



Project: 23.2 v TH20

A Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Outreach Programme for Cambridgeshire

Motivation and Approach

Students from Gypsy and Traveller (GT) backgrounds are currently the most underrepresented of any group at the University of Cambridge.¹ In the last three Admissions cycles, the number of successful applicants from these backgrounds numbered 1 (2023), 1 (2022), and 0 (2021). Currently, the central Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO) has no WP programme that is specifically aimed at potential applicants from GT backgrounds, though they are developing a programme aimed at the Roma community. In order to avoid a reduplication of effort, therefore, and after appropriate consultation with CAO and relevant INT WPIF personnel, we decided to focus our programme on potential applicants from a GT background, while recognising that the dividing lines that separate the 'G', 'R', and 'T' groups are poorly defined.

Consequently, we have used the INT WPIF funding to pilot a programme that raises awareness of higher education amongst GT groups. We knew from the start that early intervention was crucial: GT children are four times more likely to be excluded from school, and they are the least likely of any minority group to achieve any formal qualifications.² Anecdotal evidence also suggests they are more likely to experience disrupted schooling, and that they have parents who themselves have negative attitudes towards education, with the consequence that these pupils are usually encouraged by family members to leave school at 16.

While we were piloting the new programme, we worked closely with our Cambridge Link Area school, The Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA). Largely due to its geographical location close to the Norfolk border, the school has an anomalously high percentage of pupils who self-identify as GT. Liaising with the relevant teachers there, we created a schedule of events aimed at Year 10 students from GT backgrounds. These events were designed to increase awareness and aspiration amongst these groups, while also developing their study skills. We also interacted extensively with relevant third-parties, including charities such as *Friends, Families, and Travellers* (<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org>) as well as the team at the University of Sussex who for several years now have focused on raising academic attainment and aspirations amongst GT communities in East Anglia and surrounding areas (<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/raceequality/gtrsbpledge>).

Although the intercollegiate University has not previously focused on potential applicants from GT backgrounds, Cambridge is a good location from which to undertake WP work of this kind, since East

¹ The categories currently used by the UK government and by the University are problematical, since they imply much greater distinctness than exists in reality. In practice, it is often impossible to separate the 'Gypsy' and 'Traveller' groups from the 'Roma' groups, and the 'GT' group often share similarities with the 'Showmen' and 'Boater' communities. While fully mindful of the inadequacies and vagaries of these categories, we use the combined term 'GT' in this document loosely and for convenience. Also, since the University is currently developing a WP programme aimed specifically at the 'Roma' community, we are keen to avoid any confusion around that programme and this programme, hence our emphasis on 'GT'.

² The Traveller Movement, 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences in Secondary Education: Issues, barriers and recommendations', December 2020: <https://wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GRT-in-Secondary-Education-2021.pdf>

Anglia has significant populations of GT students (Figure 1). Therefore, there is no reason not to try to change perceptions of higher education by working closely with the GT communities that are relatively close to Cambridge in geographical terms.

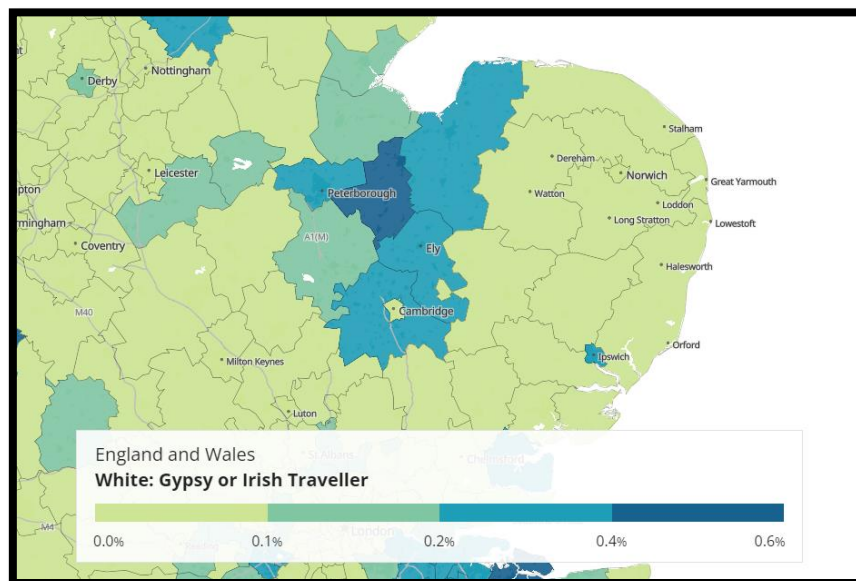


Figure 1: Census 2021 data for White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller groups in the UK³

Designing the Programme

The logo we designed for the programme incorporates the wheel that appears in the ethnic flag of the Romani people (Figure 2):



Figure 2: The flag of the Romani people

In the programme logo, the rotating wheel, which symbolises the movement that characterises the traditional lifestyles of these communities, is placed inside the College's crest, to indicate how we would like students from these backgrounds to become part of the College community (Figure 3):

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/identity/ethnic-group/ethnic-group-tb-20b/white-gypsy-or-irish-traveller>.



Figure 3: The programme logo

Various possible names for the programme were considered, which were all related to the nomadic or itinerant traditions of the GT communities. The name eventually chosen was *The Waymarkers Programme*. This was inspired by the many milestones (or ‘waymarkers’) that the College has erected, for the benefit of travellers of all kinds, along the roads around Cambridge from the eighteenth century onwards (Figure 4).⁴



Figure 4: An example of a Trinity Hall waymarker

For the pilot phase of the programme, we decided to work with Year 10 students initially, in order to better identify the challenges we would face in rolling out the fully-developed programme. The GT pupils were onboarded by the teachers at TCA, and the schedule of activities involved in-person events at the school, as well as visits to Trinity Hall. More specifically, the kinds of events we have trialled this year include the following:

⁴ <https://www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/library/fancy-a-cycle-ride-why-not-follow-the-trinity-hall-milestones-to-barkway>.

Type of Event	Details
In-person, hosted by TCA	In-person hour-long sessions with c.25 Year 10 pupils at TCA who self-identify as GT. These sessions include a light-hearted introductory focus on what university involves, the use of quizzes to facilitate engagement, the use of questions to find out more about the social and cultural contexts which the participants have encountered, a session to discuss the kinds of support that the teachers at the school believe would be most useful for the GT pupils there
In-person, hosted by Trinity Hall	Day trips to Trinity Hall that are entirely free for the teachers and Year 10 pupils who attend. These trips include a tour of the College, a tour of the centre of Cambridge, fun interactive talks about different aspects of university life, talks from recent Cambridge graduates from GT backgrounds, Q&A sessions, light-hearted quizzes about the university, with small prizes awarded for correct answers

In addition, following advice from the various third parties we consulted when setting up the programme, we recognised the importance of ensuring that the TCA library was well stocked with age-appropriate texts (both factual and fictional) that explore different aspects of GT culture. Consequently, we liaised with the TCA teachers and provided a large number of texts of this kind, which have been gratefully received by the GT pupils.

The creation of social media materials that we will use to advertise the programme in the coming months has also been a priority, including a podcast with a GT Cambridge graduate, as well as reels and shorts for Instagram and TikTok. Hearing people from GT communities speak about their own experiences at university can help to demonstrate that remaining in higher education beyond 16 is a valid option for pupils from the same kinds of backgrounds.

The evaluation of the events during this pilot stage of the programme has necessarily been qualitative, with informal surveys assessing participants' engagement and detailed discussions with the teaching staff involved. As mentioned earlier, the main task has been to identify the main challenges the fully developed programme will need to confront. Also (obviously), since we have focused so far only on Year 10 pupils, we never expected to see an immediate increase in application numbers to Cambridge. Nonetheless, we are hopeful that working with pupils from Years 8-12, for a sustained period (e.g., 5 years in the first instance), will inform and encourage young people from these communities (i) to choose to continue with post-16 education, and (ii) to make viable applications to Russell Group universities when they are in Year 13. If the fully developed programme proves to be effective, we would look to expand beyond Cambridgeshire in future years.

There are various additional elements that we are planning to add to the fully developed programme during the coming year. These include the following:

- **Extending the Age Range:** we decided to focus the pilot programme on Year 10s, but the fully developed programme will begin with Year 8s and continue to Year 12s. It has been well established for some time that is best practice in WP-related activities to achieve sustained interaction over a lengthy period of time, since (for obvious reasons) this is usually more effective either than one-off events aimed at a single year group or than sustained interaction only with Years 12s

- **Family Involvement:** the including of parents and other family members is crucial to dispel the negative connotations they may have arising from their own experiences of formal education. Therefore, in the next iteration we will include school-based events for potential applicants *and* their family members

The Budget

We were awarded £4,625 to support this programme, and the main costs breakdown is given in Table 1. Additional costs were covered from the College's Admissions budget:

Item	Details	Total Cost GBP
Trinity Hall outreach staff travel costs	Travel to TCA for meetings and for delivery of programme sessions held at the school	£621
Travel and accommodation costs for non-staff participants	To enable Cambridge GT graduates to participate in events	£520
Pupil / teacher travel costs	For pupils and teachers from TCA to travel to Trinity Hall by coach for events held at Trinity Hall	£1075
Events hosted at TCA	To cover costs incurred (e.g., food, payment of student ambassadors)	£495
Supplying educational materials to TCA	To buy GT-themed books for the TCA library, and small university-themed prizes for the quizzes	£213
Events hosted at Trinity Hall	To cover costs incurred (e.g., room hire, food, payment of student ambassadors, accommodation)	£708
Social media	To create social media posts and videos to publicise the programme (e.g., recording, editing)	£997

Table 1: Main Costs Breakdown

I hope this report gives some indication of what we have been able to achieve so far. However, much remains to be accomplished in the coming years.

Dr Marcus Tomalin
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29/1/25