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Gypsy, Roma and Traveller access to Further Education: 14-16 provision, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and A Levels

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

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Foreword

The plight of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has long been an area of interest and concern for me, none more so than in the arena of education. The discussions have often been dominated by the issues, barriers and experiences in Primary and Secondary Education which have left the discussions of Further Education shrouded in darkness.

In recent months there have been much needed conversations about access and experiences in Higher Education but we are yet to see the same interest in Further Education. This is despite it being a key point for many young people, and the poor experiences and numbers dropping out during secondary education means that there is great potential for Further Education to reengage these pupils and to improve their life chances.

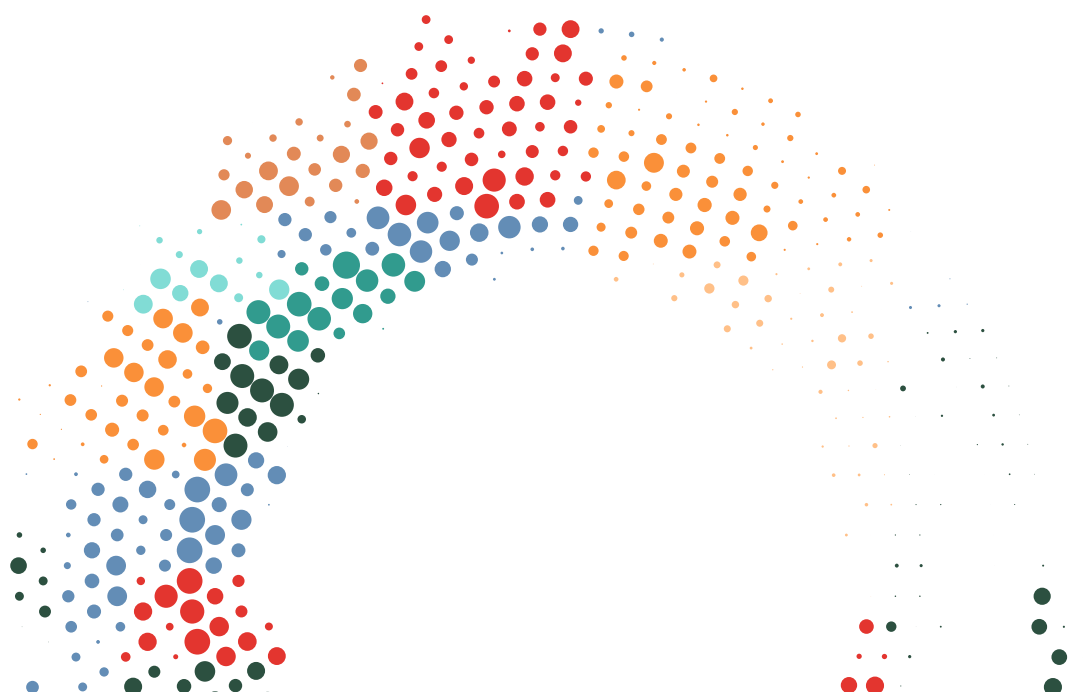
This report produced by the Traveller Movement feels long overdue and it brings to the forefront the issues that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face in accessing Further Education and some of the barriers that can prevent them from succeeding. Indeed, it highlights the structural challenges that are faced by pupils from a variety of backgrounds and puts forward a number of recommendations to bring about change.

I hope that this report will encourage further conversations about the challenges and barriers faced in Further Education, and various stakeholders to consider the changes that they can make to their policies and practices to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are progressing successfully through Further Education.



Baroness Janet Whitaker
Co-Chair of APPG GTR

“This report produced by the Traveller Movement feels long overdue and it brings to the forefront the issues that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face in accessing Further Education”



Executive summary



14-16 Provision

At present there is limited funding available for pupils aged 14-16 to pursue vocational qualifications and where there is, it is at the discretion of budget-strapped schools. There are higher numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils that fall out of education before sitting their exams, with the start of the examination year being a key fall out point, and the reduced offering of vocational qualifications could be argued as facilitating this.



Vocational qualifications

There is reduced funding available for those aged 19-25, and where there is, it is often set up in a loan scheme format which can be off-putting for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people returning to education as an adult. Those re-entering after a significant gap can face a number of challenges in accessing and succeeding in Further Education. Underfunding of the sector means that settings are not always able to offer the level of support that is needed.



Traineeships and apprenticeships

The recorded number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people pursuing traineeships and apprenticeships is low, and some are prevented from taking up these opportunities due to low prior attainment. Those who pass vocational qualifications can be prevented from progressing to the next level because they do not meet Maths and English requirements.



A Levels

There is less known about the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils at A Level. Small cohort numbers mean that current data is unreliable and generalisations cannot be drawn from it. Additionally, low prior attainment and low teacher expectations are likely to have a negative impact on the access, uptake and experiences of these pupils.





Recommendations

14-16 provision – Entitlement pupil funding should be used flexibly to pay for any recognised provision for pupils aged 14-16. This is especially important for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils given the higher numbers that are dropping out, being off-rolled and pursuing elective home education in this age bracket. This could open up opportunities to pursue vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training schemes earlier, and therefore ensure that these pupils continue to receive a meaningful education in order to enter the workforce. This would maximise retention rates and reduce the risk of them becoming NEET, especially as there are reduced opportunities to pursue trades and work traditionally undertaken by Gypsies and Travellers.

Vocational qualifications – Pupil entitlement funding should be made easily available to help pupils re-engage with the education system, particularly in the 14-16 and 19-25 age brackets where a gap seems to exist. Easy to access, designated routes back into education through re-engagement courses would better allow these pupils to access suitable academic and vocational qualifications that meet their needs. Furthermore, these pupils need access to study and learning support, and careers advice and counselling to ease the transition back into education and to increase retention and improve future employment opportunities.

Traineeships and apprenticeships – Pupils who have not achieved Maths and English qualifications by the age of eighteen should be able to access additional funding and teaching/mentoring, as Maths and English qualifications are a prerequisite to further study and employment. There should be incentives for employers to take pupils with passes in vocational qualifications but not in Maths/English and provide them with additional on-the-job training to bring them up to speed.

A Levels – Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils need to be adequately supported at GCSE level to ensure that they are able to obtain the necessary grades to progress to A Level qualifications. Additional funding should be made available to provide tutoring or mentoring for pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. This is especially important when considering the impact that missed education due to the COVID-19 pandemic will have on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

Ethnicity Based Bullying – Whilst it has been less explored here, previous research means that it would be reasonable to assume that ethnicity-based bullying remains an issue. In order to build a clearer picture Further Education settings must record ethnicity-based bullying as racist, and under their Public Sector Equality Duty they should be doing this. The Department for Education needs to ensure that these institutions are collecting this data and holding them to account when they are not.

Introduction

Further Education is an undeveloped research area in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Low levels of enrolment and inconsistent ethnicity ascription mean that data is insufficient to draw reliable conclusions.¹ Indeed, not all pupils will declare their ethnicity which means that some will fall below the radar and be counted under another ethnic group such as White British or White Irish. Poor experiences and attainment at Secondary level contributes to poor progression rates to Further Education. This briefing paper will explore the state of 14-16 provision, vocational qualifications, traineeships and apprenticeships, and A Levels for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and provide recommendations to improve access to these opportunities.

Whilst case studies have been used here to illustrate some of the issues and challenges faced by young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, they are not the sole basis of the recommendations made. Recommendations are made drawing upon the Traveller Movement's (TM) education advocacy project where we support parents with a range of issues from exclusion to bullying to special educational needs. As well as information gathered in our advisory group and expert education steering group. National data and broader educational trends also influence the recommendations put forward in this report. The case studies used in the report illustrate the range of issues that need to be addressed and have been anonymised to protect the young people involved.

¹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/destinations-of-school-pupils-after-key-stage-4-usually-aged-16-years/latest#by-ethnicity>



14-16 Provision

There has been a decline generally in the availability of 14-16 vocational provision with the government-driven move to a more 'rigorous' academic system. This means that for pupils who are not suited to academic qualifications or who do not desire to go down that path, there are limited options². A perceived lack of relevance of the formal education curriculum for some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and families can be a contentious issue, with some expressing a preference for practical skills like those offered on vocational courses. The offering of vocational provision could go some ways in reducing the number of pupils who are dropping out at this key stage and ensuring that they remain engaged in education. A recent TM report highlighted the gap in vocational provision for 14-16 year olds partially contributed to the early school leaving of some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils (Traveller Movement, forthcoming).

Case study

*Martin was on-roll at an Academy but his planned 14-16 provision at a college had fallen through because they were no longer offering the course. Martin was not interested in pursuing a traditional academic pathway and wanted to take up a vocational qualification. He had missed too much GCSE time to make returning worthwhile along with other in-school issues, and could not transfer to another school because he was in his examination year. Martin was being supported by TM and other external agencies, and potential placements were sourced which were either unsuitable or the school said they did not have funding for him to transfer to such provision. In the end, Martin received no meaningful education over the two years from 14-16, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that he has turned 16 he has applied to a Further Education college to pursue a vocational qualification.



Had Martin been able to access pupil entitlement funding, he would have been able to transfer and continue his education in a format that better suited his wants and needs. As it is, Martin missed a significant amount of education which will no doubt impact on his future progression and potentially puts him at a higher risk of dropout if he is unable to access the support that he needs to be able to catch up.

Recommendations

Pupil entitlement funding should be made available so that pupils can continue their education in a setting that suits their needs. This is especially important for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils given the higher numbers that are falling out, being off-rolled and pursuing elective home education in this age bracket. Being able to access this funding could open up opportunities to pursue vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training schemes earlier, and therefore ensure that these pupils continue to receive a meaningful education in order to enter the workforce. This would maximise retention rates and reduce the risk of these pupils becoming NEET. Financial barriers should not prevent pupils accessing Further Education; if these pupils remain engaged in formal education it is a benefit to all in society and will cost less in the long run.

² Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., 2017, September. FE and Skills across the UK: the case of England. In Seminar paper presented at FE and Skills across the UK seminar (Vol. 2).

Vocational Qualifications

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are less likely to stay in education after the age of sixteen than pupils in any other ethnic group, with just 73% of Irish Traveller pupils and 66% of Gypsy and Roma pupils staying on in 2016/17 (The latest figures made available).³ However, it is worth pointing out that this is for the pupils who manage to successfully remain in education until then and are likely to have a range of coping strategies. The higher numbers missing from education or moving to elective home education before the legal leaving age are not represented here which means that the real figure is likely to be much bleaker. It is also likely that many of the issues and challenges faced in schools by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils such as low teacher expectations, bullying and low prior attainment continue to be faced by these pupils⁴.

There is less research exploring the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in Further Education but recent research has explored the importance of careers guidance and the role of Further Education in the education plans of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people (Dr Nicola Hay, forthcoming).⁵

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, funding for learners aged 16-18 has fallen 8% since 2010/11⁶. Whilst funding for adult education and apprenticeships has been cut by 45% since 2009/10, which has meant that the percentage of adult learners has fallen by 29% since 2010/11⁷. Indeed, the underfunding of the Further Education sector is making it even more difficult for Further Education providers and teachers to meet the needs of these pupils.⁸

Case study



Margaret was a sixteen-year-old Irish Traveller girl who had joined college to begin a Hair and Beauty course. She had been diagnosed with ADHD and autism, had an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and required extra support in the classroom. Margaret had been out of school for several years and was used to learning in an individual environment. She was keen and had enrolled by herself. Initially there were difficulties around entry requirements but after scoring highly in her initial assessments she began a level two course with functional skills in Maths and English. Margaret was enjoying the programme but began to have difficulties in the classroom as she was easily distracted and didn't feel she was getting the academic support she needed that was set out in her EHCP. After a few weeks off, support still hadn't been put in place and she struggled with the structured lessons. She would get in trouble for speaking out of turn and being distracted with peers. She felt as if she was at a different stage to her peers due to being out of school for so long, even though she was capable. Although the college said that they were inclusive, Margaret didn't feel that they were taking practical steps and decided not to return to after the first half term.

3 <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/destinations-of-school-pupils-after-key-stage-4-usually-aged-16-years/latest#by-ethnicity>

4 Bhopal, K., 2011. 'This is a school, it's not a site': teachers' attitudes towards Gypsy and Traveller pupils in schools in England, UK. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), pp.465-483.

5 https://www.thecd.net/write/UKCDA/KEY_NOTE_Change_for_Nicola_Hay.pdf

6 <https://feweek.co.uk/2019/11/22/heart-wrenching-impact-of-funding-cuts-shared-by-college-leaders/>

7 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13307>

8 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/969/96907.htm>

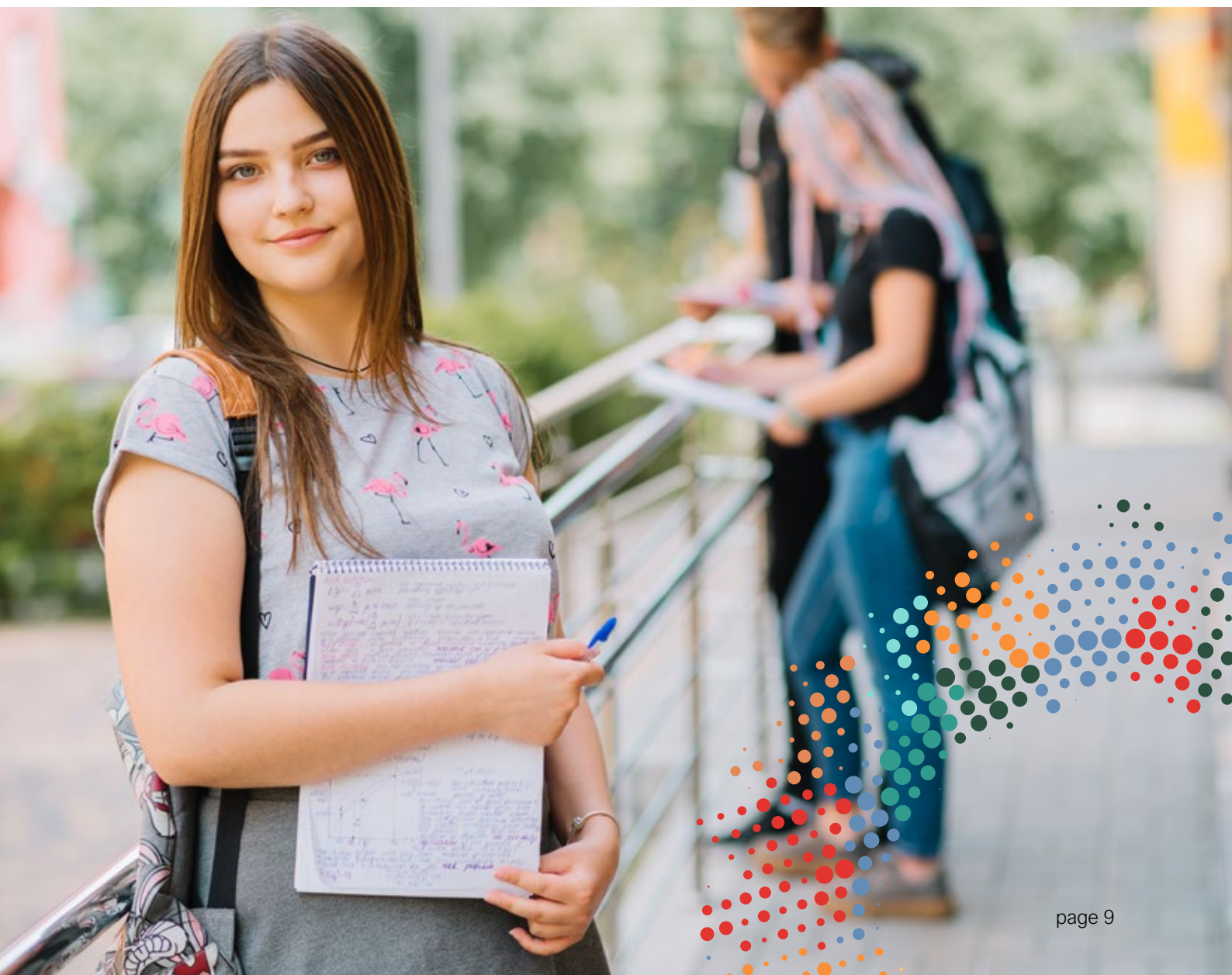
Aside from the issues accessing support for her Special Educational Needs, Margaret identified that the significant gaps in her education further contributed to the challenges she was experiencing. When pupils are returning to education after a significant period of time, it is understandable that they will need access to additional support in order to ease the transition back in and reduce their risk of dropping out.

Recommendations

Given that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are disproportionately represented in early school leaving figures and in the figures of those who leave without qualifications, the recommendations made here are incredibly important if we want to stem the tide. However, these recommendations have the potential to benefit all pupils, not just Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

Funding should be set aside specifically to help pupils re-engage with the education system, particularly in the 14-16 and 19-25 age brackets where a gap in services seems to exist in regards to accessing Further Education and support to complete. Easy to access, designated routes back into education would better allow these pupils to access suitable academic and vocational qualifications that meet their needs.

These pupils need access to support not only for Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), but also for study skills, learning and employability to ease the transition back into education and to increase retention and improve future employment opportunities.



Traineeships and Apprenticeships

Traineeships were introduced in 2013 to act as a preliminary qualification for entry onto apprenticeships and targeted young people who were not in education, employment or training. Traineeships can be anywhere between six weeks and a year, typically being twelve weeks in length. They give young people an insight into an area of work with elements of a vocational qualification coupled with employability and work experience⁹. In the ethnicity breakdown of data collected for 2017/18, Gypsies and Irish Travellers accounted for only 40 traineeship starts in England out of the 17,700 that were started in total¹⁰. This gives an indication that for whatever reasons, traineeships are not meeting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller young people. Furthermore, the statistics do not tell us whether or not these young people completed the traineeship and if they did, whether or not they progressed onto an apprenticeship or other Further Education, employment or training. This is a glaring gap in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the traineeship to apprenticeship pathway, especially for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people.

Apprenticeships have been around in various forms for many years but in the last few years there has been a greater emphasis on this training route. This can be seen with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy on businesses with an annual pay bill of above £3 million a year¹¹, as well as the introduction of degree apprenticeships. The uptake of apprenticeships among Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils is low in relation to all other pupils with only 180 starting an apprenticeship in 2017/18 out of 216,200 that were started overall¹². In 2016/17, only 160 Gypsy or Irish Traveller pupils started an apprenticeship which shows that there has been only a slight growth¹³. It is unclear however, how many of those successfully completed their apprenticeship.

Furthermore, the government does not specifically target Gypsy or Irish Traveller pupils in any recruitment schemes for traineeships or apprenticeships.¹⁴ There are no statistics on Roma uptake of traineeships or apprenticeships, a flaw in data monitoring and collection that will hopefully improve with the introduction of Roma to the 2021 National Census.

Case study

Paddy* enrolled at a Further Education College at 16 to pursue a vocational plumbing qualification. In his first year he completed a Level 1 qualification whilst doing his functional skills Maths and English. In this second year, he progressed to Level 2 Plumbing and GCSE Maths and English. He completed the year and passed his Plumbing qualification but not his Maths and English. The college did not offer functional skills at Level 2, only GCSE. Disappointed but not put off, Paddy enrolled on Maths and English GCSE's as a full-time programme for his final year and was disappointed when he did not make the grades once again. Paddy tried to get a place on a Level 3 apprenticeship but could not because he had not passed his Maths and English. Paddy was overqualified for a traineeship and a Level 2 apprenticeship but had no funding to re-sit his Maths and English qualifications.



9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traineeships--2>

10 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8083/CBP-8083.pdf>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy/apprenticeship-levy>

12 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8083/CBP-8083.pdf>

13 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8083/CBP-8083.pdf>

14 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8083/CBP-8083.pdf>

Paddy found himself in a catch-22 situation and struggled to progress. Apprenticeship pathways are not always accessible to those with limited prior formal education, especially those without passes in Maths and English. Even for those who participate on a traineeship, this does not guarantee progression onto an apprenticeship. Pupils can find themselves stuck in a cycle where they are prevented from progressing onto further study due to Maths and English.

Recommendations

Additional funding should be provided for courses in Maths and English as they are prerequisite to further study and future employment. It is difficult for people to make progress without these key qualifications. Furthermore, access to support via skilled teachers and advisors can help students to progress.

One year GCSE qualification programmes are not long enough for those who have missed significant amounts of education at the secondary level. Two year programmes might go some way to address this issue.

There should be a pathway created for those with vocational qualifications but without Maths and English. There should be incentives for employers and/or apprenticeship training agencies to take these pupils on and provide them with additional on-the-job training in Maths and English to bring them up to speed.

They should consider including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in their targeted recruitment schemes for traineeships and apprenticeships along with other underrepresented groups.



A Levels

Little is known about the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils taking A Level's as the numbers are small, which means that the data that is available must be treated carefully. It is difficult to draw inferences due to cohort sizes and they are often excluded from published statistics if the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils falls below five for each group. For example, in the 2017/2018 cohort, 28.6% of Traveller of Irish Heritage and 3.6% of Gypsy/Roma pupils achieved at least three 'A' grades.¹⁵ However, in the following cohort of 2018/2019, zero pupils from Traveller of Irish Heritage or Gypsy/Roma pupils achieved at least three 'A' grades¹⁶. Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils had the lowest average points score but this was based on the results of sixteen pupils so the data needs to be read with caution¹⁷. Whilst the small number of pupils from Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma backgrounds means that it is impossible to make generalisations or draw clear conclusions, what is apparent is that the number of pupils from these backgrounds progressing to A Level's is exceptionally low in comparison to other groups.

Case study

Jack, a Romany Gypsy pupil, faced bullying, discriminatory attitudes and low teacher expectations at GCSE level and was put into bottom set for all subjects. He moved schools, achieved A's and A's in his GCSE examinations and went on to study A Levels. Despite his prior achievement and good performance on mock exams he was once again under predicted at A Level. He was predicted BBC but went on to achieve AAB and a place at a Russell Group University to study a STEM subject. Low predicted grades limited the range of universities he could apply for.



Jack faced a number of issues from bullying and discrimination to having to move schools and deal with low teacher expectations, despite this he achieved against all odds. Whilst this is just one case study and one example of a pupil being under predicted at A Level, the current trends of low expectations and under prediction at GCSE level that a similar occurrence is taking place for some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils at A-Level. Furthermore, this could also be contributing to the low uptake of A Levels by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils along with other relevant contributory factors such as differing familial expectations, gendered norms and differing aspirations.

Recommendations

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils need to be adequately supported at GCSE level to ensure that they are able to obtain the necessary grades to progress to A Level qualifications. Additional funding should be made available to provide tutoring or mentoring for pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. This is especially important when considering the impact that missed education due to the COVID-19 pandemic will have on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Additionally, work needs to be done to combat low teacher expectations and to raise the aspirations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils so that they can see A Levels as a valid educational pathway.

¹⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/3.0>

¹⁶ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest#by-ethnicity>

¹⁷ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/average-score-for-students-taking-a-levels-and-other-qualifications/latest#by-ethnicity-tech-level-students-only>

Conclusion

The area of Further Education and specifically Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils' access to 14-16 provision, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and A Levels is an undeveloped area of study. Indeed, it seems as though conversations on Secondary Education and Higher Education are currently dominating the debate whilst little is known about the in-between education point which is a prerequisite to further study and no doubt contributes to the long-term development of a young person. Given the high levels of exclusions and low attainment rates at Secondary level, Further Education has great potential in offering Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who have fallen out of education the opportunity to reengage and reduce the likelihood of ending up NEET. However, Further Education Institutions need to ensure that they are reaching out to their local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and developing relationships with families to ease the transition into these settings and to increase retention and course completion.

The issues highlighted within this report are not necessarily unique to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and no doubt there are a number of pupils from different backgrounds who face similar challenges. This means that whilst we have focussed on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers here, many of the recommendations could indeed benefit a number of pupils from different backgrounds.

The recommendations made here will allow for the full potential of the Further Education sector to be realised and to improve access for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. With improved access comes greater progression to Further and Higher Education, and subsequently improved outcomes.





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The Traveller Movement, Resource for London,
356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA

Tel 020 7607 2002 | Fax 020 7607 2005



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