

GTR into HE Network Development

Analysis of Responses

Background:

Access to Higher Education amongst Gypsy, Travellers, Roma, Showpeople and Boaters (GTRSB) is still relatively rare and what limited evidence exists suggests that community members experience significant barriers to access, retention and attainment. Educational challenges begin early in life, proceeding through academic careers and are closely linked to broader levels of exclusion and poorer outcomes across the life-span.ⁱ GTR people have the lowest levels of educational achievement of any ethnic group and are less likely to thrive in childhood. They achieve the lowest outcomes in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE (2016 5A*-C GCSEs: Gypsy Roma 1/10, Irish Travellers 1/5). GTR children are more likely to be absent from formal education and to have ceased attendance by the age of 16.

As part of a national policy focus on the social exclusion experienced by GTRSB communities, attention has relatively recently turned to how to improve the levels of engagement with Higher Education (and from HEIs) to support members of these communities, using access to HE, retention and attainment as a proxy for social inclusion and enhanced opportunities for social mobility and economic wellbeing. In 2018 the Office for Students issued a briefing on supporting Widening Participation and Access issues impacting GTR studentsⁱⁱ.

In September 2019 Bucks New University in collaboration with Baroness Janet Whitaker, the Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma (GTR) convened a workshop at the House of Lords to bring together a range of key players, HEIs, NGOs, and GTRSB graduates to explore what could be done to support widening participation aims.ⁱⁱⁱ By the conclusion of the event – based on presentations and submissions from students and graduates from the GTR, Showmen and Boater communities and a small number of Universities with experience in Widening Participation activities targeted at the above communities, as well as comments from the floor - a consensus was reached that:

- There is a need for universities to gain a greater understanding of the barriers and challenges facing GTR, Showmen and Boater communities seeking to access or who are in, Higher Education.

- In order to maximise opportunity and enhance outcomes for members of the GTRSB communities there is a need for HEI (and Further Education colleges) to collaborate more closely with each other to raise awareness of educational challenges commonly faced by such students, to develop and disseminate good practice in supporting students and to gain awareness of culturally competent and inclusive behaviours which enhance inclusion.
- It was identified that universities also need to work collaboratively with GTR organisations, graduates and students from the communities in a more coherent and sustainable fashion to develop best practice in mentoring, support and engagement.
- Based on discussions from the floor which flagged up an apparently higher number of mature students from GTR communities entering into HE (when compared to eighteen year olds) there is a need for HEIs to identify best outreach practice to engage with and recognise the different needs of the mature student when compared to school leavers, as well as understanding the influences on /preferences for subject choice.
- It was apparently that the views of NGOs and the communities need to be heard in devising a tailored approach taken to supporting GTR, Showmen and Boaters at both local and strategic levels to support and sustain engagement in Higher Education. This approach engages with Inclusion and Social Justice models of educational practice which emphasise that the agenda must focus on experiences as well as outcomes.

As a 'next-steps' action following on from production and circulation of the report of the September roundtable it was agreed that a short network development survey would be produced and circulated to enable interested universities, NGOs, graduates and students to develop a loose network which could engage at local and national level on sharing and developing good practice and support outreach to local GTR Showmen and Boater communities.

The GTR, Showmen and Boater into HE Networks

To enable this network development to take place – and to enable sharing of contact details between participants at the roundtable, as well as those who were unable to attend but who expressed an interest in being kept informed of developments, a short questionnaire/survey of interests was developed and sent out by email to all participants at the workshop on the 16th December 2019. Recipients of the link were invited to share the survey link with other interested parties (NGOs, GTR graduates who might be willing to act a mentors/network with local HEIs; and HEI WP teams). Publicity for the network was also disseminated via social media to enable more people to sign up if they were interested in being involved in localised networks.

It was initially intended to close the survey in late January 2020 but after slow responses over the Christmas period and greater interest emerging in the survey following on from a presentation about the concept at the NEON Winter Conference on the 29th January 2020 it was decided to keep the link open for a longer time frame to enable participants at the NEON event or with whom we have since been in contact to engage. The survey link closed in mid March 2020 as university and NGO attention turned to dealing with the CV19 pandemic.

However in mid-April, following discussions with a number of additional parties who have expressed an interest and some further outreach to universities who sent a representative to the event in Westminster or who have registered an interest in being involved but who had so far not completed the survey we have reopened the network survey link again on a short-term basis and hope that recipients of this report will be able to disseminate information and encourage additional sign-up.

The analysis which follows therefore only concerns the 40 useable responses to the short (predominantly multiple-choice) questionnaire, received by the 14th March 2020

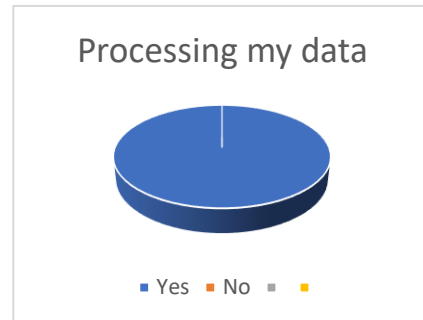
This short report of responses identifies the key themes/findings and identified priorities of respondents. The survey will be used to form the basis for ongoing network and collaborative action including through the auspices of NEON and to facilitate and guide APP and broader sector-wide steering group priorities in coming months.

RESPONSES

Q1.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of networking and information sharing about the experiences of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showpeople and Boaters (GTRSB) in Higher Education. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with current UK Data Protection legislation.

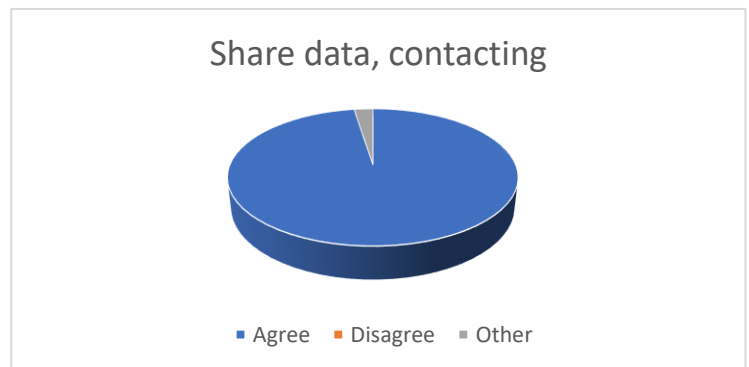
100% of respondents consented to data sharing.



Q2.

May we hold your contact details on a database and share these amongst this group of members participating in the survey?

Agreeing to share your contact details indicates that you are therefore willing to be contacted by other members of the network.



One refusal by a community member.

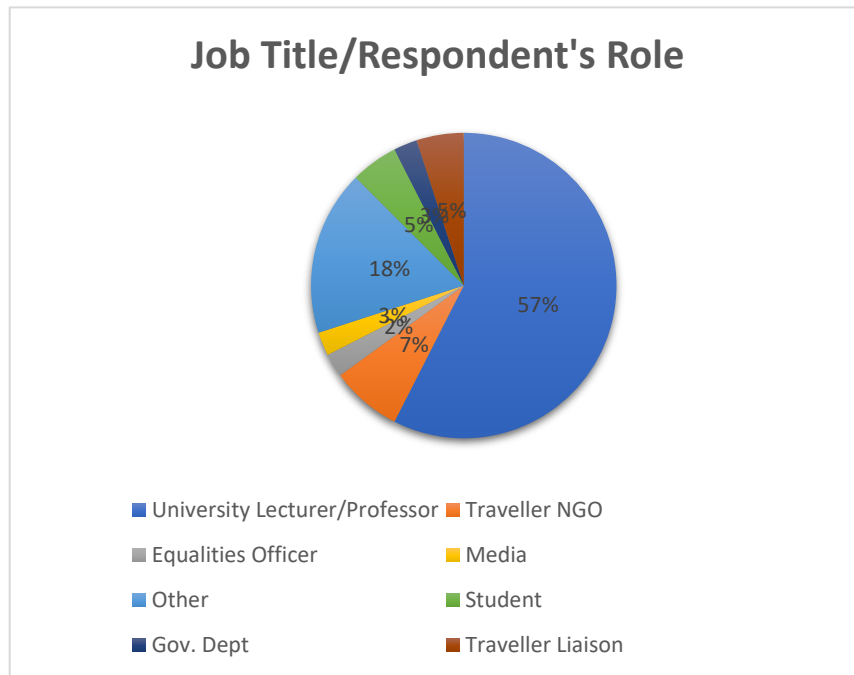
Comment: "Survey is widely open, wary of sharing contact details. I'm ok with being asked prior [to sharing of my personal contact details] and agreeing [on a case by case basis]. You can hold my details". 544916-544907-53072074

Question 3 asked for the Name of the respondent. This information is currently held separately but will be distributed (other than the one refusal) to network members.

Question 4 focused on the Job Title/Roles of respondents (analysis by self-identified ethnicity is presented under Question 11)

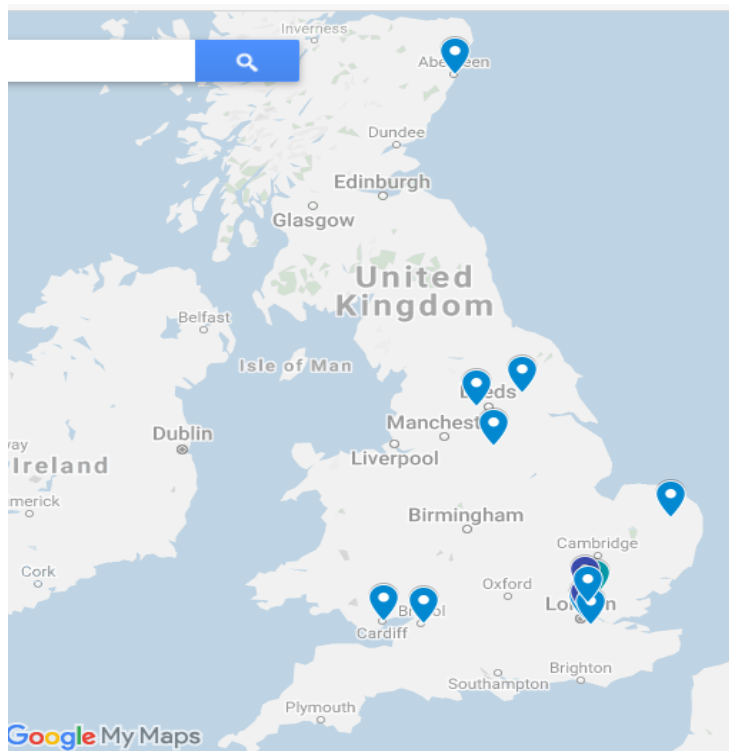
40 respondents (excluding duplicate answers)

- 8 University responses - WP professionals
- 10 GTR specialist academics/ students
- 1 x Government Dept. (MHCLG) Housing
- 1 x Equality Human Rights professional
- 3 x GTR organisations.
- 1 x Traveller liaison support.
- 14 x Community members (other)
- 2 x Non-community members experienced volunteers /knowledgeable per GTR education E.g. former TES staff

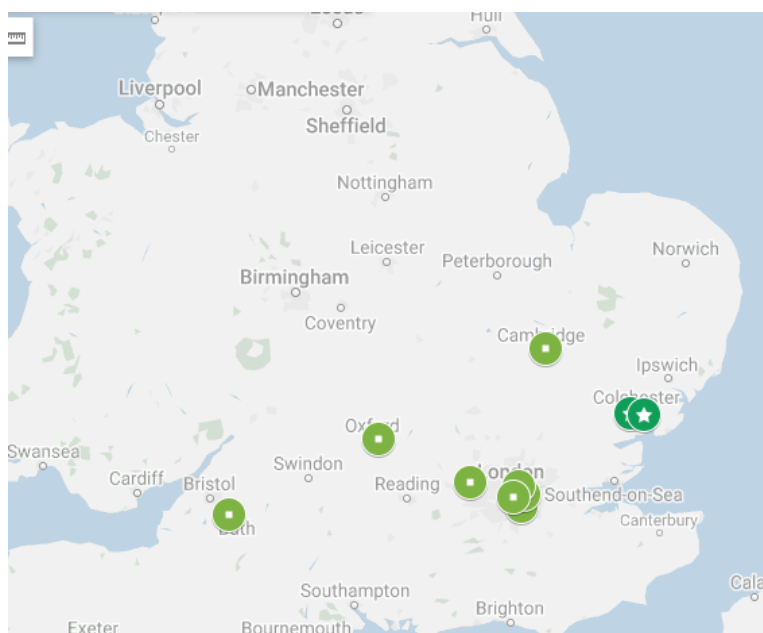


Questions 5-7 asked about the location of respondents' work/or where they were able to participate in network activities. **nb:** information is presented here under the following categories – whether respondents are community members; an HEI representative (for example as a member of a WP team), or non-community members who have expertise/interest but are not explicitly a university representative – e.g. an academic research working with the communities.

MAPS of geographical location of respondents:



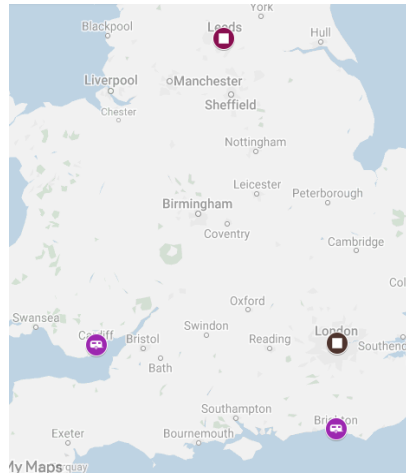
Community Member respondents















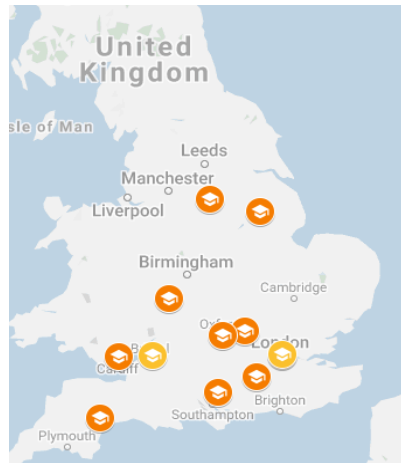
Non community member respondents

-  MHCLG
-  Friends Families & Travellers
-  The Romani Cultural and Art...
-  Cosmos Ltd

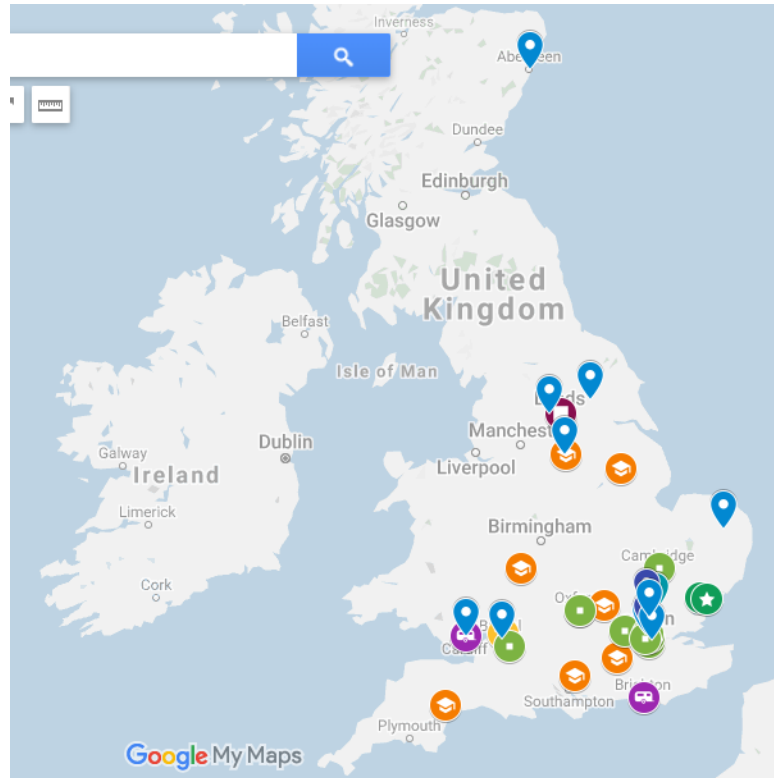
**NGOs and others e.g
Government
Department**



-  Bucks New Uni
-  Kings College London
-  Exeter university
-  Worcester University
-  Oxford Brookes university
-  Cardiff university
-  Sheffield Hallam University
-  University of Winchester
-  Bishop Grosseteste University
-  University Of Surrey
-  Office for Students
-  Office for Students












**Higher Education Institutions who have registered to become part of the
Network (scope to explore institutional participation in a 'Good Practice in
supporting GTRSB in HE' pledge)**



Overall Map of Respondent Categories

Key to map:

-  Ministry Housing Communities and Local Government
-  GTRSB NGO with a focus on education
-  Cosmos Ltd (educational consultancy)
-  Non Community member (e.g. working academic/emeritus Professor)
-  Non Community member Other, e.g. NGO staff,
-  Community member in HE (e.g. Academic, or in Widening Participation role)
-  Community member Other (e.g. student)
-  University
-  Office for Students

It is noteworthy there is some degree of overlap in relation to HEIs who have expressed an interest in being a network member and community members (in some cases working in/with NGOs) who are offering advice and support.

There is a good degree of coverage (Community Members/NGOs and Universities) in some areas of the South East (Brighton) and London. What is clear from the mapping exercise is that to ensure fuller coverage there is a need to reach out and engage more universities in the North of England, Wales and Scotland.

It is hoped that this coverage will improve via support from NEON and also given the reopening of the survey, as a result of Baroness Janet Whittaker's emailing contacts in a number of universities – in some cases directly reaching out to VCs – who showed interest in the concept or who attended the parliamentary event in London but who have subsequently not completed the survey link).

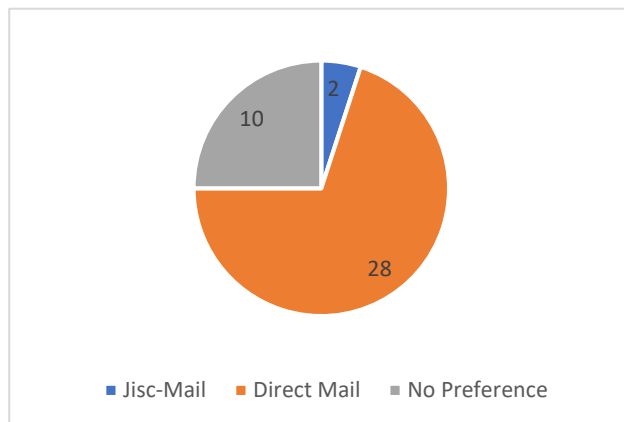
There are clear gaps in community member coverage in the North of England, Scotland and North Wales. We have contacts in these areas and envisage as the project builds momentum, inviting further community members to participate in regions not currently covered.

With hindsight it would have been helpful to gain a better understanding of the roles that community members are willing to undertake and what training they may feel they require. To this end we will be reaching out explore this further in coming weeks. The subject in which GTR, Showmen and Boaters graduated may in some cases be more relevant than their geographic location in relation to enhancing interest/providing guidance to potential students, if the community member can then be networked up to individual universities to gain more information about the specific offer or support network available. nb: should a 'good practice in supporting GTRSB students pledge' be signed up to by a network of institutions, this would in effect offer enhanced information for potential students in relation to awareness of what they can expect from an HEI.

At present, as is clear from the mapping exercise only two GTR organisations (Romani Cultural and Arts Company based in Cardiff but working across Wales, and Friends, Families and Travellers in Brighton but working throughout the South East) have completed the survey and expressed an interest in being part of the network. We are currently reaching out to more NGOs to explore what they can offer and whether they feel they would perhaps need more support in engaging around higher education with Universities.

Question 10 asked how respondents wished to be kept in contact when the Network has been set up.

Several options were provided. Almost two thirds of respondents wished to use direct email to remain in contact with other network members/receive information and opportunities for collaboration etc.



However on reflection of the logistics of such network management we may need to revert back to participants and ask if they would be willing to be part of a Jisc-mail network which is easier to maintain/allow intergroup sharing of materials.

Question 11 provided a multiple choice option for individuals to indicate their ethnicity or whether they identified as a member of any of the following communities:



Comments:

No Showman, uses the term "Showperson" . It's an exonym that will probably make us feel excluded. Consider changing this.

Mixed Romany/non-Romany

My paternal family are Showpeople, with some connections to other travelling communities. Much of my immediate family is settled now. My maternal family are from a non Travelling community.

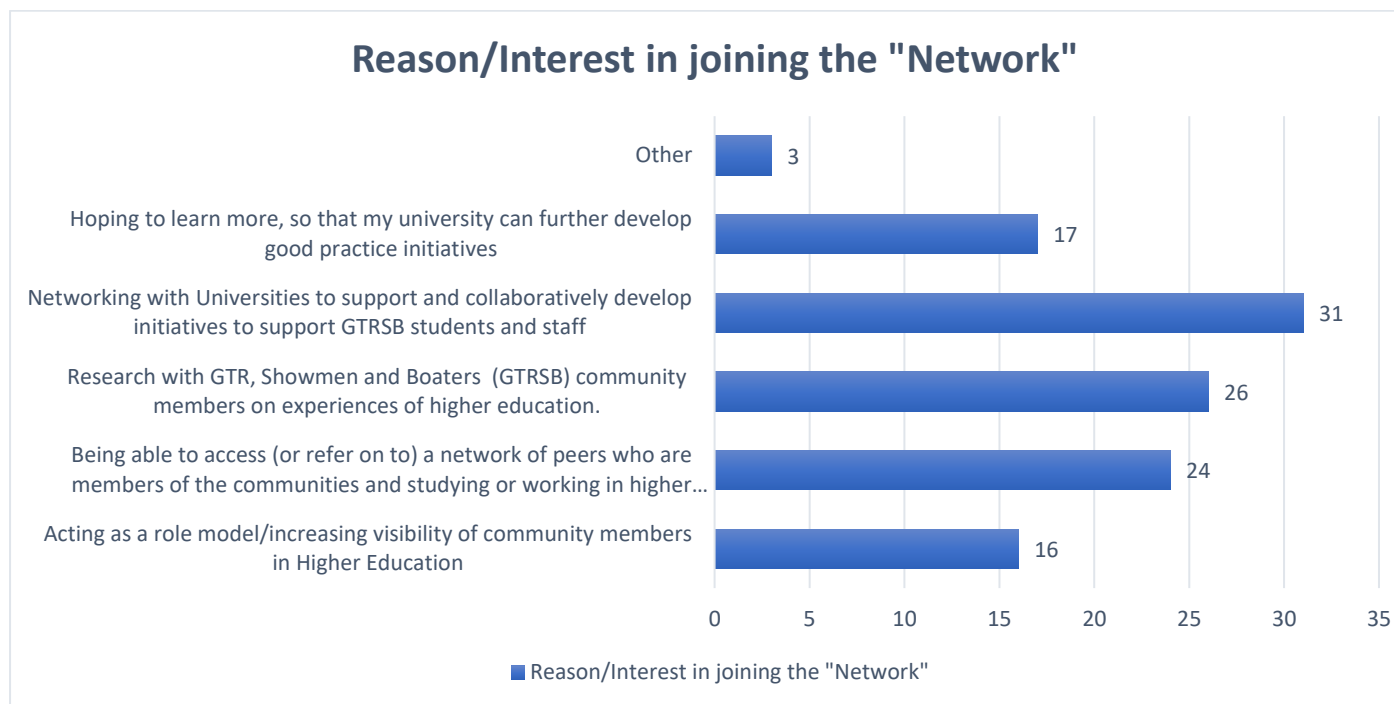
I am half Hungarian-Jewish and half Irish-Protestant. I recently discovered that a second cousin comes from Traveller background.

I have a history as a New Age Traveller and my daughter's dad is descended from boat travellers

nb: As can be seen 14/40 respondents (35%) were community members and some individuals – see comments above – selected ‘other’ although they clearly have networks into the communities. As such, to maximise coverage and expertise/buy-in from across the diverse communities, we need to engage more respondents from diverse GTR, Showmen and Boater backgrounds. At present attention amongst activists is very much focused on CV19 and an uptick in hate crime offences linked in some cases to the virus as well as recent irresponsible media coverage, but we are hopeful that as the situation returns to normal in coming weeks/months we will be able to encourage greater involvement in the network by direct contact/publicity for the initiative.

Question 12: For what reasons do you wish to participate in this “network”?

This was a multiple choice question enabling more than one option to be selected.



Comments

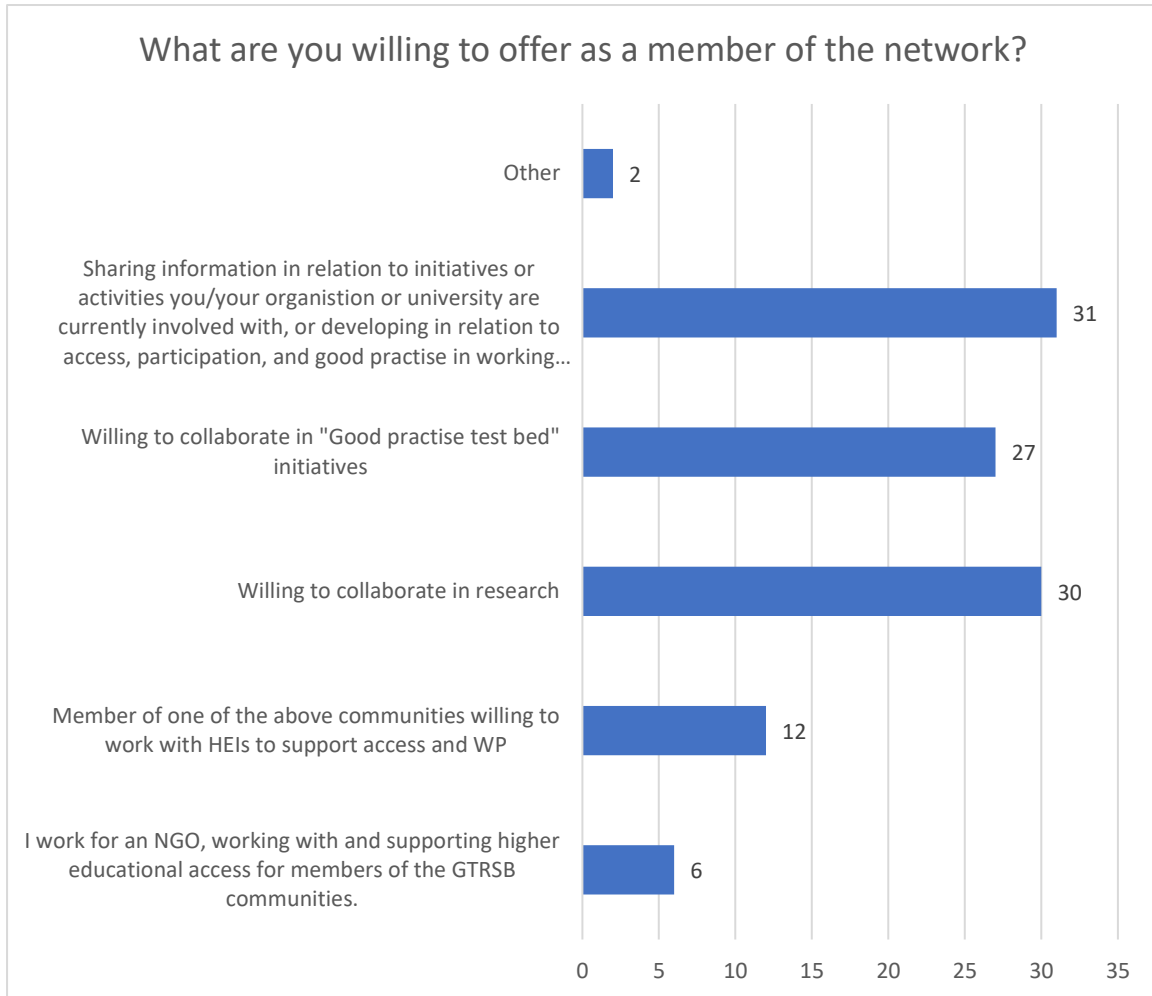
“Next year I hope to launch some sort of targeted mental health provision (ideally counselling/psychotherapy) for Travellers. Having a network to disseminate that would be useful. I would also help this can lead to finding more Travellers who are trained counsellors and encouraging more to train.” [Showman, Graduate respondent]

“Networking, keeping up to date in this area. How Office for Students may be able to offer support initiatives in the future.”

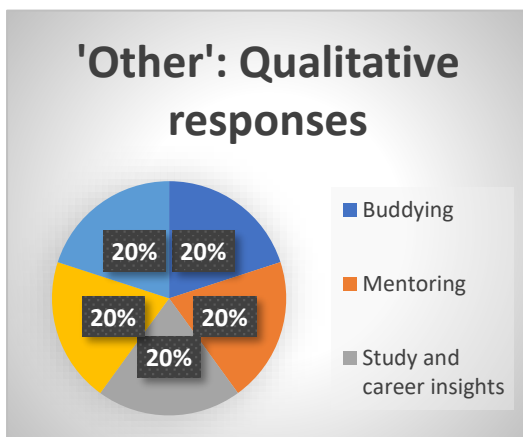
“Happy to offer contacts or act as a link”

Q13 What are you willing to offer as a member of the network?

Multiple choice, more than one answer possible. nb: see chart below re ‘other’ answers provided, in some case, listing several possibilities.



Question 13A – Suggestions received under ‘Other’ Qualitative Responses

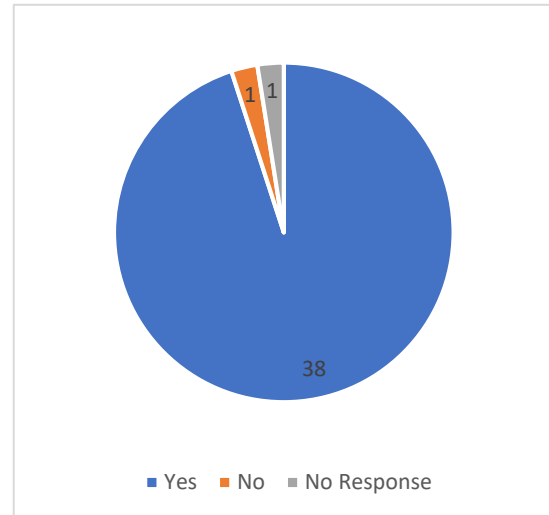


nb: One (Community) respondent added that they were “happy to circulate and publicise initiatives among wider networks of activists”.

Question 14

Are you interested in taking part in further consultation, small group meetings or local/regional network initiatives in this area of collaboration?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) indicated that they wished to take part in further consultation, meetings, and networking opportunities to support GTRSB students into and within HE.



Summary and Next Steps:

It is clear that there is a will and interest in creating a network around GTR Showmen and Boater into and within Higher Education.

There are a number of priorities and steps which can be taken forward. First and foremost to finalise an efficient way of network operationalisation given the challenges in maintaining an email list. As such unless we can identify an agency/institution to maintain such a list, self-managed Jisc-Mail (which would require going back to participants to confirm if they would be willing to agree such an option rather than a generally stated preference for direct email) seems the easiest option.

There is a need to increase sign-up/coverage across the country to ensure ongoing support for students and advice available to HEIs as well as the development in coming weeks of materials for HEIs and NGOs to share.

A priority for BNU and indeed some community members and NGOs with whom we have consulted is to scope the potential for a 'good practice pledge' which would require universities to give several undertakings around tailored student support, commemoration/celebration of key dates in the GTR calendars such as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day; International Roma Day and GTR History Month as well as to ensure inclusion of GTR related literature and learning within the curricula, and tailored outreach and WP support including through mentors in universities. Work around the content of such a 'pledge' is under development through consultation with community members and NGOs in the hopes that this will gain traction throughout the sector.

Other areas for development – emerging through the survey and preliminary consultation with stakeholders includes the absolute necessity for better data

gathering and analysis in relation to GTRSB communities in HE; and in relation to data and information sharing; including use of appropriate language such as 'Showmen' rather than 'Showpeople'; as well as seeking to alleviate concerns over 'self-identification' by some community members who would rather that the Network coordinator 'vets' potential contacts before giving out their name or email details to a third party.

We look forward to working further with the developing steering group on these and other matters.

Margaret Greenfields and Sherrie Smith – April 2020.

ⁱ See further: House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into "*Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*" (2019) London: HMSO; available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html> (Accessed 9 April 2020) and

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2016) *Is Britain Fairer? Spotlight on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma* Manchester: EHRC available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-england-fairer-2016-most-disadvantaged-groups-gypsies-travellers-roma.pdf> (accessed 15 April 2020)

ⁱⁱ *Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in higher education* London/Bristol: OfS Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/gypsy-roma-and-travellers-in-higher-education/> (Accessed 7 April 2020)

ⁱⁱⁱ See the report of the event (including a background briefing on the state of knowledge on GTRSB experiences in HE included as Appendix 1 of the report) Greenfields, M. (2019) Report of a Roundtable Meeting on Access to Higher Education for members of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) communities. High Wycombe: BNU at: <https://bucks.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/17932/> (Accessed 7 April 2020)