

## **Who we are:**

We are writing as a team of 4 academics and professionals supporting, and researching the experiences of, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students in higher education. Dr Emily Danvers is Lecturer in Education at the University of Sussex and Co-Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the University of Sussex School of Education and Social Work. Dr Tamsin Hinton-Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Education and Head of the University of Sussex Education Department. Chris Derbyshire is Partnerships Manager in Widening Participation at the University of Sussex. Tommy Buck is Projects Co-Ordinator at Friends, Families and Travellers. Together, we work on GRTinHE – an ongoing collaborative project that supports Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Students in Sussex into or towards Higher Education. Contact details, reports and further information on our work can be accessed at [www.grtinhe.com](http://www.grtinhe.com).

## **Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) in UK Higher Education**

We urge the committee to reposition members of this community as educationally aspirational and as potential future graduates. While we recognise work to support GRT young people to stay and succeed in early-childhood, primary and tertiary education should be prioritised, there is an accompanying need to think ‘high’ - to beyond school and the opportunities offered from graduate and postgraduate study. At present, GRT people are highly marginalised within higher education – with current outreach work offering intermittent targeted opportunities. Consequently, we think funds should be allocated to universities for strategic work to target and support GRT people’s access, attainment, and success.

The following headlines and recommendations for action come from our research and projects (listed below):

- Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) are a highly marginalised UK higher education (HE) minority. Between 2-11% of GRT young people enter UK HE, equating to around 200 students each year. This compares to an average of around 43% of young people accessing HE.
- The Office for Students mandates access and participation plans to incentivise universities to work with under-represented groups. But while ‘GRT’ are a recommended target, universities are not mandated to meet this ethnicity gap. This results in patchy and intermittent outreach and policy interventions for GRT people to access, support and success in HE.
- Consequently, we think there is a place for a national agenda and targeting, with associating funding and guidance to support and mandate for the inclusion of GRT people in HE. We see a clear value within this in collaborating across institutions and with schools, colleges and third-sector organisations to learn from and with each other to enhance understanding in collaboration and comparison. A regional approach, such as that employed by the National Collaborative Outreach Programme has the potential to foster such connections and partnerships.
- Demographically targeted university outreach practices can invertedly reduce groups, including GRT people (who constitute a broad and diverse community) to a

blunt category in the drive to make this group 'knowable' enough to design 'workable' interventions. We urge against quick fix approaches towards more careful, nuanced and ethical outreach practice. In practice, this will involve funds allocated to institutions that allow for longer-term projects and performance indicators of success that value enhancing community engagement and forming meaningful partnerships, alongside increased GRT student recruitment. We have developed and piloted the CIAO model for GRT inclusion along such lines.

<https://www.grtinhe.com/ciao>

- We also think there is a 'fragile promise' inherent in organisations promoting HE to GRT people when HE is not necessarily an inclusive space for such marginalised groups. For GRT people's access to HE to have maximum societal impact, universities must take seriously their commitments to inclusion. This involves looking 'inwards' to existing institutional practices and seek ways to value GRT voices, histories and experiences within practices, cultures and curricula. The GRTSB Pledge is an evidence-based example of how this has and could work  
<https://www.bucks.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-stand/gtrsb-higher-education-pledge>. This will ensure that GRT people are able to feel included within and capitalise upon the intellectual and social opportunities provided by graduate and postgraduate study.

## Supporting Data

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