

Liverpool GTRSB Education Moving Together



October 2023- June 2024

Project Overview

In 2023, Liverpool John Moore’s University signed the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater Pledge (GTRSB). Initially designed by Buckinghamshire New University, the pledge started its implementation in higher education in 2019. LJMU signed the GTRSB pledge to improve access, retention, and outcomes in education for Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen, and Boaters.

The pledge focuses on four key areas:

- Data Collection
- Organisational & Institutional Culture,
- Outreach
- Inclusion, Celebration & Commemoration.

The LJMU Moving Together project culminated in a wonderful celebration in June 2024.

“It was lovely to see communities come together and make an instant connection. The LJMU Roma students were inspirational”

94% of Attendees at moving together event Increased their knowledge of GTRSB communities

The initiation of the pledge is complemented by the origins of this project, which can be traced back to two initiatives developed by Patricia Jolliffe and Helen Collins:

Liverpool Roma Employability Network (LREN), which aimed to foster greater recognition of the Roma community in Liverpool among employers, education providers, and the local community.

The Roma Education Aspiration Project (REAP) was supported by the UK government. The objective of REAP was to provide educational support and opportunities for the Roma community.

The Moving Together project aimed to harbour the objectives of the pledge whilst continuing the work of LREN and REAP in supporting the GTRSB communities in Liverpool. Specifically aiming to connect local schools and colleges with high numbers of GTRSB students whilst understanding the current support and provision offered to GTRSB pupils and families, encourage the signing of the pledge, offering support and culturally appropriate materials, and developing a celebration event to bring schools and colleges together during Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month.

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1. GTRSB Communities

Within the UK, there are various distinct travelling communities with a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The acronym GTRSB includes Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater communities. Each community possesses its unique heritage, and history, leading to different access to and barriers to education. This section will offer a brief overview of the communities included in the acronym.

Gypsy

The Gypsy community, historically known as Romany Gypsies, English Gypsies, and Welsh Gypsies, are a distinct ethnic group that traces its origins to a migration from continental Europe and India starting around 1515. The term "Gypsy" originated from the perception of the settled population, who believed that the Gypsies were from Egypt due to their dark complexion. In England and Wales, a subset of the Gypsy population refers to themselves as Romani Gypsies, using the term "Romani." However, it's important to note that "traveller" is also used interchangeably to refer to this community.

Traveller

The Irish Traveller community has a rich history that dates back to the 12th century in Ireland. During the early 19th century, they migrated to Britain, bringing their unique culture and traditions. One distinct aspect of their heritage is the language they developed, known as Shelta, a blend of English and Irish. This language has been passed down through generations and is an important part of their identity and heritage.

Roma community

The term "Roma" was officially adopted as an umbrella term by the first World Romani Congress in London in 1971. It is used to refer to various groups of people with Romani heritage. Linguistic and genetic analyses indicate that the Roma people are believed to have originated as a Hindavi group from northern India (Hancock, 2002). The Roma community is the largest ethnic minority group in Europe. After the accession of several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries into the European Union in 2004 and 2007, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Roma individuals migrating to the UK (Popoviciu et al., 2019).

Showmen community

Showmen is a colloquial term that describes anyone with a deep ancestry living and working within the travelling fairground community. The Showmen community has a rich historical culture, traditions, dialect, and governing bodies. The Showmen identity was born from a melting pot of the social classes and aristocracy, including famous players (travelling actors), artists, circus folk, and market traders. The community was first recognised on the UK census in 2021.

Boater Community

The boater community in the UK is a close-knit group of individuals who have chosen to make their homes on canal boats that traverse the country's waterways. These individuals have formed a unique and resilient community that has become integral to British culture. Their way of life, which revolves around the water and the nomadic lifestyle of living on boats, has created a distinct and fascinating subculture within the UK.

2. Methodology

Mixed Methods Approach

A mixed-methods approach was utilised to comprehensively understand the educational experiences of the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater (GTRSB) communities in Liverpool. In addition, we mapped the schools within LCC where GTRSB students studied and aimed to understand the support offered to these students at the time of study. Our goal was to develop a network of schools willing to sign the GTRSB pledge and integrate its principles into their educational programs.

This approach allowed for integrating quantitative and qualitative data, providing a holistic view of the situation. This was achieved through an online survey, interviews and focused meetings, and the development and delivery of a celebration event, which included prior outreach to local schools and community centres. The study received ethical approval from Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU).

Stage 1: Data collection and Network building

2.1 Identification and Initial Contact

We utilised Local Government Data and the 2021 Census to collect information about all schools and colleges in Liverpool that enrol students from the GTRSB communities. We found 51 educational institutions, including primary/secondary schools and colleges. Subsequently, we contacted each of the 51 schools to gather contact information for key personnel, such as Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) leads, Inclusion officers, and Head Teachers.

2.2 Networks

Alongside the schools and colleges identified, we also developed and identified a network of 18 supporting organisations and individuals, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and council members, who were actively engaged with or looking to be engaged with the GTRSB communities. These individuals and organisations play a crucial role in providing support and contributing to the development and well-being of the communities.

2.3 Online Survey

In October 2023, an online survey was created and tested with ten local community members to ensure its clarity and relevance. The survey aimed to understand schools and colleges within LCC and their current and past intake of GTRSB students, the support offered to students and the school, and to determine if there is a need for a connected support network.

Additionally, the survey aimed to establish a relationship with the schools and colleges within LCC to introduce them to the GTRSB pledge whilst understanding their current barriers to inclusion, if any, to supporting GTRSB intake and current pupils. The survey was distributed widely, targeting the broader GTRSB communities and the identified stakeholders.

2.4 Follow-Up:

Initially, we found it challenging to gain interaction and traction with the survey and build relationships with schools/ colleges and organisations. This was due to difficulty targeting the correct contacts who work on engagement with the GTRSB communities or if there was a lack of knowledge surrounding the communities and the pledge. Schools with more GTRSB pupils immediately understood the project's aim and were happy to start the initial conversation. To gain traction, four follow-ups were sent to schools and colleges; this allowed us to achieve the best possible engagement whilst respecting those schools that did not want to engage at this time.

Stage 2: Targeted Approach, Organisational and institutional culture

2.5 Targeted outreach and qualitative data collection

We began targeted outreach and qualitative data collection after establishing connections with schools, colleges, and NGOs. This involved conducting eight semi-structured interviews, both online and in person. The purpose of these interviews was to gather detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of GTRSB students and stakeholders, understand the current support available to students, identify any barriers, determine the need and desire for a connected GTRSB network, and gain further understanding of the data collected through the survey.

2.6 Meetings with stakeholders and organisations

After conducting semi-structured interviews, we held three meetings with representatives from schools, councils, NGOs, and the community on the following dates: February 6th, March 20th, and May 22nd. These meetings encouraged dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders with the aim of establishing a network and organising an event in June to celebrate GTRSB History Month whilst fundamentally promoting inclusion and the pledge.

2.7 Student Engagement:

We convened a series of four meetings with LJMU GTRSB students to delve deeper into their educational experiences and the specific challenges they are encountering or have encountered. These sessions were designed to facilitate open discussions and establish a platform for students to express their viewpoints on the current state of education and the barriers to access.

Stage 3: Outreach and Celebration

2.8 Engagement Visits

We organised two community visits to connect actively with the GTRSB community members. During one of these visits, we had the opportunity for LJMU GTRSB students to

interact and engage with GTRSB pupils and community members. This interaction allowed the students to openly share their personal experiences and perspectives, providing valuable insights whilst gaining important feedback and co-experience sharing.

2.9 Planning and production of the Moving for Change event

A GTRSB Celebration Event, spearheaded by the GTRSB community, took place on June 17, 2024, at LJMU in the John Lennon Art and Design building. The event was meticulously planned to unite community members, schools, colleges, and external organisations to celebrate Liverpool's GTRSB communities. The event's planning took place over several months, with an emphasis on arts-based engagement. This included GTRSB students developing Flyers, Maps and Posters to promote the event. At the same time, collaborating with schools who kindly provided travel for pupils to attend the event. We had several stalls and partners for the day, including the student union, National Fairground & Circus Archive, and Irish Community Care. This celebratory gathering aimed to underscore the project's positive outcomes strengthen the communities' bonds with the university and inspire further collaboration between organisations and stakeholders.

2.10 LJMU Celebration Event Evaluation:

We conducted an evaluation survey at the LJMU Celebration Event and the subsequent outreach days and received 51 responses. These responses highlighted a diverse range of positive outcomes from the event. 100% of the respondents agreed that the event would make a difference to the community and that it motivated them to contribute to the GTRSB community. The best thing about the celebration was the dancing, atmosphere, and community spirit **'It was an amazing event which celebrated our cultures and brought people together as well as positively promoting higher education'**. Furthermore, 14 young people shared how they would explore opportunities to attend further education.

3.0 Research Limitations

The study, like all studies, has limitations. At the same time, it provides evidence that can support future research. Initially focused on GTRSB, it has allowed us to learn from participants' varied experiences, which will inform future research. How does one's identity exist in a liminal space, such as the intersection of home, study, and work? What are the most effective coping strategies? Additionally, are certain sectors, jobs, or disciplines more empathetic and less discriminatory towards GTRSB individuals than others? With a larger and more diverse sample, future studies could delve into the lived experiences of GTRSB students and individuals who also identify as disabled or LGBT. This research has the potential, especially in these unprecedented times, to drive discussions that help organisations understand the support needs of GTRSB individuals.

Although the study can be marked as a significant springboard for engagement with GTRSB communities, specific limitations in this study surrounding the engagement of members from each individual GTRSB community were challenging; this is due to multiple factors, including the time frame of the research, which can limit interaction and meaningful connections being recognised. This is because establishing trust between institutions and GTRSB communities is a considerable barrier, as displayed throughout GTRSB literature (Thomas, 2019; Greenfields, 2023). Therefore, to continue breaking this barrier, research projects following 'Moving Together' (MT) should have an emphasis on the continuation of building trust

between the institution and communities by using the connections built through REAP, LREN and MT whilst looking to a sustainable GTRSB hub housed by LJMU.

Richard O'Neill - Gypsy Storyteller
'Moving together'



*From colleges and schools across Liverpool they came
To mark the pledge for GTRSB, their aspirations the same
They stood and spoke with pride of success and moving on
Reflecting on the past, present, and future as the work goes on
Families cheering children, rejoicing in their success
University staff striving to give their very best
Dancing around the vardo under the shining sun
Gypsy, Roma, Showman, Traveller united as one
An event so fabulous, inspiring every soul
Truly inclusive, intergenerational, and whole*

4.0 Key Impacts and Outcomes

Impact 1 Establishing a GTRSB culture at LJMU

This research and outreach project has achieved significant progress in building connections and improving understanding of issues faced by Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater (GTRSB) communities across different educational and community settings. This has allowed LJMU to become the leading university in the Northwest region for GTRSB advocacy and support. A dedicated GTRSB Committee has been established, comprised of representatives from across the university. The committee's objectives include developing and implementing policies to support GTRSB students, ensuring university-wide representation and consideration of GTRSB issues, and facilitating research and outreach projects focused on GTRSB communities. Developing and implementing a GTRSB culture within LJMU has allowed the university to support other institutions in taking the pledge, whilst building a support network for those looking to work collaboratively to tackle inequalities the communities face.

Impact 2 Challenges and Opportunities – School data analysis

School Feedback from Survey

The initial survey was conducted by a total of eight primary schools and one college in Liverpool, focusing on the educational experience of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater (GTRSB) pupils. This comprehensive survey aimed to identify the demographic distribution, challenges, and support mechanisms available to GTRSB students in these educational institutions. Among the surveyed schools, two institutions reported a notably high concentration of GTRSB pupils, each with more than 36 GTRSB students enrolled. It was particularly noted that most of the GTRSB pupils in these two schools come from Roma backgrounds.

Identified Challenges

The survey highlighted a series of significant challenges GTRSB pupils face in their educational journey. These challenges are multi-faceted and include:

Poor Attendance: One of the most prevalent issues identified was irregular school attendance among GTRSB pupils. Factors contributing to this include frequent mobility, family commitments, and cultural practices.

Lack of Routine: Many GTRSB pupils struggle with establishing and maintaining a consistent daily routine, which can affect their academic performance and social integration within the school environment.

Extended Travel: Due to the itinerant lifestyle of many GTRSB families, extended travel times to and from school are common. This contributes to irregular attendance and impacts the students' punctuality and energy levels for school activities.

Language Barriers: Language barriers pose a significant hurdle, particularly for Roma pupils who may not speak English as their first language. This barrier affects their ability to fully participate in classroom activities, comprehend the curriculum, and communicate effectively with teachers and peers.

Support Mechanisms

The survey also explored the various support mechanisms in place to assist GTRSB families and enhance the educational experience of their children. These support systems included:

Home Visits: Regular home visits by school staff or designated support workers help maintain communication with GTRSB families, understand their needs, and provide tailored assistance to encourage better school attendance and engagement.

Partnerships with Children's English Language Centres: Collaborations with specialised English language centres provide targeted language support to GTRSB pupils, helping them to overcome language barriers and improve their academic performance.

Coffee Mornings for Families: These informal gatherings offer a platform for GTRSB families to connect with school staff, share their experiences, and receive information about school activities and resources. Such initiatives foster a sense of community and support among GTRSB families.

Health Appointments: Schools facilitate health appointments to ensure that GTRSB pupils access necessary healthcare services, addressing any health issues that may affect their school attendance and performance.

Family Meetings: Regular family meetings are organised to discuss the pupils' progress, address concerns, and engage families in the educational process. These meetings aim to build a collaborative relationship between the school and GTRSB families, promoting a supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

Although limited, this survey's findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the unique challenges faced by GTRSB pupils in Liverpool's educational institutions. By understanding these challenges and implementing effective support mechanisms, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for GTRSB pupils, enhancing their educational outcomes and overall well-being. Continued efforts and collaboration between schools, families, and community organisations are essential to achieve this goal.

Impact 3- Enhanced Collaboration Between Educational Institutions and Local Authorities

The project successfully collaborated with multiple educational institutions, including primary schools, secondary schools, a college, and the Liverpool City Council (LCC), to tackle GTRSB issues. This equated to St Hughs Primary School, St Francis Assisi, Archbishop Blanch and Liverpool City College taking the commitment to sign the GTRSB into Schools Pledge with a clear aim to implement the four principles into their school policies.

The pledge signatories encouraged and supported by this project signify a dedicated effort to create an inclusive environment and support the educational needs of GTRSB students of all ages. The signing of the pledge fosters a more inclusive educational environment, including developing an inclusive curriculum and promoting cultural awareness. Moreover, it addresses specific challenges GTRSB students face, such as providing necessary support and resources. It also Promotes awareness and understanding of GTRSB cultures and histories through educational initiatives and events and encourages respect and appreciation for diversity.

Each institution has also provided a dedicated testimony when signing the pledge; this can be found below, alongside their schools and colleges' mission statements.

St Hugh's Primary School

St Hugh's Catholic Primary School provides a welcoming, safe, and secure environment for all. Our school aims to be a community which reflects real gospel values of love and forgiveness. A community in which each individual, child or adult, can work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding; so as to broaden their appreciation of the world, its cultures and its people.

Testimonial

St. Hugh's is an inclusive and welcoming school for all. We aim to cater for the needs of all our children and the communities we serve. We are firmly committed to meeting the needs of our GTRSB community and would like to sign the pledge as a token of our determination to do this to the best of our ability. We are committed to doing this by ensuring that families from this community are able to access education and achieve the best possible outcomes. We will ensure that all of our policies and procedures include GTRSB, and we will monitor their effectiveness. We will ensure that all staff understand and are responsive to the particular needs of this community and we will continue to try our best to engage with parents and families. We want all of our children, families and communities to feel welcome, included and supported in our school.

St Francis of Assisi

St Francis of Assisi is a joint faith academy (Catholic and Church of England), although it welcomes students from a range of faiths. It is truly a unique place with a wonderfully diverse community. It is inclusive and warmly welcomes children of all abilities, cultures, and backgrounds.

Testimonial

The Academy of St Francis of Assisi is committed to welcoming, educating and supporting all members of the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman, Boater community. Inspired by our Christian values, we accept this pledge to ensure that our GTRSB students are welcomed into a community where they can flourish, thrive, and shine. We challenge prejudice, derogatory language and discrimination against BTRSB children. Our school mission is 'success for all' and we believe that we can continue to foster an inclusive environment where our students can 'live, love, and learn together in the light of Christ'

Archbishop Blanch

Archbishop Blanch is the only Church of England girls' school in Liverpool. It offers all students a dynamic place to learn in a caring, Christian way.

Testimonial

Archbishop Blanch are thrilled to announce that our secondary school has signed the GTRSB (Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater) Pledge, becoming the first secondary school in Liverpool to do so. This significant milestone reflects our unwavering commitment to promoting equality and diversity within our school community.

By signing the GTRSB Pledge, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment where every student, regardless of their background, can thrive and achieve their full potential. We

believe that education should be both aspirational and inspirational, empowering all students to reach their goals and contribute positively to society.

Our school is committed to implementing policies and practices that support the needs and celebrate the cultures of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, and Boater communities. We recognise the unique challenges these students may face and are dedicated to providing tailored support to ensure their academic success and personal well-being.

We are proud to lead the way in Liverpool by taking this important step. Our commitment to the GTRSB Pledge aligns with our broader mission to cultivate a learning environment that values diversity, champions inclusivity, and inspires every student to succeed. Together, we will continue to work towards a future where all students have equal opportunities to excel and make meaningful contributions to our community and beyond.

City of Liverpool College –

The City of Liverpool College is the only general FE college in the city and the largest FE college in Liverpool City Region. It offers the widest, most diverse vocational curriculum in the region and ranges from entry up to degree and post-graduate levels.

Impact 4 - Comprehensive Network and Knowledge Dissemination Across Liverpool City Region (LCC)

Alongside implementing a culture of support within LJMU, this research project has also been key in developing a comprehensive network and knowledge-sharing framework to be established across the Liverpool City Council (LCC) to address GTRSB issues. This network includes LJMU Schools, Liverpool City Council, Colleges, and NGOs, including Irish Community Care (ICC). The network aims to enhance collaborative efforts to support GTRSB communities, share best practices and resources to improve educational outcomes for GTRSB students and promote sustained engagement and advocacy for GTRSB issues.

A formal liaison has also been established with the Head of Race Equality in the Liverpool City Council (LCC). This collaboration is crucial for integrating GTRSB issues into broader race equality initiatives, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of the GTRSB community are represented in policy-making processes, and promoting equality and inclusion across all public services.

Impact 5 LJMU GTRSB Celebration Event

On 17 June 2024, Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU) hosted a GTRSB Celebration Event, which attracted over 200 attendees. The event aimed to bring together students, community members, educational institutions, and local authorities to celebrate the achievements of GTRSB students and community members. Additionally, it sought to raise awareness of GTRSB issues within the broader academic and local communities. The event also provided a platform to strengthen the network between educational institutions, local authorities, and the GTRSB community, fostering collaborative efforts to address the challenges and opportunities the GTRSB community faces. The event also served as a clear marker for the institutions that had signed the pledge to promote their commitment to the communities.

Increased Awareness of Educational Opportunities

The project has enhanced the understanding of local educational opportunities within the GTRSB community by providing customised information and conducting outreach into schools and community centres, whilst providing the celebration event. Additionally, it has empowered GTRSB individuals to pursue further educational and career prospects. This has allowed for trust to be built amongst the communities and the institution and successfully minimised the disparities between the GTRSB community and educational providers, thus creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all involved.

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25 November 2024