

**Barriers and supports in access  
to higher education for Gypsy,  
Traveller and Roma students.**

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## Introduction

There are consistently fewer than 200 university students in the UK who come from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background (there were 184 in 2018-19 according to the Office for Students, 2020). These groups have protected ethnic status under the Equality Act (2010). However, they remain among the most educationally disadvantaged groups across the UK and Europe. Gypsy Roma and Traveller young people face significant challenges in accessing and progressing through education (Gould, 2017). These challenges emerge in school (Hamilton, Bloomer & Potter, 2012), affecting the pipeline through school and into university. Scholars have identified that these young people face barriers to achieving and staying in education including experiencing a culture gap (Hamilton, 2018), high levels of exclusion (Derrington, 2005), and bullying, racism and prejudice (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008). Our own research with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities reinforces the evidence that they face hate and discrimination in a range of public and private services including education, and that organisations need to adapt to be more supportive, inclusive and accessible for these communities (Thompson & Woodger, 2020).

In 2019/20, Goldsmiths had 10 students who disclosed their ethnic status as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller. This is a relatively positive picture given both the national context and that many people from these groups choose to hide their ethnicity for fear of repercussions. Between 2019 and 2021, colleagues from the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS) at Goldsmiths were supported by Goldsmiths' Widening Participation team to explore, through surveys and interviews, the support needs and barriers experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students in Higher Education in order to make clear recommendations for how we might improve access, engagement and retention for these groups. This report outlines the research we undertook and its findings and recommendations.

Of the university-educated participants who took part in our research, 89% were the first generation of their families to attend university. 32% of the respondents' parents and 55% of their grandparents had not completed any education at all.

Some of the most significant barriers to accessing higher education were identified as:

- Lack of support from teachers and families to remain in and progress through education, earlier in their educational journeys
- Imposter syndrome (impacted by lack of support and experiences of exclusion)
- Discrimination
- Lack of role models
- Finance

Some of the most needed supports were identified as:

- Financial grants (beyond the current student finance system)
- More encouragement and support from teachers and families to remain in and progress through education, earlier in their educational journeys
- Access to role models who have been to university
- Tailored support services in universities

Issues of invisibility and the need for representation emerged as significant themes under their broader experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion in education. A paradox emerges between students who choose to hide their ethnicity to protect themselves from discrimination and hostility and those who seek a voice and the acknowledgement that they 'exist' in their university.

The recommendations emerging from the research are significant for all areas of the student lifecycle from the pre-application stage to supporting positive career outcomes. Targeted support mechanisms need to be in place to reach out and engage these students and to retain them and support their progression. Financial and practical supports need to be in place that are needs-specific. Additionally, moves to decolonise and liberate curriculum content and teaching methods need to not exclude this 'hidden minority'. Current students from these communities need to be supported as role models and ambassadors to their peers. All student facing staff need sufficient knowledge and training to effectively support them.

We use the inclusive acronym 'GTRSB' throughout this report as an umbrella term that is equally inclusive of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater (sometimes referred to as Bargee) identities. While Gypsy, Roma and some Traveller communities have achieved hard-fought protected ethnic status, Showmen and Boaters are still considered to be cultural rather than ethnic groups in law. However, all are under-represented in higher education and face overlapping challenges, discriminations and support needs.

## Methods

Survey and interview methods were employed to gather quantitative and qualitative data about the educational journeys of GTRSB individuals. The research explored the participants' thoughts about the barriers and supports in access to higher education as well as their educational journeys more broadly. We recognised educational disadvantage begins much earlier in their educational journeys than at the point of application or not to higher education. Therefore, it was relevant to get a holistic perspective on the participants' overall experiences of education. GTRSB communities are hard to reach and due to their experiences of systemic exclusion, they are often mistrustful of research. As such, the data collection was supported by an alumnus of the university from a Romany Gypsy background.

An online survey was circulated via social media channels and groups relating to GTRSB communities. The survey did not receive a large number of responses despite repeated calls to take part. Overall, we received 44 online survey responses. The online survey comprised of closed and open-ended questions pertaining to specific areas of educational experience e.g., relevancy of curriculum content to the individual, the level of support received from teachers, etc – as well as specific questions about the barriers and supports to accessing higher education in particular. Participants were asked to respond to the survey whether or not they had attended university or completed a degree. This allowed for a wider perspective on forms of access and barriers. However, given the focus of the study, it received more responses from those who had studied or were studying higher education programmes than those who had not.

In addition, we conducted interviews with 9 students from GTRSB backgrounds. Two of these were undertaking or had completed a postgraduate degree, six were undertaking or had completed an undergraduate degree, and one was an A-level student. Interviews were conducted either over the phone or online via video call. Interview participants were recruited through the survey and via the networks of the researchers. Interviewees were asked to complete the survey prior to interview and the unstructured interviews started with reflections on their survey responses before opening-up into their broader experiences of education and particularly higher education.

## Sample

Participants identified as the following: Gypsy (36%); Roma (21%); Showmen/Circus (16%); Irish Traveller (9%); Scottish Traveller (5%); Traveller (5%); Welsh Traveller (2%) and English Traveller (2%); Romani (2%) and Romany (2%).

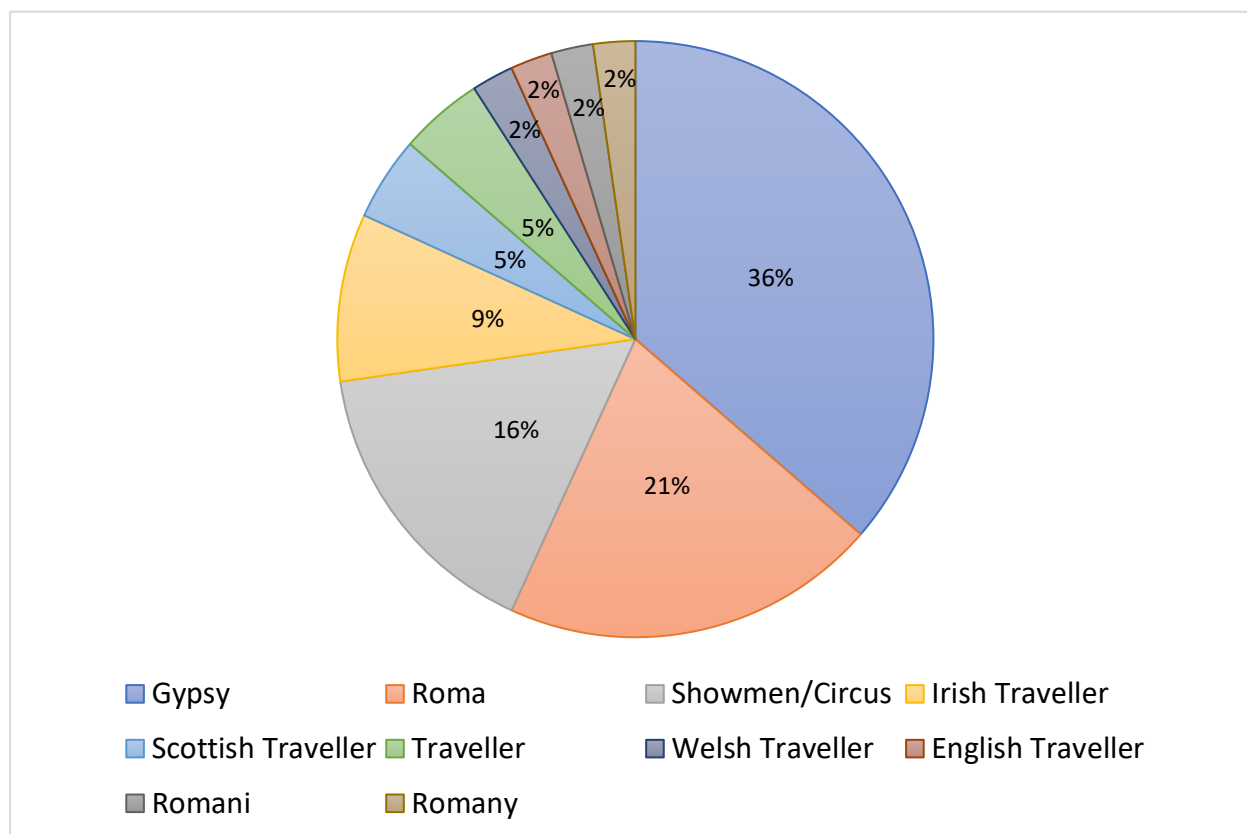


Figure 1 Breakdown of ethnic identities of survey respondents

Respondents reported their highest level of education as the following:

- 7% had completed a doctorate;
- 26% had a postgraduate degree (MA/MSc);
- 33% had completed an undergraduate degree;
- 7% had completed A-levels or equivalent;
- 16% had completed secondary school with GCSEs or equivalent;
- 2% had completed secondary school with no qualifications;
- 2% had completed primary school;
- 7% did not complete any education;
- 2% did not respond to this question.

As such, the majority of responses (66%) came from individuals who had university qualifications. This high proportion reflects the focus of the research being higher education. As the survey asked what the highest level of education was that they had completed, it is likely that a number of the

respondents who had completed secondary school and/or A-levels or equivalent were also current university students.

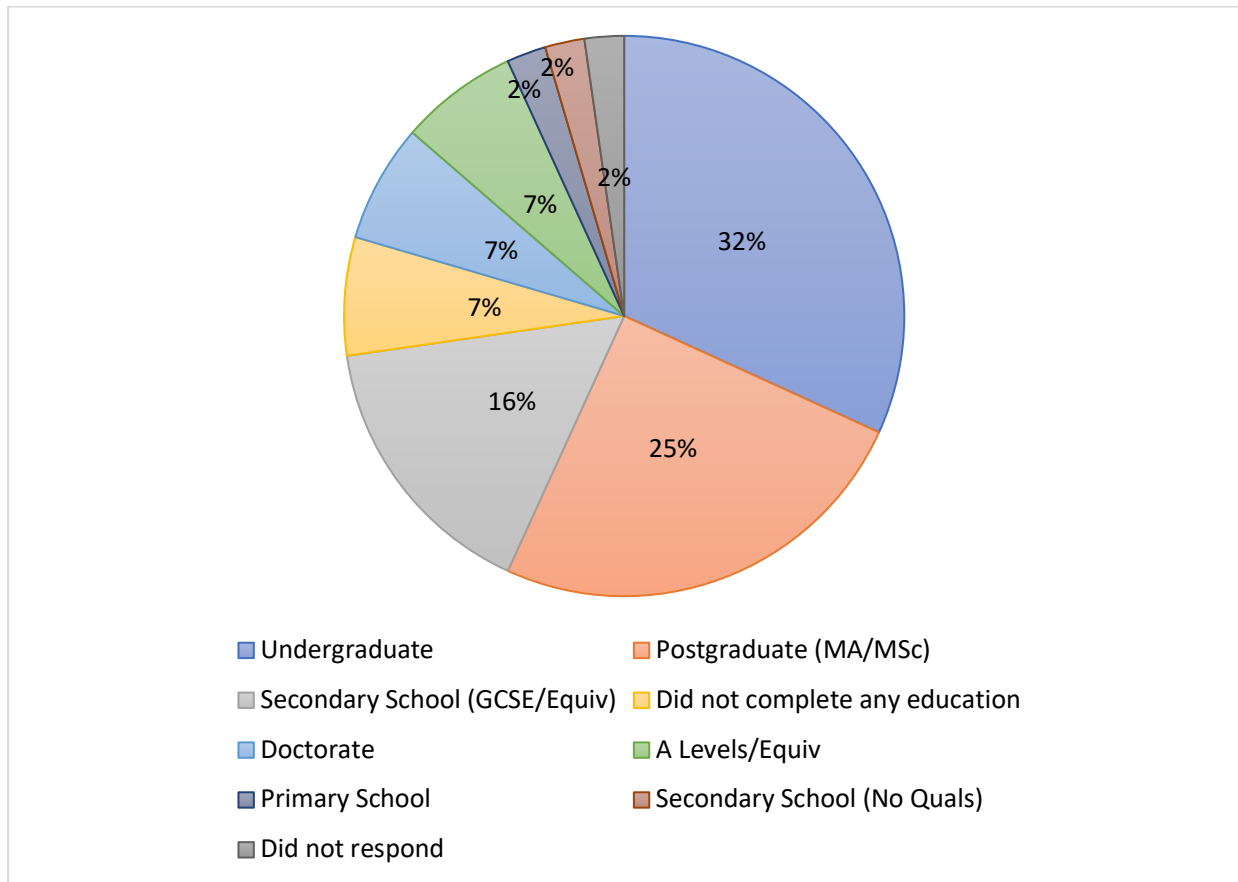


Figure 2 Breakdown of participant's 'highest level of education completed'

The survey also asked about the educational backgrounds of parents and grandparents. 32% of respondents' parents had not completed any education and 54.5% of their grandparents had not completed any education. 89% of university educated participants were the first generation of their families to attend university.

## Survey Findings

This section reports on findings from the online survey and will present these findings through a combination of statistical data and survey comments. These findings are presented under subheadings related to each key question from the survey.

### Experiences of teaching and support in education

Participants were asked to report on how supportive, overall, they found their teachers to be throughout their educational journeys. 43% reported feeling neutral about the support they had received overall from teachers during their educational journeys. 23% felt teachers were 'mostly unsupportive', and 5% said they were 'not supportive at all'. 18% felt their teachers had been 'mostly supportive', while only 9% felt they were 'very supportive'. Their comments reflected a broad scope of experiences with teachers. More positive experiences of support were marked more often by teachers acting as advocates and providing consistent academic encouragement. Less positive experiences sometimes reflected a lack of understanding of GTRSB student needs.

*My teachers were not unsupportive. I did feel they didn't understand the reality of being a 1st generation scholar from a Romany background and, being unaware of it, assumed perhaps that there was no support required.*

*I think teachers need to develop a better understanding around GTRSB culture. It should be mandatory for teachers to complete [GTRSB] cultural awareness training.*

For some participants, it went beyond a lack of understanding to them experiencing racism and discrimination from teachers and lecturers:

*I had a teacher pull me out of lesson and accuse me of being a witch.*

*I have had a renowned professor asking very personal questions about my upbringing and lifestyle and making assumptions about me due to my identity. When the people in power who are supposed to be your mentors make you feel this way, it is very difficult to question or challenge their assumptions for fear of being disliked or left out of the conversation. And, in some cases, being marked down.*

Some previous studies into GTRSB schooling experience have found that pupils felt teachers held narrow understandings around their needs and culture, and often did not feel that teachers supported them with regards to experiences of racism and bullying in school (Wilkin, et al., 2009). The above experiences highlight that this remains an ongoing situation for GTRSB students in schools.

Some participants stated they had been encouraged to hide their ethnicity to avoid discrimination from teachers and the wider school:

*My teachers were not aware of my background (Romani on my father's side), and my parents encouraged me to hide it.*

*I was told by my family to hide my ethnicity in order to 'get on.' My family actively encouraged me into education. I hid my heritage my entire educational life, identifying as White British.*



Hiding ethnicity is a repeating theme identified within this study and will be explored further in the interview findings.

## Curriculum content

The survey asked about the relevancy of curriculum content in the personal educational journeys of respondents, and how well they had related to it. Only 9% of respondents reported relating 'very well' to curriculum content, while 23% reported feeling it was 'mostly relevant'. 36% felt 'neutral' about the curricula they had encountered, 23% found it 'mostly irrelevant' and 7% found it 'not relevant at all'.

Respondents' comments again reflected a variety of viewpoints. Some expressed that they found the curriculum relatively interesting and yet tended to explain how they had independently adapted what was being taught to their personal interests and abilities. More participants, however, shared that they felt the curriculum was difficult to understand as it did not speak to their lived experience, as in the example below:

*I didn't have a clue what the lessons were about. Literature focused on rich people in houses... history was irrelevant to me and never mentioned my people.*

Another participant explained that even where there was representation in the curriculum materials, it was ignored or went unmentioned:

*My teachers completely erased Roma and Travellers in what they taught. Even when it came up in readings or class, they skimmed past us.*

Reflecting on their experience of university, one participant shared the importance for them of authentically representative curricula:

*In my experience in the social sciences, I came across very little literature relating to Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma communities. I have found they are massively under or misrepresented in higher education. This makes it difficult when your peers are finding much of the curriculum resonates with them, but you are struggling to feel the connection. This can leave a person feeling particularly alone and othered.*

Other studies have highlighted the importance of reflecting GTRSB culture and contributions in educational curricula (Wilkin, et al., 2009). This is particularly key in the context of low representation of GTRSB groups in higher education staff and student bodies.

## Learning and teaching styles

Participants were asked to reflect on how engaging they found styles of teaching and learning throughout their educational journeys. 36% found learning and teaching styles 'mostly unengaging' and 7% found them 'not engaging at all'. 34% reported feeling neutral. 14% found them 'mostly engaging' and 7% 'very engaging'.

More positive comments highlighted the impact of motivating and adaptive teachers who could inspire engagement with learning. Many respondents, however, felt their learning and support needs were entirely unheard or unaccounted for in their experience, as in the example below:

*They were trying to teach me French when I couldn't even spell or write in English.*

Another participant shared how they felt isolated as a consequence of inaccessible teaching styles:

*I was able to understand it after it was explained to me... too much professional jargon creates barriers to engage and resulted in me feeling isolated at times.*

The below two participants described similar experiences of struggling to engage with the dominant teaching and learning styles in higher education after they had not received adequate support in early schooling:

*I find university-style lectures are difficult to focus on and relate to if you are from certain backgrounds and haven't already been taught how to get the most out of them.*

*Another thing I found difficult was picking up the basic skills I had not been encouraged to develop at school, such as a foundation of algebra and chemistry that were vital to my degree. It is possible to obtain a good degree without this background but certainly there were times when, in order to understand something at university level, I had to return to and build from something I might've learned in primary school.*

Teaching and learning approaches that are tailored to individual student needs and are considerate of structural barriers to learning are considered central to supporting GTRSB pupils (The Traveller Movement, 2019). Targeted support and specific interventions for these groups in universities are necessary to address disadvantages experienced earlier in their educational journeys. This could include proactive support services such as access to mentors. The above experiences emphasise that early schooling and higher education have yet to completely acknowledge and supply for the broad spectrum of learning styles and needs.

## Barriers and supports

Survey participants were asked to select, from a list what they felt were key barriers for GTRSB students in going to university. They could select multiple categories.

The most chosen options were as follows:

1. Lack of support earlier in their educational journey
2. Lack of role models, such as family and friends having been to university
3. Imposter syndrome
4. Discrimination
5. Lack of encouragement by teachers/school/college to apply

Participants were then asked to select which one barrier they felt was the most significant. The most chosen options were as follows:

1. Lack of support earlier in their educational journey
2. Imposter syndrome

### 3. Finance

As highlighted already, many respondents felt they did not personally receive enough support in their early schooling to guide them successfully into higher education. One participant further shared their view on this major barrier:

*A lack of understanding from the education system about the reality of being Romany in the UK today. More familiarity with this would enable educators to address issues and make provisions for students in this position. At present, it seems like many are unaware of the systemic inequality that exists.*

Lack of support from family, alongside the need for role models, was raised by respondents in their comments as highly important for encouraging higher rates of participation in higher education among their communities:

*Lack of encouragement by family to apply. Parental attitudes to education are very influential and you need the support and motivation of your parents to do it. I think lots of parents are afraid to let children go to university because of Gorgers influences and they don't think about it as an option.*

*Lack of direction from family due to the discrimination within their locality outside of the Gypsy community - very difficult to change attitudes and behaviours of families when the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individuals around them who aren't part of the Gypsy community are the same.*

Participants were also asked about what supports would make the biggest difference in helping more GTRSB students access university. Again, respondents were asked to select from a pre-defined list, and the most popular choices were as follows:

1. Financial grants (beyond the current student finance system)
2. Encouragement and support to apply from schools/colleges
3. Access to role models who have been to university
4. More encouragement and support earlier in their educational journey
5. Tailored support services for GTRSB people in universities

Participants were then asked to select which one support would generate the biggest impact in helping GTRSB groups access university, with the highest responses being:

1. Financial grants (beyond the current student finance system)
2. Access to role models who have been to university
3. More encouragement and support to remain in or progress with their education (e.g. from teachers and families) earlier in their educational journey

Financial issues are paramount. GTRSB communities have some of the highest levels of poverty and low-income rates amongst minority ethnic groups, due to consistent marginalisation and employment disadvantage (The Traveller Movement, 2014). Many young GTRSB people enter employment at an early age and work to support themselves and their families while still in education.

The following participant's view spoke to the three key areas of support chosen by respondents, and highlights the interplay and impact of structural and community dynamics:

*There are numerous cultural values that conflict with an ongoing education. For example, contrary to popular belief, Romany families aren't often very rich and children work from a young age. Young girls are also expected to run a home, care for children (even if they have none of their own) and also for community elders. Some of the breakthrough social milestones have not yet reached the Romany community. Though friends and family are, in my experience, very proud and supportive of ongoing education...Universities also have a markedly low understanding of Romany reality, the systemic racism and structural inequality the group faces, only reinforcing our feeling of marginalisation and invisibility when we're there.*

This sense of invisibility and marginalisation builds on the earlier findings about the absence of support and understanding from teachers and lack of relevancy of curricula to their lives.

To conclude this section, the survey findings show that while many respondents had relatively positive experiences in education, they also reported significant existing barriers and areas for consideration for widening participation in higher education.

## Interview Findings

Interview data was subject to thematic analysis. Three key themes emerged that echo and build on the survey data.

The key themes identified from interviews are as follows:

1. Racism and discrimination in education
2. Family and community support
3. Wider systemic exclusion

These themes and the survey data reflect broader GTRSB education research. In 2007, a Children's Society report examined GTRSB young people's perspectives on education and found that many of the causes of educational disengagement stemmed from exclusionist and hostile educational environments (Ureche and Franks, 2007). Some of these factors impeding engagement included racist bullying and discrimination, a non-relevant curriculum, and inaccessible learning and teaching styles.

### Racism and discrimination in education

Racism and discrimination underpinned many of the experiences of education shared by interview participants. This racism was described as manifesting in several different ways. Racialised bullying by peers, in particular, was described often by participants as a key factor they felt impacted GTRSB students and their progression through education.

*From the community, it's not always seen as a positive to be in education...I would say it mainly stems from bullying at school. I would go as far as saying it's systemically racist at school for Gypsies and Travellers.*

*I think bullying in schools, I think that's going to be the biggest barrier, the schools. Because that's when kids first learn that people don't like them. Because that's when they first start to hear insensitive comments, discrimination.*

One interviewee shared that while they had experienced racist bullying, their teachers had recognised and addressed it:

*There was a lot of racism in my school. But it was all dealt with, as if somebody was being racist to a person of colour. There was one person who messaged me... completely unprovoked and said 'You effin' G\*\*o'. And I sent a screenshot straight to my Head of Year, who sent it on... and come Monday, that person was in isolation for two days learning about the persecution of Gypsies throughout the years.*

This same interviewee then expanded on their views about addressing anti-GTRSB racism in schools:

*I think if you deal with that element of racism, start teaching it in schools... My English teacher came up to me at the beginning of Year 12 and said to me, 'I'm rewriting the Year 9 English course content, I want to include something about Gypsies and Travellers, can you help me?' So, I think if it's written into the curriculum, you can end racism from there and then you can encourage people to stay in school. Because a lot of people do have the problem of racism and they don't want to stay and face more of it.*

The importance of educational curricula was raised as a key issue by survey participants. The above participant's experience speaks to the relevancy of widely representative content, both in ensuring visibility for marginalised identities and in challenging racism.

Another participant shared their personal positive experience on their university course, in which GTRSB-specific content formed part of the curriculum and featured in discussions:

*The most positive outcome I've had from uni is that everybody in my year group now knows what a Gypsy is... just, even for them to say the word Gypsy. They're talking about it, they're saying something, it means we exist, it means we're there, it means we're in the mainstream, it means we're at university.*

This sense of 'existence' through representation in curricula and discussions could potentially combat the sense of invisibility and marginalisation described by other participants. It also presents an alternative to feeling like they need to hide.

Interviewees also shared, similarly to survey participants, that they had felt forced to hide their ethnicity to avoid bullying and stereotyping by both peers and staff at school.

*We present as white very often... it's something we can hide, it's something we can pretend, we can lie about it. And that's a good thing for our survival because sometimes you have to lie about it to get through something.*

Derrington (2007) described the unique cultural dissonance felt by GTRSB students who are faced with a choice of existing and presenting wholly as themselves, or assuming the pretence of a privileged identity to survive the racism and stigma attached to their identity.

The participant quoted above also went on to explain the wider consequences of GTRSB people having to hide their identity, and how it influences initial access to higher education:

*A lot of GTRSB kids go into school and they probably wouldn't tell their classmates or their teacher about their background. So, they go through silently and the teachers don't know that and they're maybe not aware that actually you need to push that kid a little harder with 'Hey, have you really thought about going to university? Have you thought about higher education? This is a possibility for you'.*

The same participant explained further the impact of the invisibility of GTRSB people and the lack of representation or recognition:

*I think there's still huge challenges to face. I think that you can say [there are] lots of elements of racism and discrimination, specifically in the UK. In theory, [GTRSB] kids can go through the school system and do well. The problem is this is very difficult to find, the data still isn't there. It's still very difficult to identify members of these groups because a lot of them are illiterate and a lot of them don't want to be found. Why would they want to reach out to an institution? No institutions have ever helped them.*

This highlights a key question about how many GTRSB students are currently in higher education but feel unsafe in declaring their identity. This question challenges a widely held notion in the public imagination that GTRSB communities do not participate in education by virtue of 'cultural standards'. Rather, it is the structure of educational institutions and the associated environments that continues to exclude and discriminate against potential and current students.

## Family and community support

The issue of family and community support was discussed by several interviewees. A majority of respondents felt that a lack of GTRSB role models having been to university was a significant barrier for young people entering higher education. 'Access to role models' was also named as the second most vital support that would enable more GTRSB people to access university in the survey.

Participants described that a lack of support from within their family or wider community in their pursuit of higher education was not due to cultural values or standards - rather it was due to family members' own negative experiences in education that generated fear for children being exposed to racism.

*My mum and dad were fairly supportive but they were really concerned...from their experience they'd both been kicked out of school before they were 12 and the time they'd spend in school was really tough. They'd just been sent to the back of the classroom and been told to just fill in a colouring book. They were very much excluded from the school system.*

The same participant further elaborated on their parent's feelings about their move towards higher education:

*I come along, I do very well in the school system and now I've set my sights on higher education and they were filled with this fear because they know that they can give me a living, they can give me a trade, they can train me up to do this. But that's not what I want, I want to go off and go to higher education... and I'm probably going to have a really tough time because of my background and people are going to be mean to me. And, of course, as parents, they didn't want that, you don't want your kids to have negative experiences.*

This experience reflects the generational impact of racism and perpetual exclusion. Parents want to, naturally, shield young people from the trauma of racism at school that they experienced. These young people themselves experience racism when they do attend education, and this can continue a vicious cycle of low representation and invisibility in education particularly in progression to further and higher education. The outcome is that, while young people may wish to continue their education, they may lack access to community role models and mentors who have already done so.

The participant quoted below shared their experience of having a role model from her community within higher education:

*I never had any expectation that I would go to uni. A cousin of mine had done the course that we're on and I was working with her at the time... I saw her development and I just saw how she grew and the benefits of it and something just clicked and I thought 'I can do this'.*

'Imposter syndrome' was cited by survey respondents as the second most significant barrier to accessing higher education. This can be a consequence of a lack of role models and mentors in higher education, alongside inadequate academic attention in school and encouragement to progress. Imposter syndrome as a term is often inferred as an individual struggle with confidence and esteem, one that the individual must personally overcome. However, a person is likely to feel as if they are an imposter in an environment that treats them as one. One interviewee shared their perspective on *personal* versus *structural* responsibility for engagement:

*I think it's a tough choice between the culture themselves not accepting that it's a possibility and the reality that they still get treated poorly by any institution, including schools. There's lots of schools that have really unhelpful attitudes towards [GTRSB people].*

While family and community support is greatly important for educational participation and a lack of this support can certainly be a barrier, another participant's opinion speaks to the root of the issue:

*I think before you can sort the problem with girls going on to higher education, [GTRSB] going on to higher education, you have to sort the whole racism thing in schools.*

This brings us back to the need to address systemic racism and exclusion before being able to respond to the perceived lack of family and community support for GTRSB students in higher education.

## Wider systemic exclusion

The final theme identified from interviews is the wider systemic exclusion levied against GTRSB communities and its impact on educational participation. GTRSB communities face consistent exclusion from mainstream systems such as employment and healthcare as well as education (Ryder, et al., 2021).

As reported earlier, respondents to the survey reported 'finance' as one of the major barriers to engagement in higher education, also reporting that financial support would make the most impactful difference for GTRSB university access. As mentioned previously, GTRSB communities have some of the highest levels of unemployment, exclusion and poverty. The issues they face that lead GTRSB people to feel the need to hide their identities extend beyond education to the labour market. One interviewee highlighted the racism Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller job applicants face when disclosing their identity:

*It's disgusting that you have to hide it, but I do feel that if I put it on a job application, I'd automatically be discounted or maybe not prioritised with interviews...And I think that's just because of all the stereotypes surrounding Gypsies and Travellers, you know, 'They steal, they're late, they're rude, they're whatever else', I feel like you have to hide that and then change the stereotypes before you can say it.*

The significant barriers to mainstream employment clearly impact on aspirations and motivations to engage in higher education. Exclusion from other systems and services are also relevant. The same interviewee also talked about exclusion from healthcare, speaking about the difficulty in accessing screening or diagnosis for neurodiversity and specific learning difficulties:

*You don't want to be that person who has gone to the NHS, because you don't really go to the hospital and the doctors when you're a Gypsy and Traveller. You don't want to have to fill in the forms. There's a thing called medical racism. I don't feel I've ever experienced that, but especially when you put your address as living on a site, you tend to get a lot of doctors going, 'Oh, well, your health condition can be attributed to living on a site or your lifestyle'. So a lot of people won't go to the doctors and won't get diagnosed just because they don't want to fill in their address.*

This has significance particularly for professional programmes in higher education that require an occupational health assessment signed by a GP prior to study. The interviewee's struggle to get adequate diagnoses and support for learning difficulties also reflects a key issue for young GTRSB people earlier in their educational journeys. It is reported that GTRSB students have the highest, and most disproportionate, levels of learning and educational needs out of all ethnically minoritized groups. However, many students are incorrectly or inaccurately labelled by unqualified teachers and school staff which can result in students not being given adequate support, often leading to subsequent punishment and school exclusion (Wilkin, et al., 2010). Another participant shared their view on this and the impact they felt this had:

*In primary school, there's a lot of kids where they will label them with behavioural issues, etc., that just don't make it through to mainstream. They're labelled SEN, they're labelled as persistent trouble makers, so a lot of them don't even progress to secondary school.*

This impacts not just access to support but on personal aspirations and wider encouragement to achieve educationally.

Difficulties accessing both higher education and the healthcare system were also described by another interviewee in relation to a lack of fixed address:

*Another big barrier as well to education is travelling. Getting somebody to travel to university, a lot of girls won't travel on their own. Another big barrier as well, is if you're travelling around and you haven't got a permanent location, then accessing services, especially education, I mean, they can't even access healthcare or a GP. So, to keep up with a university education would be difficult as well.*

This raises key concerns for potential higher education applicants and students who are unable to access diagnostic screening and associated tailored educational and tangible support. It also emphasises the significant barriers that are external to university environments that continue to inhibit access and engagement. Proactive moves must be made to address these contributing factors to lack of participation. Alternative arrangements for those without a fixed address or stable and



consistent internet may be needed for those who are part of travelling rather than settled GTRSB communities, for whom the barriers are even greater.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear from survey and interview findings that higher education institutions need to address several areas of concern in order to support the participation of GTRSB students. Respondents widely shared experiences of racism and discrimination throughout their educational journeys, manifesting as bullying, stereotyping and ignorance from both teaching staff and peers. Many respondents shared that they had hidden their identity throughout their educational journeys to avoid this discrimination and that this experience generated cyclical invisibility. This invisibility is further intensified by a lack of representation and relevancy in curriculum content; inaccessible or irrespective teaching and learning styles; and very few visible role models within higher education to access for support and community connection.

Respondents outlined the systemic nature of the racism they and their families and communities experienced, and continue to experience, both outside and within educational environments. Wider systemic exclusion was identified in findings as creating significant barriers to higher education for GTRSB students. Poverty as well as racialised exclusion from employment and healthcare exacerbates the barriers to engagement, with potential or current students often unable to access financial or tailored learning support for their studies.

The research findings have a number of implications for how higher education institutions might better support GTRSB students in all stages of the student lifecycle from pre-application through to supporting career outcomes, in order to overcome the challenges they face. There is a clear need for targeted interventions and specific initiatives to close the access gap that is particular to these communities, who remain a 'hidden minority' in both wider society and higher education (Forray and Óhidy, 2019). Their experiences of invisibility are compounded by an often-hostile environment that causes many to hide their ethnicity and that does not acknowledge their existence where they are actively present. This creates a paradox between GTRSB students hiding their ethnicity and yet wanting curricula and educational experiences that allow them to feel like they exist. As such, proactive outreach, representation in curricula of programmes, and the targeted recruitment of role models to support other GTRSB students, are all key to combatting the persistent marginalisation and invisibility of GTRSB groups in higher education. Alongside this, financial and practical barriers need to be broken down.

## Recommendations

GTRSB students need targeted support throughout the student lifecycle. We have outlined some recommendations for Goldsmiths (and for higher education more broadly) that emerge from this research below. However, it is important that staff who work in all the different areas of student support, teaching and experience are aware of and adaptive to the needs of GTRSB students. Otherwise, they will remain a 'hidden minority' (Forray and Óhidy, 2019).

## Outreach

Funding and initiatives relating to outreach with GTRSB young people is key to addressing some of the challenges they face earlier in the educational journey. Widening participation strategy needs a specific focus on engaging with these groups as early as possible in their schooling, to focus on raising aspirations and challenging exclusionist discourse. Outreach will be most effective if it commissions grassroots GTRSB organisations, networks, and community collectives. There is a need for such outreach work to implement targets to address racism and marginalisation in schools/colleges and foster educational engagement within communities from an early age.

## Admissions

Full scholarships and bursaries/grants for GTRSB applicants and students will help to overcome financial barriers to accessing higher education. This financing should also focus on GTRSB applicants with non-traditional educational backgrounds, rather than being based on previous academic achievement.

Alternative arrangements are required where GTRSB students may not be able to provide a fixed address as well as to admissions systems that require stable and consistent internet access. The issues with needing a fixed address relate to several 'fitness to train' conditions (such as health assessments) for professional programmes as well as to the application to university itself.

Student ambassadors from GTRSB backgrounds should be proactively recruited for involvement in admissions activities. Specific events for GTRSB applicants, such as the one delivered by Widening Participation and STaCS in 2021, should be part of the annual calendar of events relating to student recruitment. Courses that have particularly attracted GTRSB students to Goldsmiths should contribute to such events, as well as wider information being available on other subjects of study.

## Retention

Recommendations around retention of GTRSB students relate to increasing and utilising representation of GTRSB students and role models and providing specific support for GTRSB students, tailored to their needs. This could include a GTRSB-specific support and peer mentoring service within the university, directed and managed collaboratively by GTRSB staff and student representatives. Ensuring that there are GTRSB student ambassadors working with the university's widening participation team would be key to this.

It would also be helpful to GTRSB students (who may have previously un/misdiagnosed support needs) to establish a circumstances-based waiver for the 'student contribution' fee associated with accessing screening for SpLDs (Specific Learning Difficulties) and neurodiversity such as autism.

Consideration of alternatives is needed where students must provide medical evidence to support their studies i.e., 'Extenuating Circumstances' processes and accessing a 'RASA' (Reasonable Adjustments Support Agreement). The current process assumes that this evidence is easily obtained; however, many GTRSB students may not have a fixed address or access to a GP, as well as an inability to access this evidence due to medical racism. It is recommended that the more recently included element of 'self-certification' of mitigating circumstances remains in place beyond the 2020/21 academic year and COVID-19 pandemic, for students with barriers to obtaining the appropriate evidence.

GTRSB students would benefit from efficient and responsive complaints procedures for discrimination and hate-crime reporting that take account of their specific needs and challenges. Hate crime and complaints officers should be proficiently knowledgeable in the specific experiences and needs of GTRSB groups.

There is a need to ensure that the university's Extenuating Circumstances processes, which have recently added an additional category relating to racial trauma, are fully inclusive of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller specific experiences. Those administering such processes need to understand and incorporate the racial trauma experienced by these communities when assessing such applications for extenuation.

## Learning and teaching

The decolonizing the curriculum agenda needs to take specific account of GTRSB groups. Curricula need to be adapted to be inclusive of GTRSB content and literature. Adaptations to the curriculum must be made in consultation with students and front-facing teaching staff. Learning methods should provide space for discussions that include GTRSB identities, allowing GTRSB students to be heard, without placing sole responsibility for educating peers and staff on these individuals.

The library might create a list of GTRSB resources – both in terms of authorship and content of publications. Programmes should incorporate more GTRSB authors and subject-specific publications into their reading lists.

The university needs staff representation from these communities and increased knowledge about GTRSB communities among staff more broadly. On relevant programmes, guest lecturers (including former students) might teach sessions where there are gaps in expertise.

The university and its departments should consider hosting GTRSB educators, activists, and community/network organisers for free-to-access educational seminars and lectures that are available to staff, students and the public. Significant events such as GTRSB history month and Roma Holocaust Memorial Day (an estimated 500,000 of the European Roma population were killed in World War 2) should be acknowledged as part of departmental and university programmes of events.

## Careers

Given the challenges that GTRSB people face in accessing employment, the careers office needs to work with staff and student representatives to consider what specific employment and internship initiatives might support GTRSB students to develop employability skills and secure good graduate career outcomes. A recognition of the discrimination faced in GTRSB access to employment will be needed.

## Initiatives relevant to the whole student lifecycle and all staff

It is important that the university-wide Anti-Racism training is inclusive of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller-specific racism (sometimes described as anti-gypsyism).

The university should sign up to the 'GTRSB into HE' pledge led by Buckinghamshire New University, and regularly review its meeting of the relevant commitments.

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