

Improving Access & Participation in Higher Education for Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen & Boaters



“Take the Pledge”



The purpose of the pledge.

The GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge consists of a firm commitment by your University, College or Institution to undertake certain steps to support GTRSB students into and within higher education.

The Pledge is designed to support best practice in ensuring monitoring of data; inclusive practice in the academy, and the development of widening participation practice to support GTRSB students and potential students.

The pledge has been developed after consultation with GTRSB community members (graduates, students and academic staff who are members of the community) and is underpinned by key research findings, and consideration of widening participation interventions effective in supporting members of the communities into and within HE.

The Pledge sets out to deliver effective practice and also create an open and welcoming environment where members of the communities know their culture and learning needs are understood by the institution which they attend, or which they are interested in attending.

**CREATE CHANGE,
IMPACT & POSITIVE
OUTCOMES**

There is no Charge for your Organisation to "Take the Pledge"

Members of the **GTRSB** into Higher Education advisory board will work with our partner institutions to publicly promote their practice, and celebrate their achievements in helping Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boater students to access and remain in higher education.

We will support HE staff through signposting training, resources and best practice conferences.

A group of best practice champions and community member graduates/students will monitor your progress and provide supportive advice/facilitate access to resources (e.g. Posters and Campaigns/information etc. designed to support a 'welcoming environment').

Our monitoring is not intrusive, and we will arrange a catch up with you one year after your institution has signed up to the pledge to see how things are going, what assistance or resources you may need, etc. This light touch monitoring and review will take place annually thereafter



What is in the Pledge?

There are a few minimum commitments your institution must agree to, prior to taking the Pledge ...

- Your institution must commit to working towards creating the most appropriate and welcoming environment and conditions in which GTRSB students can stay resilient and thrive academically and personally.
- To do this, the institution will establish a named contact point for GTRSB students and potential students
- The institution will clearly identify and publicise the support for GTRSB students already in place which engage the key areas of the pledge:
 - data monitoring of GTRSB student and staff numbers;
 - building a supportive and welcoming culture for GTRSB students;
 - outreach & engagement to local GTRSB communities
and
 - inclusion, celebration and commemoration of GTRSB cultures and communities.
- To facilitate this, the institution will develop processes to identify GTRSB students and monitor their progress, as well as supporting the professional and personal development of staff members who self-identify as members of the communities.
- The institution will ensure that staff and students across departments and faculties are aware of the support available to GTRSB students in the university or college.
- The institution commits to ensuring that staff development exists raising awareness of the barriers GTRSB students may face in entering HE and more broadly in society.

Your VC, Pro VC, or Principal will need to write a short public statement of commitment to these principles and actions.

There is no charge to your institution for
“Taking the Pledge”

Data Collection

Core elements of the Pledge (required commitment)

Increase understanding of institutional context through:

- Monitoring the number of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, (Showmen and Boater) students and staff currently at the university/college
- Year on year evaluating trends in these numbers of self-identified students/staff

This element of the Pledge may include (examples/stretch targets):

- Encouraging the collection of data on Roma and also Showmen and Boaters as separate categories in addition to UCAS/HESA categories.

Although Romany Gypsy/Traveller student numbers are routinely captured (although recognised as an under-count) through UCAS/HESA returns; Roma, Showmen and Boaters are not enumerated as separate/discrete categories, although OfS guidance <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/> recognises the importance of including these students under the broad rubric of “Gypsies, Travellers and Roma”.

As such it is recommended that institutions explore ways of facilitating Roma, Showmen and Boaters to self-identify as such, through internal expansion/modification of data categories to permit of such self-identification.

- Ensuring that all staff and students are provided with an explanation as to why GRT ethnicity data is collected and the importance of including Showmen and Boaters in such categories, should the institution elect to expand self-identification categories.
- Encouraging UCAS/HESA to expand categories of data collection in line with OfS guidance so as to include Roma, Showmen and Boaters as separate categories on returns/monitoring forms

Organisational & Institutional Culture

Core Elements of the Pledge (required commitment)

- Designating a key named contact for working with GTR/SB students to oversee workstreams/ attend regular training/EDI meetings
- Encouraging the formation of GRT/SB student and staff societies, possibly in local or regional groups of HEIs

This element of the Pledge may include (examples/stretch targets):

- Profiling/supporting activities which highlight that the HEI is seen as a 'safe space' in which self-declaration of GTRSB identity can take place.
- Actively monitoring equalities data to challenge discrimination against GTRSB students and staff and issuing guidance to clarify that discrimination against GRT (ethnic) communities is unlawful
- Reviewing APL and APEL policies to ensure that they offer GTRSB students meaningful opportunities to transfer credit from one institution to another, or take account of caring responsibilities which may have disrupted educational experiences within HE.
- Ensuring that existing equalities and anti-discrimination policies/training fully incorporates GTRSB communities and intersectional challenges faced by these communities
- Ensuring admissions processes do not covertly discriminate against GTRSB applicants
- Encouraging all staff and students to challenge prejudice, derogatory language, and discrimination against GTRSB

Outreach

Core Elements of the Pledge (required commitment)

- Having a distinct stream of work which focuses on GTRSB students within widening participation activities
- Strengthening links to schools/FE colleges or NGOs working with local GTRSB communities
- Developing or expanding mentoring opportunities for GTRSB graduates/students to work with members of their communities who are considering entering (or re-entering) HE

This element of the Pledge may include (examples/stretch targets):

- Supporting access to tailored outreach information which ensures that GTRSB pupils/potential students and families are well informed about university processes, available support and good practice learning initiatives e.g. financial support and student loan systems, as well as antidiscrimination, inclusion practice and pastoral/learning support offered to students at the university
- Ensuring that widening participation teams understand the barriers to higher education often experienced by GTRSB students, in order to better address them within institutional policies
- Including GTRSB outreach within a current job role
- Building relationships with GTRSB families and communities to build a community of learning which is accessible and supportive across the life-course (for example in-reach to local sites, collaborating with GTRSB civil society to deliver tailored short-course or training or support for community led learning initiatives).
- Increasing number of GTRSB students involved in outreach activities and who receive payment for participation in such initiatives as student ambassadors

nb: Be aware not all GTRSB students may wish to be the visible 'face' of WP/Outreach activities in their institution

Inclusion, Celebration & Commemoration

Core Elements of the Pledge (required commitment)

- Visibly foreground GTRSB inclusion and cultures within the university/college (e.g. ensure that the communities have parity of recognition alongside other BAME communities who are members of your institutional family)
- Ensure that staff recognise that visibility and awareness of the communities in and around Higher Education institutions reduces barriers to access, retention and attainment, and helps to support GTRSB students through creating a welcoming and affirming environment.

This element of the Pledge may include (examples/stretch targets):

- Encouraging appropriate inclusion of GTRSB experience and texts within the curricula e.g. professional training for health professionals/social workers; history and social policy programmes, as part of inclusive/decolonisation of curricula activities
- Where possible to work closely with GTRSB civil society agencies to ensure cutting edge engagement with NGOs such as co-delivering training or teaching, enabling work placements with such organisations, or encouraging them to feed into curricula content
- Celebrating Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history month (in June); encouraging participation in commemoration of European Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day (2nd August) and ensuring that Roma genocide is included in Holocaust Memorial Day events (January)
- Hosting guest lectures/events on topics related to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boater communities (e.g. film screenings, debates, exhibitions, etc)
- Actively encouraging the recruitment of GTRSB staff members through explicit mention of these communities, along with welcoming applications

Who can write the letter which commits your institution to the Pledge?

The letter needs to come from your VC, Pro VC or Principal.

It is common practice for engaged individuals within an institution to champion the taking of the GTRSB into HE Pledge, but the letter of commitment must be signed by your VC, Pro VC or Principal to indicate highest level support for the initiative.

How much does it cost?

There is no charge to take the pledge or join the associated practice network (see below). However there may be costs associated with attending professional development conferences hosted by network members should you wish to learn more about current or developing research and best practice in supporting GTRSB students.

How is the pledge monitored?

We will ask you for a brief annual update on your progress towards your goals, and sharing of your activities.

This is provided by submitting an online form with the potential for further follow-up by email or other means if you think this might be helpful. The development of activities/progress towards goals achieved by signatories to the Pledge will be monitored and overseen by a group of GTRSB Champions/Professionals who work across the four pledge areas as well as through providing you with the chance to submit feedback from GTRSB students.

What kind of support can we provide to institutions?

We can help you to identify key areas of development via reflecting on your own progress and outcomes, through access to best practice training events, or occasionally we can help individually through providing support via a phone call or online meeting. We can help you to disseminate and promote your best practice and inspire others to follow in your footsteps.

We will also ask you to complete a short questionnaire on practice, knowledge and what you hope to gain/can offer from network membership, and you will then be added you to our JISCmail facilitated network of universities, individual academics with specialisms in working with GTRSB students and communities; specialist NGOs and community mentors who can act as a resource for you to draw upon.

What kind of support can we provide to NGOs/Graduates and Students?

Longer term we are working with colleagues and network members to develop free to access information resources (available via the Network) to support students, civil society organisations, graduate peer-mentors from the communities, and Universities through providing materials which may be helpful in supporting community members to navigate Higher Education.

We will be able to provide preliminary information and advice to students around applying to Student Finance and we will be able to sign-post to the help and support that is available in various institutions.

We can also introduce you to our network of community graduates to help peer mentor and support you on your educational journey as well as providing information on International networks and organisations with an emphasis on supporting GTRSB students such as the Roma Education Fund and the Advisory Committee for the Education of Romanies and other Travellers (ACERT) in the UK.

Regrettably we can't support students financially, give loans, or be a guarantor for accommodation.

The Network

When you agree to “Take the Pledge” we will ask you to complete a short questionnaire and then (if you are not already a member) add you to the GTRSBintoHE network, which communicates via Jiscmail.

The network exists to share information about our activities, findings from research, explore how best to enable and disseminate good practice interventions and facilitate exchange of knowledge in supporting GTRSB students in HE with diverse stakeholders.

Participants include community members who are students and graduates; educational and community leaders; Civil Society organisations/NGOs; policymakers; Widening Participation professionals; post-graduate students and scholars concerned with the educational inclusion of GTRSB communities.

The Network is run by and for the participants and it is what **you** make it – so we actively encourage participation and sharing of information through this medium.

To apply to join the Network: either email us (below) or subscribe via: GTRSBINTOHE@JISCMAIL.AC.UK

For more information on ‘Taking the Pledge’ either contact us via the Jiscmail address above or in the first instance email:

Sherrie.Smith@bucks.ac.uk or
Margaret.Greenfields@bucks.ac.uk