

**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee**

**Grant gwella addysg: Plant Sipsiwn, Roma a Theithwyr, a phlant o leiafrifoedd ethnig | Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children**

**EIG 06**

**Ymateb gan : Y Ganolfan ar gyfer Cyfranogiad Plant a Phobl Ifanc, Prifysgol Canolbarth Sir Gaerhirfryn (UCLan)**

**Response from : The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, University of Central Lancashire**

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### **Relevant expertise**

The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation at the University of Central Lancashire is an international hub for research and teaching focused on participatory action. Staff at the Centre first worked with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and young people in Wales in 2003. We currently co-lead PEER (Participation and Empowerment Experiences for Roma youth), a 2 year project funded through an EU Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Action Grant JUST/2013/FRAC/AG/6230. PEER involves partners in three UK nations and eight other EU countries collaborating to co-produce training and guidance on participatory ways of bringing change for communities and promoting children and young people's education and empowerment.

In the UK PEER is working with GRT young people aged 12-19 to build participation capacity and opportunities for young people. In Wales, PEER works in partnership with Travelling Ahead, Unity, Traveller Education and play services.

### **Evidence base**

In PEER UK, five groups of GRT young people have been involved in trying to bring about improvements on priority issues they have chosen: Improving education for GRT children and young people; ending discrimination; and challenging Roma exclusion. These 50 young people have investigated, planned and then taken action to try to bring about change through seven participatory research projects. They have involved a further 550 young people (from both GRT and non-GRT communities), GRT parents and professionals. UCLan have also hosted a policy discussion event with 50 participants (adults and young people). The responses in this document are based on the views of the GRT young people involved in this action research and the evidence we have collected from workers who are supporting them. Findings from PEER will be published at the end of 2016.

## Consultation Response

Question 1. From 2015–16, the Gypsy Children and Traveller Children Grant and the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant were merged into the new Education Improvement Grant. What impact has this had on the levels of educational support available to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Minority Ethnic children, and their educational outcomes?

(If this is a concern to you, how should this be addressed?)

In Wales, GRT young people involved in PEER have indicated the value of having spaces within schools that are dedicated to them.

*'Having a [safe GRT support] place in school, or opposite school... support with school should be more of a priority than sites'. (GRT young person)*

*'Having a quite space at school was good where I could study...when I go home I'd have a lot to do.'* (GRT young person)

Young people described how having safe spaces or support teachers just for GRT young people did not mean they were separate from the others, it focussed them on attainment.

*'It was just more support for when you have been out of lessons. That's how I got my Maths GCSE' (GRT young person)*

*'Instead of doing languages and stuff we come [to our dedicated support space] and [Traveller Education worker] will do extra work with us...to help us get our GCSEs.'* (GRT young person)

Given the importance of creating spaces and relationships in which GRT young people can feel known, recognised and supported, we are concerned about the lack of dedicated funds to support and sustain these relationships. The provision of ring fenced funds for GRT educational support ensures long term employment for workers in these roles, and it is through long term engagement with communities that relationships of trust and understanding are built. These relationships enable children and families to feel secure that any discrimination faced by their children will be adequately challenged.

Where long term positive relationships exist between families and Traveller Education workers or GRT led organisations funded to support their elective home education, young people can be more effectively supported to engage in both formal and informal learning. This can enhance educational outcomes that can lead to higher level qualifications and professional careers. Our experience in PEER shows that workers who have known families for years are able to support young people to:

- maintain a focus on education (if they so choose), when they may otherwise be drawn into other family obligations
- re-engage with education, after personal and family circumstances have taken them away from schooling for some time
- achieve academic and broader educational attainment, including obtaining skills as trainers, mentors and young leaders

Known workers build trust with whole families by providing them informally with advocacy and advice about issues beyond immediate educational attainment.

Retaining targeted funding for GRT educational support is of vital importance here. Although, in many places in Wales, these dedicated spaces and relationships are still in place, experience reported by workers in England suggests that when ring fenced money is removed, then job security has been undermined and time available to provide whole family support has been reduced. Consequently supportive relationships with communities have been disrupted.

Question 2. How effective are other Welsh Government policies and strategies for supporting the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children?

(If this is a concern to you, how should this be addressed?)

#### Bullying and discrimination policies

We note the development of anti-bullying policy in Wales and it is a positive finding in our research that there are some improvements in some places in Wales:

*'They don't give us no bullying or nothing now. We just avoid it...I think they understand us'*

*(GRT Young Person)*

Our findings show a marked difference in the levels of bullying experienced by Gypsy and Traveller young people in different areas. A decrease in bullying was evident in some schools over time, including secondary schools, especially where there is direct support from dedicated TES staff.

*'If we are in trouble we will come down here, and she will sort us out. She's like our solicitor ...say if anyone was bullying us, she's like a real proper solicitor.'* *(GRT Young Person)*

However bullying remains a significant problem experienced by GRT children and young people (in both Wales and England).

*'I got bullied at high school so I did not go back to high school...teachers should recognise [people saying pikey] as racist. It kind of made me feel like giving up on school'. (GRT Young Person)*

*"Teachers should not dismiss racist comments – recognise it as racism"  
(GRT Young Person)*

Recommendations from young people regarding addressing bully and discrimination

It is people, rather than policies who appear to make the most substantial difference. Where the GRT support function has been subsumed into the role of the equalities officer there is a risk that children will not feel they have a dedicated 'solicitor' who they know will defend them. Early findings from action research by GRT young people in Wales suggests that a peer-to-peer education approach is effective in challenging discrimination by young people against Gypsies and Travellers.

Although there has been work in Wales to develop GRT curriculum resources and training geared towards awareness raising, we note that the Travelling Ahead Education Report continued to call for teachers to be adequately trained. Our findings echo this concern. Despite the production of GRT curriculum resources, when asked whether these were being used in schools, GRT children across schools in five local authorities in Wales reported a lack of GRT culturally specific content in the mainstream lessons they attend.

Young people from Wales have reported that some teachers continue to hold discriminatory attitudes about GRT employment and tax-paying. Some teachers also remain ignorant about the reasons for protected cultural and family traditions of travelling. Young people who have delivered training on cultural awareness to their peers and to adults report 'lightbulb' moments, where participants in their training appear to have suddenly seen things from a new perspective and have shifted their attitudes. The young people involved in PEER therefore extend this recommendation to all school children and professionals working with children:

***PEER young people's recommendation:*** *All school children, teachers AND student teachers AND other people training to work in health, social care and public service, should have training in GRT culture delivered by GRT young people.*

Experiences reported outside of Wales suggest that in the absence of a dedicated TES worker within schools, employment of a community member in a supporting role and appointment of a community member to the board of governors are both effective strategies in reducing bullying. Having community members in these roles ensures that there is a 'safe' person to report incidents to, and they in turn can reassure children and their parents that something has been done to redress any discriminatory attitudes.

### Attendance

Concerns raised about attendance levels particularly at secondary level (e.g. in Gypsy and Traveller Education: Engaging Gypsy and Traveller Families – A Research Report) are echoed by children and young people who are keen to attend education. In research interviews, young people and a parent talked about the need for community members to encourage attendance at school, but they pointed out that this would only happen if they were shown more understanding and trust. Again, the role of long term relationships with trusted staff is crucial here. But, in addition, location played a key role in terms of accessing a chosen school as did ward boundaries. Continuity in their education was an important issues for the majority of the GRT children and young people involved in PEER and young people and their parents were keen to attend schools that other Gypsy and Traveller children currently attended:

*'My Mam changed her mind cos everyone else was there. ..When other girls are there then you want to go as well'. (GRT young person)*

In contrast other young people reported feeling isolated in some schools when they were the only child from the GRT community. Our concern regarding attendance relates to the lack of availability of suitable school places where GRT young people can attend with confidence that they will be in supportive environments.

In some cases, partial attendance seemed to be interpreted by teaching professionals as pupils being disinterested or disengaged, rather than accepting and respecting that partial attendance was as a result of GRT custom and traditions. And in another reported situation where trying to attend, a pupil was excluded without explanation.

*'After two days [attendance] they tried to exclude me for nothing. When my Mam came in they had no answer for her'. (GRT young person)*

Although only one such incidence was reported in our research, the higher levels of exclusion of GRT young people are well documented.

Recommendations from young people regarding attendance

Young people in PEER again reinforced the need for cultural understanding:

*'More understanding of our culture...and on both sides' (GRT young person)*

*'Realise and accept that we may be late.'* (GRT young person)

They also called for research into the reasons for exclusions of GRT young people.

Handholding of children as they are making transitions into secondary school and building relationships with communities was essential. As noted, young people were more open to the idea of going to school or college if they could attend with other community members they knew. In some examples, this was facilitated by an induction day in which year 6 pupils being welcomed to their future secondary school by other GRT young people.

Access to schools where there are other GRT young people is a pre-requisite for this approach. Therefore, young people involved in PEER propose this recommendation:

***PEER young people's recommendation:***

*Provide greater opportunities for GRT young people to attend the secondary school that they choose.*

As some Gypsy and Traveller young people do not have any other community members at their secondary schools, in one PEER project, pupils have taken the lead in reaching out to young people in other schools where they feel isolated or discriminated against. This may provide a short term solution for some young people and help them to maintain attendance in environments where they do not feel welcome.

Question 3. What more could be done to support the educational attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Minority Ethnic children:

### Appropriate Education

Within schools, a key request from young people involved in PEER is for education that is appropriate to interests. Lack of recognition of oral traditions, and school systems focussing on literacy and numeracy can fail to engage with the knowledge and the capacity GRT children and young people bring. Young people requested alternative teaching strategies that include content relevant to GRT young people's lives:

*'The school system would be better if it were more focused on what everyone wants and need, not just the same for everyone.'* (GRT young person)

One group of Gypsy Traveller young people who conducted research with Roma young people in three different sites concluded that promoting attainment for Roma from outside the UK required

- *Help for them to learn the English language, to complete their GCSE's and get a further education.*
- *Lessons in school where other people can learn their language and know more about their background.*
- *Support for them to set up their own participation forum and inclusion in ours (PEER Action Research Group in Wales)*

Across local authorities, access to vocational qualifications was seen as important. In some high schools construction qualifications and hair beauty classes are provided. However in one locality in England, spending cuts had put an end to alternative provision that had been successful in providing vocational qualifications were accessed through colleges, even though students were aged under 16. Workers here felt that funding dedicated to GRT attainment would have facilitated on-going alternative provision. There is also an apparent role for regional consortia in the provision of short accredited courses which promote employability and build on young GRT existing skills. Training in mechanics, building and tree surgery was suggested, particularly for young GRT males.

At a national level, provision for gaining accredited learning and qualifications through informal learning could be strengthened. We support the Travelling Ahead call for extra funding to ensure home tutors are available for those who want home tutoring and for the provision of support to parents and carers who deliver home education to their children. In PEER we are developing qualification routes for young people engaged in leading participatory group work and at UCLan experienced community members and young people have succeeded in gaining entry to higher education on the basis of their experience, without the proof of points that normally act as a barrier.

## Monitoring and Inspection

To ensure and monitor progress, the final insight shared by young people in PEER is:

### ***PEER young people's recommendation:***

*Involve GRT young people in developing outcomes and giving evidence to inspection criteria for OFSTED and ESTYN.*

In one PEER project, young people made recommendations for outcomes indicators for education and we are yet to hear whether these have been implemented.

Regardless of local implementation, developing this approach at a national level could ensure development of a system for monitoring progress using indicators and targets that are relevant to the challenges that community members themselves identify.

Question 4. If you could recommend to the Welsh Government one thing it could do to improve the educational attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children, what would it be?

### **Sustained Funding**

If we have to choose just one recommendation, it would be to ensure there is adequate and sustained funding for Traveller Education Services and Travelling Ahead so that they can support young people to continue to engage in participatory activities and to progress into employment in these sectors. Our experience over the past two years shows that when children and young people engage in action focussed participation, they identify goals and bring about positive change for themselves and their communities, including in relation to education. This benefits not only the young people engaged in these participatory activities, but also the young people in the wider school and community environments they engage with. Young people directly involve benefit from education in the largest sense as results from the evaluation of PEER suggest that it supports young people to develop increased confidence, oral and written communication, action planning skills and civic competence. Through these activities they become competent leaders who can champion the rights of their communities, but in order for them to experience equality, as with other professionals, they should have access to paid employment to carry out these roles.



Question 5. Do you have any other concerns about the amalgamation of the other previously separate grants into the Education Improvement Grant? If so, please provide details.

We have no direct experience of this.

Question 6. Finally, are there any other issues relating to the terms of reference that you would like to draw to the Committee's attention?

No

EU Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Action Grant JUST/2013/FRAC/AG/6230

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