvements which reduce education disparities for this group. Derrington (2010) evidences strategies from successful schools who participated in the Labour Government's National Targeted Intervention Programme, known as GRTAP (Gypsy Roma Traveller Achievement Programme). Key priorities emerged, including:

- Effective use of data to track pupils
- Literacy interventions (for many families, the parents may not have attended school and thus may have literacy problems, too)

- Parent partnerships
- Early years education
- Better preparation and support for transfer to secondary schools
- Raising aspiration
- Focus on improving behaviour and attendance.

Bhopal and Myers (2009) also suggest schools work alongside local authorities' Traveller Education Services (although many such services no longer exist due to financial constraints). They also recognise that school leadership must set the tone for an inclusive culture in school, sensitive to the needs of pupils from GRT backgrounds and thus also flexible in their approach to school systems. They conclude, "Confidence and enthusiasm for learning is directly influenced by the extent to which the curriculum and resources reflect the reality of GR&T culture, language and history" (Ibid, p.311). This is consonant with findings of research led by Smith of Newcastle University, working with Roma families in a 'languages for dignity' approach, where family expertise in translanguaging was used to co-construct multilingual enquiry spaces for Roma children in school. The result was the creation of a learning space, wherein "children were as free and as enabled as possible to leverage all of their [linguistic] repertoire in the service of solving the puzzles and in so doing learn about an historical period/event, or scientific facts, or become prepared for transition to secondary school." (Smith et al 2020, p. 110-111). The results of co-constructing and using a multilingual learning space were improvements not only in home-parent communication, pupil attendance at school, self-ascription as Roma, but also specific improvements to pupils' reading.

4.2 Research into Higher Education Experience and Practice

In a recent and comprehensive report by Greenfields et al (2022), which set out to present the findings of a research project to understand the barriers and enablers to Higher Education access, success and progression for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) young people in West Yorkshire, several barriers and ways forward for HEIs were suggested, putting the voices of GTRSB people at the heart of the report.

They note "increasing evidence ... 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" (Ibid, p.17). Consequently, access courses or routes to HE which may use alternative qualifications are important. However, they also revealed that most of the young people they spoke to for their research "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." (Ibid, p.42).

In terms of reasons for the education disparities discussed above, the young people they interviewed spoke of "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" (Ibid), leading to a loss of trust in all educational institutions.

In terms of ways forward for HEIs, both the study by Greenfields et al (2022) and a local study by Forster and Gallagher (2020) which is referenced in the Greenfield et al's report, evidence very similar findings to the grey literature previously reported. Forster and Gallagher (2020) interviewed a national sample of GRT HE undergraduate and postgraduate students. An overriding message from both of these reports as well as argued by Atherton (2020) is for HEIs to adopt an integrated approach rather than single or one-off projects. Greenfields et al (2022, p.78) call for "a co-ordinated whole school approach [which] extends to partnerships between educational providers at different levels in the system and between statutory and NGO/civil society organisations."

The recommendations to HEIs fall into 2 main categories: promoting access to HE, and support during HE. Forster and Gallagher (2020) provide a detailed agenda of strategies, which takes into account the academic literature from schools, and includes advice for HEIs as well as GTRSB communities to bridge perceived and real cultural dissonances. For example, they recommend "challenging teacher assumptions that university is 'not for' GRT members" and "[a]dvice and information provided to community members should emphasise the transferrable skills gained in higher education and their benefits in gaining employment". They acknowledge the need to build relationships with GTRSB pupils, and support transition to FE and HE. Alongside Greenfields et al (2022), Forster and Gallagher (2020) call for role models to showcase "the successes of existing GRT higher education students in inspiring other GRT members to take up higher education", whilst being cognisant of the possible impact on the mental health and wellbeing

as well as academic progress of role models. Forster and Gallagher (2020) also call for practical interventions relating to course flexibility and "support ... in completing university applications, and universities should consider offering students a choice of completing verbal or written applications".

In terms of support during higher education, Forster and Gallagher (2020) note some important principles, chiefly that HEIs should avoid tokenism and create inclusive environments, irrespective of the number of GTRSB students at a University at any one time. They note that "commitment from senior leadership in HE institutions is essential in supporting efforts to promote equality for GRT community members."

They insist that Universities have clear and accessible policies for anti-racism, which recognise racism against GTRSB students, with effective systems for dealing with such complaints (especially in relation to tackling racism in student accommodation) "which ensure that community members themselves are not made to feel at fault for challenging this behaviour." GRT rights should be embedded in the University as a whole, and unconscious bias challenged in all university services and departments. Related to this, they also note the need for training "for staff in student counselling and mental health teams, in order to ensure that they are able to deliver services to GRT students in a culturally sensitive manner."

They also call for specific forms of representation of GTRSB students in physical spaces, and within the curriculum and not only in terms of inequalities experienced, but also "the assets and contributions of GRT members to society".

They refer to the need for flexibility, with courses and systems specially tailored to GRT students' needs, such as the creation of flexible and distance learning options to facilitate retaining family and community connections and aspects of cultural heritage such as nomadism. They recommend also the creation of peer support networks and communication with GRT students to reveal specific needs as they arise. Support with the conventions of academic study ought to be offered, although it may not be needed by all students. They also suggested that student unions may have more of a role to play in promoting GRT inclusion.

Finally in terms of career development post-study, Forster and Gallagher (2020) recommend, in line with Greenfields et al (2022) who call for bespoke careers advice, that student employability services "showcase employment success stories following completion, in order to help alleviate the concerns of some GRT community members that university may not lead to job opportunities".

5. Report from the local engagement project with local Roma communities

This report was written by Zaneta Karchnakova as a result of the small project she undertook as part of the work towards the GTRSB Pledge, funded by NU's Engagement and Place Award.

Report by Zaneta Karchnakova

I have been working with Czech and Slovak families for over a decade. Every family wants the best for their children and that comes with their education. Unfortunately, the families don't know where to turn to for extra support for their children's education, and most of the schools don't know much about the Czech and Slovak Roma background. They don't know how they have been treated back home when it comes to education and the fact that most of the children get sent to a special education school even if the children have not got any special needs or illnesses. The families are very happy that their children are being treated fairly in UK schools in comparison to Czech/Slovak schools, however they are still not really sure how to achieve higher education and the support they need.

In the beginning of this year, for the past 10 weeks every Thursday I held a session with Czech/Slovak families. We discuss about everyday challenges parents face on their children's education and future. One of the main topics for discussion is about their children's further education. What I have found out after speaking to the parents is that majority of their children leave secondary school and go straight into work, so they can support their families financially. The parents mentioned they don't have the confidence to send their child or children to college or university. Even the children don't have the confidence to pursue further education. This is due to lack of knowledge and information given to the parents or children. The following are the concerns:

1. They feel they won't be able to afford it.
2. The school is not providing enough information to parents around college and university.
3. The child or children are not getting that little extra push to pursue further education. They are not getting information about the benefits and rewards of going to college or University.

4. Most of the Czech and Slovak families are worried about their settlement status in the UK. They are not sure what will happen to them after 5-10 years stay in the UK. They are unsure about if they will be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Due to this parent are also unsure if their children should get into college or university.

5. A lot of the parents don't understand or even know about student loans, how they could apply for it and how repayment of the student loans work. When informed about the student loan, the families were unsure about whether they would be entitled given that they only have settled status for 5-10 years.

6. Majority of the children's biggest challenge is language barrier. Some of the children don't know how to speak English and some children are slightly older and start straight into later years of primary or secondary school which has made it difficult for them to learn. This results into falling behind in education.

The next step we are hoping for the government and education system to provide extra support and extra information to families, children and young adults of Roma community. After our discussion about all this I believe the parents are seeking guidance and reassurance.

My personal opinion is to provide parents/children with more information on further education on how it will benefit them, and how going to college and university getting a degree, diploma can have big rewards for their future and how they also need to give more information to parents about student loans, how it all works. Give children the confidence to pursue further education that you can achieve the grades to get into college or university, just be motivated, dedicated and hard work. I hope this report would give you some ideas and information on how most of the Czech and Slovak Roma families and children feel about the education/higher education. There is still a lot that needs to be done to help and support the families.

6. Guidance to improve access, engagement and successful completion of a degree by students from GTRSB backgrounds

Evidence collated from the literature reviews and local project was presented to colleagues in the interest groups from within Newcastle University and representatives from HEIs working across the region, to arrive at a set of agreed principles and suggested actions. We start with principles and then move towards actions embedded within those principles. We also propose collaborative local action. As Atherton (2020, p.49) advocates, "The two main routes by which widening access work could address these [GTRSB access to HE] challenges is via the Uni-Connect programme and APPs", of which nationally "just under 30% analysed included any reference to GRT communities." (Ibid, p.36).

To address the inequities described in this report, Newcastle University should work in a collegiate manner with other FE and HE providers and GTRSB ally organisations in the region to action the following recommendations in support of signing the GTRSB Pledge:

"Such a pledge is an important tool in helping HE providers understand what they should be doing to support access and inclusion for this group and galvanise action. It needs to be part though of an ongoing programme of work to share practice especially in outreach between HE providers and community organisations, improve data collection and reform HE structures." (Atherton, 2020, p.53)

Overarching principles for action:

1. We need to do something different to make a difference. We propose that given the scale and severity of inequities to accessing HE for GTRSB communities, a collaborative response is required.
2. Change takes time and is cumulative. This project must not be evaluated solely on annual metric measures of increased student access over a minimum period of years. The legacy of

discrimination against GRT communities over centuries will take dedicated, long-term action to undo.

3. Role models from GTRSB communities can be incredibly valuable, BUT reliance on individuals is not advised due to associated unhealthy pressures, so a case study approach or funded team to provide sensitive support is advised.
4. We need work to listen to and amplify voices of GTRSB communities, but not to speak for them: "nothing about us without us" (European Roma Rights Centre, 2014).
5. Outreach work must listen to real concerns specific to GTRSB communities and be prepared to think critically and ask critical questions.
6. Access is not sufficient, ongoing support is required for students throughout their time at university.
7. Participation requires institutional support for GTRSB students as well as changes to the institution itself, enabling GTRSB students to keep identifications with their heritage and avoid feelings of disconnect.
8. Staffing for responsibilities for change must be resourced (including workload allocation) and supported.

Proposed Actions

These actions are specifically for students from GTRSB backgrounds but are expected to be beneficial to students from many other minoritized groups. They have been devised in light of the research literature on GRT access and inclusion, and are consistent with some of the recommendations in the Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged and the Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education reports by the EHRC and UUK.

I. Creation and employment of GTRSB access and participation lead role(s), shared between the participating HEIs, with an attached peer support group from student body (including internships) and academic allies across the HEIs to work for and across the regional universities and to action:

- Provide access support in relation to matching prospective GTRSB students' wishes and (predicted) grades to the range of courses and requirements on offer in the region from participating universities (as in the MERIT model which works in the region).
- Work with APP, admissions, and other relevant teams in participating HEIs (for example Student Engagement and Progress teams, Student Support and Wellbeing, and those in Student Conduct roles or on Disciplinary Panels) to provide information and training to recognise, acknowledge and work to robustly counter specific forms of racism, discrimination, and prejudice towards GTRSB communities and associated biases in systems and expectations in HEIs.
- Work with appropriate colleagues across HEIs in participating HEIs to provide information and training on the history, diversity, multilingual dexterity, and knowledge of GTRSB communities and to encourage co-production of knowledge for decoloniality.
- Work with APP, admissions, and other relevant teams in participating HEIs to provide information and training on the specific barriers to HE faced by GTRSB students.
- Work with APP, admissions, and other relevant teams in participating HEIs to provide translations of aspects of HE and HE access which families find difficult to understand.
- Work with APP, admissions, and other relevant teams in participating HEIs to improve data collection (including options for self-ascription), analysis and disclosure.
- Work with EDI teams in participating HEIs to embed GTRSB communities in their work.
- Work with DPDs and other relevant teams to support bespoke conversations with students and communities (rather than generic open or taster days) and provide support from application through to university transition (including information on how to write personal statements, opportunities for financial support, and preparing to study activities and/or involvement of role models in open days).

- Work with specialist and ally organisations such as ACERT, The Traveller Education service and local community groups to disseminate information.
- Support the HEIs in visibility for GRT month in June (but not as a one-off stand-alone event, but integrated into curriculum changes as point 3 below).

- Work in the first instance to establish what is required in terms of appropriate support services for current GTRSB students, working within, alongside and, if necessary, beyond existing student support systems. This would include, for example, being cognisant of potential cultural differences in accessing standard mental health and wellbeing support and the provision of alternative support (e.g., pastoral, peer, chaplaincy, student union). It may also involve specific antidiscrimination practice changes and support (e.g., adjustments to guidance on bereavement or extenuating circumstances).

Other actions which can be actioned independently of the GTRSB team, alongside their remit, with their support.

II. Building trusting relationships with communities through system changes. Work with appropriate teams (including course leads) to:

- Change the outward-facing messages about access to courses, e.g., publish and highlight different but equivalent entry requirements; include a statement of intent to promote GTRSB inclusion (e.g., publicise this in the partners scheme website pages and other affirmative action schemes); emphasise entry requirements for courses where a portfolio of evidence of work, experience and skills is important.
- Make and publicise a video in several languages (or draw on those created by GTRSB pledge team) to explain: the UK education system; the benefits of HE study; the requirements; the antidiscrimination and inclusion practices and pastoral support offered to students; and answer critical questions such as funding, loans and prospects for work after HE study.

III. Begin to embed knowledge co-production in the creation of decolonised and inclusive curricula, address the hidden curriculum and issues of belonging and feelings of isolation with and for GTRSB students across degree courses. Start with a few courses in each HEI as appropriate. Embed this within existing charter work, e.g. Race Equality Charter. Draw on existing resources created within NU, e.g. Roma Oral Histories Project (Funded Projects | Oral History Unit and Collective | Newcastle University (ncl.ac.uk)); Roma education project ROMtels (ROMtels; ROMtels; Newcastle University (ncl.ac.uk)).

IV. Creation of funded PGT and PGR study in specific schools for GTRSB students (no strings attached) and for any subject of study, not just GTRSB themes (although these may be included). This may occur as part of existing systems of funding as in Northumbria. Access to all students from GTRSB communities to funding to support attendance at academic-related events and activities as per their interests.

V. Consider flexible learning options more compatible with mobility for some members of GTRSB communities and tailored provision such as an on-site creche.

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