

“Hand the Shame Back”

A Qualitative Study of Traveller Experiences Across the Education Continuum - Enabling a University for All



Dr. Hannagh McGinley
UCD Access & Lifelong Learning



University College Dublin
University for All

Access and inclusion is everyone's business

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0.1%

Percentage of Traveller new entrants to higher education in 2021/22 as a proportion of all new entrants.



Dr Hannagh McGinley

Dr Hannagh McGinley is a member of the Irish Mincéir/Pavee (commonly referred to as Travellers) community. Her research expertise is Traveller education, anti-racism, culturally responsive and intercultural approaches to education. Her roles have included post-primary school teacher, community development practitioner, casual lecturer and module coordinator. Dr McGinley worked as an Education Officer at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) where she was responsible for advancing the recommendations of NCCA's [Traveller Culture and History in the Curriculum: A Curriculum Audit](#). More recently she was appointed the role of Assistant Professor in Education in MIC Thurles.

Foreword

Equity of access, participation and success in higher education is a priority for the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The ambition of the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 (NAP) is that the higher education student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education, reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

Traveller new entrants to higher education in 2021/22 represent just 0.1% of all new entrants. Substantial improvements need to be made. The HEA is committed to promoting Traveller participation in higher education and to the targets for Traveller participation that are set out in the NAP.

Stemming from the progress review of the previous NAP (2015-2021), which recommended target action to increase participation by Travellers, and to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19, ring-fenced funding of €750,000 was introduced under the Dormant Accounts Fund to support Traveller and Roma students in higher education. The positive outcomes of this funding, including the research findings in this report, contributed to laying the foundations for a new targeted funding stream to support Traveller participation. PATH Strand 5 was established in 2022 under the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) and commits €1.35 million over three years to enable higher education institutions to put in place an infrastructure to support Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

This ringfenced funding stream that is targeting specifically the needs of Travellers in accessing and successfully participating in higher education is a hugely welcome development that will be vital to the achievement of targets.

The HEA welcomes this report - Qualitative Study of Traveller Experiences Across the Education Continuum. The findings are consistent with themes emerging from HEA consultations with Traveller students and organisations. Increasing Traveller participation in higher education is a whole-of-education issue. Early interventions are required to support students from the Traveller community at each stage of their educational journey. Travellers should be central in decision-making processes and engagement with Travellers and Traveller organisations is vital to success. This report's findings and recommendations will contribute to enhanced policy and practice in Traveller education. I would like to congratulate Dr Hannagh McGinley, the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning team and all those involved for their work in conducting this research. It places the student voice at the centre and provides important insights into the daily challenges faced by Travellers. It will contribute to the work of all stakeholders working to increase Traveller participation and success in higher education.

Caitríona Ryan

Head of Access Policy, HEA

October, 2023

A Note of Introduction

You know that isolation leaves an imprint in your life where you're very guarded ... because whatever space you occupy, you're very scared of judgement, do you know what I mean? Because them early imprints in your life nearly determine your future, you know that kind of way? Which is sad, and you have to work at it ... I think there's a scale of trauma (Michael).

It is truly humbling to be invited to write the introduction for this really critical report exploring the experiences of Travellers within and across the Irish education system. While the primary objective of this study was to capture Traveller experiences in Higher and Further Education, initial findings from this research indicated the criticality of capturing Traveller experience across the continuum of the education system. This was especially important to interrogating the complexity of Traveller educational experiences in shaping their journeys within and through education.

A unique strength of this study is the positionality of the researcher, who identifies as a Traveller, and also an expert in the field of research interrogating Traveller experiences in education. Such researcher positionality contributes to the depth and breadth of findings presented in this research report. Dr McGinley was especially conscious of the sensitivities of conducting research with a minority group often marginalized within our education system and society. Indeed, the insider positionality of the researcher as Traveller empowered the voice(s) of participants with one individual stating they felt safer and more free in speaking with a researcher with a shared ethnic background and cultural understanding.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach employed by this study also significantly contributed to the research design and analysis of findings. The establishment of a Traveller steering group was especially important to recognizing and acknowledging expertise in their own lives. The steering group provided critical guidance to the research team in all aspects of the study from the initial phases, including the refinement of research questions, to the finalization of this report, reviewing and providing insights on data findings.

The findings presented in this research report on Traveller experiences across the continuum of education. Such experiences are critical to understanding the deeply embedded practices and structures impacting on Traveller access to and engagement in Higher and Further Education. Mapping the experiences of those who have progressed through the continuum of education provides deeply profound, and at times extremely confronting, accounts of the barriers and challenges impacting on Traveller engagement in and through education. The complexities of such barriers are interrogated in this research, highlighting the complex intersection of Traveller identity, educational expectations, structural barriers, isolation and wider societal stigma and prejudice in shaping their educational journeys. The findings raise really challenging and pertinent questions for those working across education and, indeed, for our wider Irish society. As evident from this research, the educational journeys taken by Travellers are more protracted, deeply emotionally demanding evoking profound psychosocial responses ranging from shame, a sense of failure, isolation and fear, to a more positive sense of self and pride in achieving and realizing dreams and aspirations in education. However, as evident from this report, the emotional cost of such educational achievement cannot be underestimated.

Especially evident from this research study is the value Traveller participants place on the importance of education in their lives, particularly in helping them make sense of who they are in the world, and the experiences they are grappling to make sense of in their lives. If, as Paulo Freire argues, education is the practice of freedom, there is no doubt that education plays a really critical role in empowering Traveller children and young people as they make sense of their lives, and in ensuring they have the opportunity and access to realise their aspirations and dreams for the future. As relayed by one participant:

It [education] was very liberating... it explained a lot for me. D'you know like the questions that I couldn't answer when I was younger like, d'you know 'Why can't I go over to my grandfather, cos the other children will know I'm Traveller.' D'you know 'Why... what am I ashamed of?' ... And I couldn't answer those questions as a child, but then I kind of was able to take ownership then of that in third level education, and kind of, you know, hand that shame back to non-Travellers ... 'That's yers to carry, not mine.' (Chantelle).

“

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- CHANTELLE



In conclusion, the importance of this research for understanding Traveller experience across the continuum of the Irish education system cannot be overstated. While the findings are deeply profound, the report also proffers insights and recommendations on possibilities for creating and enhancing specific practices and supports to retain and enhance Traveller participation in Higher and Further Education. Of particular note is the importance of Traveller visibility within and across education (as teachers, lecturers, role models, as well as the provision of Traveller specific information and supports) and the importance of intergenerational and familial approaches to support and retain Travellers in education. Furthermore, the findings also emphasise the critical role of Traveller cultural awareness and anti-racism training in creating a more inclusive education system. Finally, it is imperative that Traveller children, young people and their families feel safe, accepted and valued across the continuum of education – this is where the critical work of widening access to Further and Higher Education should begin.

If they're coming from a stage where ... they've done leaving cert and they've been able to get through that and make it into college on the points, then I think that all they would need ... would be ... a safe space ... somewhere where Travellers can be themselves (John).

Dr Deirdre McGillicuddy

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CHAPTER 1

Context and Background

Executive Summary

Inclusion is one of the six strategic goals set out in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's (DFHERIS) Statement of Strategy (Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2022). Based on the results of the progress review of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education and the Priorities to 2021 (HEA, 2018), the DFHERIS and the Department of Education (DES) identified priority actions in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (National Access Plan (NAP)) 2015-2019, extending the lifetime of the plan to 2021.

CHAPTER 1

A key focus of the National Access Plan (NAP) was to increase Traveller participation in higher education. The fourth NAP 2022-2028, developed through partnership with DFHERIS and the HEA, also focuses strongly on improving progress in equity of access for Travellers, though with a move “beyond access to full participation and eventual success” (HEA, 2022, p. 21). The NAP aligns with the Programme for Government (PfG), other national social inclusion and anti-poverty measures, and strategies, such as, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), which is currently under review (ibid.).

As part of the launch of the Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan for 2021, Simon Harris TD, Minister for the DFHERIS, announced a €300,000 fund aimed at improving access to further and higher education for Travellers. Recognising that there was a significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Travellers in third level education, the University College of Dublin Access and Lifelong Learning Centre used funds, received through the Dormant Accounts Fund, to commission a research project to examine Travellers’ experiences of third level education, in terms of access, participation, and progression. This current research report presents the findings from a participatory action research (PAR) study (**see Appendix 1 for full methodology chapter**) about the experiences of Travellers in further and higher education.

11.4 percent of the total number of Travellers (167 according to CSO, 2016) who had completed, or were in the process of completing, further or higher education took part in this study. Nineteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with Travellers (nine males and ten females), who had experience of further and higher education, were conducted to understand the challenges and barriers that they faced in education, as well the opportunities they had for engagement and participation. The qualitative data was analysed across a range of key themes, seen as directly, and indirectly, related to Travellers' experiences of further and higher education. The current report aims to give a comprehensive overview on the findings across a range of dimensions: experiences with education at all levels; interactions with educators and non-Traveller peers; barriers and challenges to, and opportunities for, participation and engagement. Most of the data was collected virtually in March 2022, though two interviews were conducted in April, and one was conducted in May 2022, during COVID-19 restrictions. This research is unique because it not only engaged with, but was also led by, members of the Traveller community at every stage of the study.

This study found that school, in particular post-primary school, was often a negative experience for Travellers. The research participants reported being excluded across the education continuum and talked about their experiences of racism in education. Furthermore, the research participants noted how low teacher expectations negatively affected them and stated that their relationships with their non-Traveller peers were often tense and/or superficial in nature. Importantly, this research highlighted the significant and lasting role that positive encounters with educators played in the lives of the research participants. It also found that having parents who could advocate on behalf of their children in education was important. The study found that while Travellers experienced financial barriers to participating in education, in some cases they were more acute than others. For example, students who were also parents required different kinds of supports to students who did not have a family to support. Not having access to intergenerational educational capital was also identified as problematic and the research participants talked about the importance of Traveller role models who also often acted as mentors and helped to bridge that intergenerational gap.

This report concludes with recommendations about how the education system might better work to include and support Travellers across the continuum of education. It suggests a number of practical steps that can be taken including reinvestment by the state in Traveller education; future research in the area of Traveller education at all levels from early childhood education to further and higher education access, participation and eventual success; training for Traveller parents so that they can better advocate on behalf of their children in education; training for educators so that they can adequately adopt intercultural approaches to education; targeted financial interventions and wraparound supports; the development of good career guidance for Travellers and the identification of clearer pathways to employment; and the creation of educational spaces that cultivate a sense of belonging in all students.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter locates the current research study by providing contextual and background information regarding Travellers and their experiences in society, with a specific focus on what is known about their experiences in education, across the continuum. It also details the efforts being made to widen Traveller participation at third level and outlines the types of supports and initiatives that are currently available.

There are four sections in this chapter. Section 1.2 provides the reader with information about the Traveller community and outlines the impact that discrimination and racism have on their living standards, life outcomes, and lived experiences. Section 1.3 details what is known about Travellers' experiences with, and their participation and attainment in, primary and post primary education and presents what is known about Travellers in further and higher education. Finally, section 1.4 highlights the current opportunities and supports available to support Traveller participation and progression in third level education.

1.2 Context and Background

The Equal Status Act (2000, p. 7) defines the Irish Traveller community as:

... the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture, and traditions, including historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.

In Cant (Traveller language), the terms for Travellers are Mincéirs and/or Pavees. Some Travellers use the term Mincéiri as opposed to Mincéirs. The term 'Traveller' is used throughout the Report of the Travelling People Review Body (Travelling People Review Body, 1983) in place of the term 'itinerant', which was used by the 1963 Commission on Itinerancy. Travellers, who had been involved in developing the 1983 Report, explained to the Commission that they found the term 'itinerant' unacceptable and noted that they preferred to be called 'Travellers' (Equality Authority, 2006). While preferable to itinerant, the term 'Traveller' is still problematic, and many Travellers would prefer to be referred to as Minceir or Pavee. While the author finds the term 'Pavee' preferable because it is the term they grew up using, the designated term 'Traveller' is used throughout this study, as the author did not feel they had the right to change it without consulting with the broader community.

1.2.1 Population Profile of Travellers

Table 1 outlines how many Travellers were estimated to live in Ireland, over the past decade, according to three separate sources: All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS, 2010), the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2017, 2022), and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Norris, Joyce and Norton, 2019).

Table 1: Number of Travellers in Republic of Ireland

Year	Data source	Number	Percentage of overall population
2010	AITHS	36,244	1 percent
2017	CSO	30,987	0.7 percent
2019	DHLGH	Between 46,695 to 58,925	1 percent
2022	CSO	32,949	0.6 percent

The state has taken measures to address this discrepancy between the figures, with Traveller organisations working closely with the CSO and its enumerators to ensure that Travellers are counted in a more accurate and sensitive manner. It remains to be known if these efforts have been reflected in the 2022 Census.

0.6%

Estimate of number of Travellers living in Ireland in 2022 as a percentage of the overall population according to the CSO

1.3 Traveller Education

As noted above, in Ireland, there has been a dearth of research carried out on Travellers in education (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2019). Up until 2014, no accurate records of Traveller participation and attendance rates in schools were kept, thus it was difficult to ascertain how Travellers performed in comparison to their non-Traveller peers. The lack of data collection was in part due to the state's failure to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group, which resulted in there being no ethnic identifier question on school data.

1.3.1 Traveller Education: Policy and Practice

The 1963 Report on the Commission of Itinerancy (Government of Ireland, 1963) laid out several provisions to address the issues of Traveller education. It recommended establishing 'special schools' and 'special classes' for Travellers. 'Special classes' for Traveller students were established in the late 1960s in mainstream school settings. During this era, the language of 'absorption' and the practice of assimilation were being promoted. Segregated education was adopted as a "short-term strategy ... to prepare Traveller children for absorption into the 'normal' or 'mainstream' classes" (DES, 2005, p. 52). The first 'special school' for Travellers was established in 1968. This model of segregated education continued well into the 1990s (DES, 2006).

During the 1980s, in an attempt to address what was perceived as the “educational deficiencies” (Government of Ireland, 1983, p. 75) and the issue of early school leaving amongst Travellers, the Department of Education launched the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) (DES, 2002, p. 11). The role of the VTS was to “bridge the gap between the culture of the home and the culture of the school” (Nunan, 1993, p. 70). The Department of Education also supported the establishment of Junior Traveller Training Centres (JTTC) for 12–15 year-olds and Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC) for 15-25 year olds (upper age limit was abolished in 1990). The first JTTC was established in 1982, and by 1990, six JTTCs had been established across Ireland. In the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (DES, 2006, p. 20), the DES described the Training Centres as projects which provided a “culturally appropriate” model of education to Travellers, which met their “educational, social, leisure and spiritual needs” (DES, 2006, p. 20). The Training Centres tended to focus on teaching Travellers social skills, basic numeracy, and literacy, as well as showing them how to make crafts.

The move towards a more inclusive approach to education has its origins in the field of special education. In the early 1990s, people with special educational needs (SEN) and their parents/guardians started to challenge the status quo legally and began to put political pressure on governments to move towards a more inclusive model of education (Flood, 2013). Traveller organisations were also calling for an end to the segregated model of education. By the end of the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that a more inclusive framework was needed.

In the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (DES, 2006), the DES promoted the integration of Travellers, at all levels, into the mainstream education system. Consequently, the ‘special schools’ for Travellers were closed. While the ‘special schools’ for Travellers were shut down, it is likely that a substantial proportion of Travellers still attend designated Special Schools because of their historical context. Traveller school ‘choice’ is influenced by having a family history of attending a particular school, not being able to access other schools, and wanting to be amongst their own (McGinley and Keane, 2021).

Pavee Point made it clear, in their Position Paper on the Senior Training Centres (Pavee Point, 2006), that they wanted to see an end to all forms of segregated education for Travellers. In its Value for Money Review of Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre Programmes, the DES (2008a) agreed with Pavee Point's position and recommended the phasing out of the Traveller training centres. While initially the plan had been to 'phase out' the training centre model, the programme of mainstreaming was carried out in an aggressive manner in the wake of the economic recession that followed the 'Celtic Tiger'¹ era in Ireland. The austerity measures that followed led to all Traveller training centres being shut down in June 2012 (Harvey, 2013). There was little consultation with Travellers and Traveller representatives, and no alternative plans were put in place for the attendees, other than an invite to participate in mainstream programmes (ibid.).

1.3.2 Traveller Attendance, Participation and Progress in Primary and Post Primary School

While there is almost full participation by Traveller children in primary schools in Ireland and a high transfer rate of Travellers to post primary education (DES, 2005; Hourigan and Campbell, 2010), attendance and retention rates remain poor. Evidence shows that Travellers cease their post primary education, on average, 4.7 years earlier than those in the general population (CSO, 2017). Data from the CSO shows that only 8 percent of Travellers in Ireland had completed their education to Leaving Certificate level, in comparison to 73 percent of the general population (Watson et al., 2017). This is cause for great concern, given that Ireland has one of the highest retention rates at post primary level within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and a high transfer rate from second level to third level education (DFHERIS, 2021).

¹ The 'Celtic Tiger' era refers to economic boom experienced in the Republic of Ireland from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.

32,949

Number of Travellers in Republic
of Ireland in 2022

In Ireland, despite little data on achievement by ethnicity, research shows that Traveller students attending DEIS² schools have very low scores in English, Reading, and Maths standardised tests, in comparison with the general population and “other” minority ethnic groups (Kavanagh, Weir and Moran, 2017). Weir and Archer (2011, p. 45) stated that “the magnitude of the difference between the scores of the two groups is large in every case”. While a high proportion of Travellers attend DEIS schools, it is estimated that half attend non DEIS schools (Darmody, Smyth, Byrne, and McGinnity, 2012). We do not know if there is a significant difference in achievement for specific groups, such as Travellers, attending non-DEIS schools, as this data is not available.

Travellers’ reluctance to participate in education is often perceived as a salient feature of Traveller culture (Bhopal, 2004, 2011). However, as Bhopal (2011) argues, this trend of poor participation in education needs to be understood within the context of the long history of racism experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

2 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) forms part of the Department of Education and Skills social inclusion strategy to help children and young people who are at risk of or who are experiencing educational disadvantage. Schools included in the DEIS programme receive additional supports in recognition of the proportion of their students from marginalised backgrounds.

1.3.3 Early School Leaving

In the research literature, explanations for early school leaving amongst Travellers are usually framed within the context of 'push' and 'pull' factors (Derrington, 2007). 'Push' factors identified in the literature include being subjected to racism and racially motivated bullying from both students and teachers; the irrelevance of the curriculum; low teacher expectations; and exclusion (Bhopal and Myers, 2008; 2016; Bhopal, 2011). The 'pull' factors usually identified reference 'cultural norms', such as the tendency to marry young and the lure of the Traveller economy³ (Bhopal and Meyers, 2016). Additionally, nomadism has been identified as one of the key reasons for Travellers' poor attendance at school and low achievement levels (Cudworth, 2018). While some of the reasons why Travellers leave school early may be linked to 'pull' factors, research has found that it is more likely due to the 'push' factors, "such as exposure to racist bullying, social disengagement, educational policy and low teacher expectations" (Derrington, 2007, p. 360), as well as isolation, poor relationships with their teachers and peers, internalised low expectations, and an overall lack of adequate support (Derrington, 2007; Derrington and Kendall, 2004). Dupont (2022) found that discrimination, low teacher expectations, and negative encounters with their teachers played a key role in poor attendance and early school leaving.

3 The 'Traveller economy' refers to the economic activities in which Travellers have traditionally engaged, which are "'outside' dominant or 'mainstream' economic activity that is based on sedentary modes of production" (Donohue, McVeigh and Ward, 2005, p. 13).

1.3.4 Teachers' Attitudes towards Travellers and 'Other' Minorities

While there is little research within the Irish context that examines teachers' attitudes towards and beliefs about Travellers in education, the report on Youthreach Centres provides us with some insight into the ways in which teachers adopt a 'cultural deficit lens' and tend to blame Traveller families and Traveller culture for Traveller students poor engagement in the programme (Smyth, Banks, O'Sullivan, McCoy, Redmond and McGuinness, 2019). Other studies have similarly found that, while teachers were empathetic towards Travellers, they tended to adopt a 'cultural deficit lens' and blamed Travellers for the inequalities that they experienced (cf. Kavanagh, 2013; McGinley, 2020; Quinlan, 2021; McGinley and Keane, 2021).

The experiences of 'other' minority ethnic students in education are also relevant in understanding Traveller students' experiences. Research from the international context shows that teachers often view students from marginalised and minority groups through a 'deficit lens' often perceiving them to be weaker students (cf. Chapman and Bhopal 2019; Castro 2010) and 'undesirable' learners in terms of their general behaviour and academic ability (Bhopal and Myers 2008). Low expectations amongst teachers based upon their racist assumptions of Black inferiority are common place (Chapman and Bhopal 2019).

Deficit racialised constructions of non-Traveller minority ethnic students are also commonly reported in Ireland (cf. Ní Dhuinn and Keane 2021; Darmody et al. 2012; Kitching 2011; Ní Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Mendez, and White, 2009). Devine (2005) found that teachers' held particularly negative views of Roma and African students' behaviour and academic ability (see also Fine-Davis and Faas, 2014). Such negative constructions of minority ethnic students' ability are often related to perceptions of English language proficiency and (perceived) related language support needs (Darmody Byrne, and McGinnity 2014; Nowlan 2008). For example, Ní Dhuinn and Keane (2021) reported that (migrant) minority ethnic participants' academic ability was constructed by their teachers in deficit terms, based on often incorrect assumptions about their English language competency.

Research also points to the 'White racism' (Bhopal, 2011) experienced by GRT groups in the UK, including racist bullying (cf. Derrington and Kendall, 2004; Deuchar and Bhopal, 2013). Indeed, teachers do not always believe GRT students when they report racist bullying (Lloyd and Stead, 2001). Kavanagh (2013) pointed out that teachers often fail to recognise the inherent racism in non-Traveller parents asking teachers to move their children away from Traveller children.

1.3.5 Problematic Relationships with non-Traveller Peers

Research is clear that minority ethnic students experience problematic peer relationships. This is evidenced in a lack of mixing between groups, and in majority group students' deficit views of their minority peers' academic ability (Tatum, 2017; Bhopal and Chapman, 2019; McGillicuddy, 2021). Racism, discrimination, and harassment in schools is evident in peer interactions (Peguero and Jiang, 2016; McGinley and Keane, 2022), although it is frequently downplayed or denied (Raby, 2004). Further, it has been found that minority students are viewed as 'undesirable' learners by their peers (Kitching, 2011), resulting from their construction as 'other', with respect to their skin colour, cultural background, and/or first language and related perceived language 'deficits' (Devine, 2013; Kitching, 2011).

Similarly, research in Ireland has found evidence of a lack of meaningful mixing between student groups, as well as forms of inter-ethnic conflict (Devine, Kenny and MacNeela, 2008; McGinley and Keane, 2022). Traveller students report high levels of racial bullying and discrimination, as well as a lack of a sense of belonging and connection to their non-Traveller peers (cf. Lynch and Lodge, 2004; Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018; Quinlan, 2021). Tormey and Gleeson (2012) found that 42 percent of the almost 5,000 non-Traveller⁴ post primary school students in their study reported high or very high levels of 'social distance' from Travellers. Lynch and Lodge (2004) reported that three-quarters of the post primary school students participating in their study believed that Travellers would not fit into their school.

⁴ According to the authors of this research, no Traveller participated in the study. It is not clear how this conclusion was drawn and/or verified.

The Equal Status Act (2000, p. 7) defines the Irish Traveller community as:

“

... the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture, and traditions, including historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.

1.3.6 Irrelevance of the Curriculum

Research examining the experiences of Travellers in education found that Travellers reported finding the current curriculum irrelevant (Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018; Quinlan, 2021; Dupont, 2022). In July 2018, a Private Members 'Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill' was introduced in the Seanad by Senator Colette Kelleher. The Bill provided for the teaching of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum in recognized state schools and called for an amendment to the existing 1998 Education Act to reflect this. The then Minister, Richard Bruton, pointed out that the Bill, as it stood, was unintentionally problematic, as it granted Traveller culture and history a different status to all other subjects – because it meant that the teaching of Traveller culture and history would be compulsory – and, therefore, he suggested that the Bill would be more appropriately located within an existing section of the Education Act.

The proposed amendments were accepted by the Seanad in October 2019. In July 2021, the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, expressed that the government would be supporting the Bill and it was put forward to the Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for further consideration. The Bill is waiting for Committee stage, with Thomas Pringle TD sponsoring it.

A lot of work has been done since the Bill was introduced in the Seanad. In response to the Minister's request, in November 2019, the NCCA published the [Traveller Culture and History in the Curriculum: A Curriculum Audit](#). The Audit can be found on NCCA.ie website. The Audit identifies curriculum areas, subjects, and learning outcomes through which children and young people's understanding of Traveller culture and history could be advanced in the curriculum across the different sectors. Furthermore, the Audit recommended developing a research paper to support teaching and learning about Traveller culture and history. A copy of the Traveller culture and history research report (NCCA, 2023) can be found [here](#).

Kavanagh and Dupont (2021) note the difficulties associated with "additive" curricular amendments, including, for example, issues of tokenism, and the danger of not critically attending to the role of teachers in perpetuating inequities. Careful and critical continuous professional development for teachers will be required to ensure that Traveller culture and history are taught in an appropriate and sensitive manner (McGinley, 2020).

1.3.7 Traveller Parents' Experience with Education/Impact of Intergenerational Educational Trauma

Parental educational level/achievement is strongly correlated with child educational outcomes, with research identifying the link between parental educational underachievement and poorer educational outcomes for young people (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Research on low-income or unemployed parents has shown that they are likely to have found their own school experiences unrewarding and, as a result, they tend to lack the confidence required to engage with schools (ibid.). Doyle and Keane's (2019, p. 12) paper on parents' perspectives of early school leaving found that parents felt constrained by unsupportive systems and their "human need to prioritise surviving everyday life in their challenging world". While the parents valued education and understood the negative impact of not having an education, they felt that teachers had low expectations of their children and were unsupportive and disrespectful towards them because of their backgrounds and where they lived.

In Ireland, while it is often assumed that Travellers do not value education, the reasons they may not engage with schools and education providers are much more complex (Bhopal, 2004). Studies have found that Traveller parents and students are very receptive to education for their children (cf. Boyle, Flynn, and Hanafin, 2020; Quinlan, 2021; Dupont, 2022), despite their own reported negative experiences of school (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010). Boyle et al. (2020) found that the Traveller parents in their study were optimistic about their children's education. Similarly, in the UK, Bhopal (2004) found that Traveller parents were often very receptive to their children's education. Myers, Mc Ghee and Bhopal (2010) found that many parents felt that schooling had a greater place in their children's lives than would have been the case a generation ago. While many Traveller parents interviewed in Derrington and Kendall's study (2004) demonstrated high aspirations for their children, they tended to prioritise vocational skills and saw "the achievement of a functional level of literacy and numeracy as the determining factor of a 'good' education" (Derrington, 2007, p. 359). This reflects the low expectations that Traveller parents have internalised for themselves, as well as the transgenerational impact of negative school experiences.

Evidence consistently points to the need for schools to build better relationships between Traveller parents and the school (Bhopal, Gundara, Jones and Owens, 2000). Bhopal and Myers (2009) and others (cf. Derrington, 2007) assert that trust is a significant issue for Travellers in education, as many Traveller parents experienced negativity in their own schooling. They see post primary school as a dangerous place where their children are exposed to racist bullying, thus the very act of sending Traveller children to post primary school could be perceived within the community as "a dereliction of parental duty" (O' Hanlon and Holmes, 2004, p. 29 as cited in Derrington, 2007, p. 260).

Intergenerational trauma occurs when the effects of an original trauma are passed down through generations (Gaywsh and Mordoch, 2018). Being excluded and segregated by the state, your teachers and your peers is a traumatic experience. Many Traveller parents will have been subjected to this trauma. Gaywsh and Mordoch (2018, p. 4) argue that “education must respond to the effects of trauma, both historical and ongoing, within classroom settings”.

1.3.8 Traveller Participation in Further and Higher Education

Over the past two decades, the state had been trying to increase Traveller participation in further and higher education (Loxley and Finnegan, 2021). As Loxley and Finnegan (2021) pointed out, there is a significant gap in the research pertaining to Travellers' experiences, attendance, participation, and progression in further and higher education.

According to figures from the 2011 Census (CSO, 2012), 115 Travellers (less than 1 percent of the Traveller community) in total had completed third-level education. This figure had grown to 167 by 2016 (CSO, 2017). In 2015, for the first time ever, as part of the 2015-2019 National Access Plan (NAP), the HEA set out to increase Traveller participation in HE and aimed to raise the number of Travellers enrolled from 35 in 2015 to 80 by 2019 (HEA, 2015). While this target was unmet, by 2019, 61 Travellers were enrolled in HE (HEA, 2019a; HEA, 2020). As the data is based on enrolments only, it is hard to ascertain how many Travellers remain in HE to completion (Loxley and Finnegan, 2021).

A progress review, of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education and the Priorities to 2021, was published in December 2018. Based on the results of the progress review, the Department identified priority actions in the NAP 2015-2019 and extended the lifetime of the plan to 2021. Increasing Traveller participation in higher education was a core focus of the plan and an Action Plan for Traveller Participation in Higher Education 2019–21 (HEA, 2019a) was launched in 2019. The HEA (2018) understands that access to higher education for Travellers is affected by several factors, including the high level of early school leaving amongst Travellers. Consequently, it acknowledged that early interventions would be required to address the low levels of participation in further and higher education.

The four National Access Policies in Ireland (HEA, 2004, 2008, 2015, 2022) each propose a rationale for the inclusion of Travellers embedded within a discourse of human capital development and social justice. However, universities can produce and reproduce social inequalities (Bhopal and Myers, 2022, 2023) directly and indirectly by valuing the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 2002) of the dominant group over 'others'. This can result in marginalised groups avoiding being part of "the apparatus of established mainstream society, for example higher education institutions" (Levinson, 2007, as cited in Morgan, McDonagh and Acton, 2023, p.3).

While "cultural capital is context specific" (Carter, 2003, p. 137), Yosso (2005) highlights how minority students often lack the type of habitus and cultural capital that is valued in education. They are often viewed as students who come to universities with 'cultural deficiencies' (ibid.). Minority students have been found to 'play white' and or cultivate the dominant groups' habitus and cultural capital to fit in and progress through HE (Morgan et al., 2023).

1.4 Current Opportunities for Engagement in Further and Higher Education

There are several opportunities available for Travellers who want to attend third level. While some of the supports are Traveller specific, most supports are also available to students from other underrepresented groups. In terms of the supports available for accessing third level, there are several different access routes available to students from underrepresented groups. Additionally, there are different financial supports available. The two sub-sections below provide details of the types of supports available.

1.4.1 Programmes to Support Access, Participation, and Attainment

The HEA set out to address issues of under representation in the late 1990s. It commissioned a number of reports to examine the extent of the problem and suggest solutions (Fleming, Loxley and Finnegan, 2017). In the early 2000s, the National Office for Equity and Access was established to develop and coordinate policy. Access plans were published by the HEA in 2004, 2008, 2015, and 2022, along with interim evaluations.

€6m

funding was provided over a three-year period for 600 1916 Bursaries.

In the first year of the 1916 Bursary Fund (2017/2018), 10 of the 200 bursaries were awarded to Irish Travellers.

Central Applications Office (CAO)

The traditional entry route to university is through the Central Applications Office (CAO). The CAO processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Decisions on admissions to undergraduate courses are made by the HEIs who instruct the CAO to make offers to the successful candidates. The CAO now also processes applications for courses in Further Education and Training Colleges and Apprenticeships.

Access Courses

Access courses are available in many institutions. They are designed to provide a supportive educational environment that prepares students academically and personally to pursue a third level qualification. Students receive support from the Access programme, as needed, as they progress through third level.

To qualify for an Access programme, students can be either school leavers (under the age of 22) or mature students (23 years old or older). They are generally from the underrepresented groups targeted in the NAP.

Higher Education Access Routes (HEAR)

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) was established to promote access to education nationally. HEAR is an admissions scheme for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. It aims to improve access to college for school-leavers from socio-economic backgrounds that are under-represented in third-level education. To be eligible for the scheme you must be under 23 years of age and meet certain criteria related to your financial, social, and cultural circumstances.

Under the HEAR scheme a number of third-level places are allocated to school-leavers on a reduced points basis. A reduced point place means that applicants may get a place on a third-level course with fewer than the full CAO points. Each of the third-level colleges participating in the scheme has reserved a number of places on its courses for school-leavers who are eligible for HEAR. However, they must meet the college matriculation and any specific course entry requirements.

Applicants apply for HEAR through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Once applicants have been accepted as eligible for HEAR, they then compete for the reduced point places based on Leaving Certificate results. For example, if applicants are eligible for HEAR and get 350 Leaving Certificate points, they may be offered a place on a course that is 360 points through CAO.

Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school-leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education. Like HEAR, DARE offers reduced points places to school leavers who, because of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.

If you get a place, through HEAR or DARE, you will also be offered a range of supports while you are studying at college, such as, an orientation programme, extra tuition, study skills and mentoring. The supports available vary from college to college.

Further Education and Training Qualifications

If you are coming from a Further Education and Training course, the Irish universities welcome applications from candidates who wish to progress to higher education with appropriate awards at Level 5 or Level 6.

Mature Students

The universities have diverse student populations and actively encourage applications from mature candidates. Mature students are those aged 23 years or above on 1st January in the year of entry. Mature students can apply online through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Students must be first time entrants and cannot already hold a level 8 or higher third level qualification.

Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Projects and Access to Post-primary Teaching Project (APT)

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund was established during the lifetime of the 2015-2021 NAP to support increased participation in higher education for the identified target groups. Ireland's National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015–2019) (HEA, 2015) includes a focus on diversifying initial teacher education (ITE) through the 'development of Access programmes and routes to teacher training' (HEA, 2015, p. 26). The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) (Strand 1: Equity of Access to ITE) (2017–2020), and several other projects, such as the Access to Post Primary Teaching Project (APT), have commenced in the various ITE centres around the country to diversify ITE for the target groups in the National Access Plan. As 'other' minority ethnic groups are not a target group in the NAP, they are not included in the PATH 1.

An example of work being carried out in this area is Marino Institute of Education's Tobar project, which seeks to increase Traveller participation in initial teacher education at primary and post primary level. This project is specifically targeting and supporting young Travellers who aspire to be teachers, placing the emphasis on a community-based approach in collaboration with Traveller advocacy groups and target schools. There are two strands in the project, with strand one being geared towards Travellers that are in the process of completing their Leaving Certificate, while strand two is for Traveller students already enrolled in undergraduate programmes in HE. There does not seem to be clear Traveller specific pathways into and through other types of courses.

The PATH Fund also supports three other time bound projects: PATH 2, PATH 3, and PATH 4. Each of the three new Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) funding strands is expected to have a positive impact on increasing Traveller participation in higher education. Under PATH 2, funding of €6m was provided over a three-year period for 600 1916 Bursaries. In the first year of the 1916 Bursary Fund (2017/2018), ten of the two hundred bursaries were awarded to Irish Travellers. The initial assessment of the pilot stage implementation for PATH 2 indicated that the overall chance of securing a bursary was high for prospective Traveller students. Funding received under PATH 3 and PATH 4 will be used to develop partnerships between HEIs, the FE sector, and community partners, strengthening universal design for learning (UDL) for all students and support the engagement of students with general learning difficulties (GLD). There seems to be a lack of Traveller specific funding to support Travellers into and through further and higher education.

Under the latest NAP (2022-2028), funding has been increased to support HEIs to put in place the infrastructure required to increase the participation of students from the Traveller and Roma community in HE through PATH 5. PATH 5 aims to ensure that the targets identified as part of the new NAP (2022-2028) can be achieved.

The new Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education will also examine ways of capturing data relating to Travellers, with the gathering of precise data in respect of Traveller students. It is intended that the numerous initiatives under the various strands of PATH will enhance our understanding of the barriers that exist in respect of access to higher education by Traveller students.

1.4.2 Funding Support

SUSI

The Student Grant Scheme is the main financial support scheme for students studying in Ireland and abroad. It is also known as the SUSI grant because the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is the awarding authority for the Student Grant Scheme.

Student grants are means tested and are divided into Maintenance Grants and Fee Grants. Maintenance grants help students with their living costs. Fee grants pay tuition fees for students who do not qualify for free fees. Fee grants can also pay the Student Contribution and the cost of essential field trips. If you qualify for the maintenance grant, you also get the fees grants. Some students only qualify to get the fees grant. You cannot receive some social welfare payments while in receipt of the SUSI grant. Information about the social welfare payments that do not qualify is available [here](#).

An independent Review of the Student Grant Scheme (Indecon Economic Consultants, 2022) recommended that the grant needed to be increased to reflect the increase in the cost of living and that further supports should be given to low-income postgraduate students. Additionally, it recommended extending supports to other forms of learning, such as blended learning, online learning, and part-time study.

Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

If you are unemployed, parenting alone, or have a disability and are getting certain payments from the department, you may take part in a second-or third-level education course in Ireland or Northern Ireland and get a Back to Education Allowance (BTEA). You can receive your BTEA for a year abroad, if the year is a mandatory part of your course. You must be at least 21 years of age to get BTEA. To get it for a postgraduate course, you must be 24 years of age. If attending a third-level course, you must have been getting a social welfare payment for 9 months or more. A list of the qualifying social welfare payments can be found [here](#).

1916 Scholarship

The 1916 Bursary Fund was first established by the DES in 2017/2018 under the PATH 2 programme. The purpose of the 1916 Bursary Fund is to encourage participation and success by students who are most socio-economically disadvantaged and who are from groups most under-represented in higher education. Bursaries are awarded through regional clusters of higher education institutions. A list of eligible higher education institutions under the 1916 Bursary Fund can be found [here](#). Initially, funding was provided for the award of two hundred undergraduate bursaries in the amount of €5,000 per annum in each of the three academic years commencing 2017/18. In 2021/2022, a second tier of 120 bursaries worth €2,000 per year was introduced, as well as a once off third tier worth €1,500 for that academic year.

Applicants must demonstrate that they would qualify for the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant Scheme special rate and/or in receipt of a Department of Social Protection (DSP) long-term means-tested social welfare payment. Applicants must also be first-time new entrant to higher education for undergraduate study, have been resident in the State for three of the past five years, and be pursuing an approved full-time or approved part-time undergraduate course in one of the approved institutions. Applicants must be from one of target groups identified under the NAP.

The number of applications received usually exceeds the number of bursaries available. The approved institutions prioritise those who they deem to be in the greatest need. Twenty percent of the bursaries must be awarded to lone parents. All applicants are expected to demonstrate the significance and impact of the socio-economic disadvantage and barriers experienced.

Other Funding Opportunities

Some institutions award Entrance Scholarships to mature students on an annual basis based on their grades. A Financial Aid Fund or Student Assistance Fund is also available and can be applied for by students who are experiencing financial difficulty. In some universities, there are several University Scholarships for mature students completing degrees for their first time. Funding for Students with Disabilities (FSD) is one of the main funding sources supporting participation by students with disabilities in approved higher education courses in Ireland. It also supports students from Ireland to study on approved courses in other EU countries and in the UK, including Northern Ireland. Eligible students on an approved course can receive assistance from post-leaving certificate to doctoral level during any year of study.

The University of Sanctuary Initiative at University of Galway, University College of Dublin (UCD), Maynooth University (MU), Dublin City University (DCU), and elsewhere provide a number of scholarships which can be applied for by International Protection Applicants, refugees, vulnerable immigrant groups, and Irish Travellers. The UCD Cothrom Na Féinne Scholarship has ringfenced a scholarship for students from the Traveller community. Additionally, the UCD Think Again scholarship is available to female mature students on low income who want to study part-time or full-time for a degree.

Charitable and Philanthropic Sources of Funding

Other sources of funding are also available to support students from the most marginalised backgrounds. For example, students can apply for funding through the Saint Vincent De Paul Education and Training Bursary Fund or they can apply for one the University Scholarships. In some colleges, students can apply directly to the College Chaplains for emergency financial assistance.

1.5 Mentoring

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASLHA) (2007a, p. 1) defines mentoring as “a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else”. According to Gershenfeld (2014), mentoring describes a broad range of relationships that occur between a student and other students, staff, and faculty members.

Since the late 1980s, mentoring has been promoted as a means of enhancing participation by underrepresented groups in higher education (ASLHA, 2007b). Mentoring is considered important for a number of reasons, including helping students from underrepresented groups transition into new institutions and spaces, improving academic performance, and ensuring that students persevere with their studies when faced with adversity (Wilson et al., 2012). Mentoring may be formal or informal (Eby and Allen, 2008), can be limited to one meeting or last for a longer period, and can be between a mentor and an individual or done in small groups (Crisp and Cruz, 2009).

However, although mentoring has shown positive results in retaining students from underrepresented groups, as Crooks (2013) highlights mentoring is not a panacea for addressing the underrepresentation of minorities in further and higher education.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has situated this research by detailing the context and background to the study. It has discussed the impact of discrimination and racism on Travellers in education. Furthermore, it has outlined the steps taken to address the poor level of Traveller attendance, participation, and progression in further and higher education. The next chapter will present findings from the study relating to Travellers' experiences across the continuum of education.



CHAPTER 2

Challenges and Barriers to Educational Participation and Engagement

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the types of challenges and barriers to educational participation and engagement faced by the research participants. It is important to understand the experiences of the research participants across the continuum of education in order to comprehend the challenges and barriers to participation and engagement in higher education. The compounding of negative experiences ultimately shaped how Travellers experienced finding their way into and through Higher Education, hence one cannot be understood in the absence of the other.

All nineteen research participants had faced challenges and barriers to educational participation and engagement at some point during their educational journey. They talked about being excluded, 'othered', and isolated, at times, during primary and post-primary school. The research participants also talked about their encounters with educators and the impact that those encounters had on them, both positively and negatively. The research participants recalled how their interactions with their non-Traveller peers impacted on them throughout their educational journeys. Furthermore, they recalled how financial barriers often prevented them from fully engaging in and staying in education and identified the supports that helped them to succeed. Finally, the research participants spoke about how their parents' own experiences of education had impacted on their educational experiences.

There are seven sections in this chapter. Following this introduction, section 2.2 provides details about the research participants participation in primary and post-primary education and their journey to further and higher education. Section 2.3 outlines the ways in which the research participants experienced discrimination and racism in education. Section 2.4 details their interactions with their educators, while section 2.5 discusses their relations with their non-Traveller peers. Section 2.6 outlines other barriers to education such as financial barriers and pressures to engage. Finally, section 2.7 examines how the research participants' parents' level of education and their experiences with education impacted on their own educational experiences.

2.2 Research Participants

Research Participants

All research participants had completed or were in the progress of completing further and HE study. Nineteen research participants took part in the study. This included nine males and ten females. Only two (one male and one female) research participants, John, and Meg, did not transition from primary to post primary school. While seventeen research participants (eight males and nine females) transitioned from primary to post primary school, only eleven (six males and five females) stayed on to complete their Leaving Certificate. The other six participants (four females and two males) had all left post primary school before the age of sixteen.

Four male research participants entered third level through the traditional entry route. By comparison, none of the female research participants entered higher education through the traditional entry route. Three male research participants and three female research participants entered third level through access programmes. In both cases, one of these research participants had done courses in further education institutions first. While the traditional entry route was the main access route to higher education for the male research participants, the main access route for the female Traveller research participants was the mature student entry route. Seven female research participants went to higher education as mature students. Six of these had attended a variety of courses in further education institutions before entering HE. The other two male research participants entered higher education through the mature student entry route. Similar to the females participants, one had completed a number of courses in further education institutions first.

Six male research participants attended non-DEIS post primary schools. Only one attended a non-DEIS school. By comparison, four female research participants attended DEIS schools and only one attended a non-DEIS. For the remaining female and male research participants, the DEIS vs non-DEIS category was not applicable because the research participants were in the UK for their post primary education, had not attended post primary or had attended post primary when DEIS/non-DEIS categories did not exist.

Tables 4 and 5 present details about the male and female Traveller research participants educational attainment and entry route/s into further and higher education.

Table 4: Male Traveller research participants' pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Completed primary	Transitioned to and completed post primary school	Type of post primary school attended (DEIS vs non-DEIS)	Route into F & HE
Terry	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	Traditional Entry (TE)/HE
Eanie	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	Access/HE
Frank	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	TE/HE
Patrick	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	TE/HE
Michael	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	TE/HE
William	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	Access/HE
Connie	Yes	Transitioned but left after 2 years approx..	N/A (educated in UK)	Mature student HE
Tom	Yes	Transitioned, but left in fourth year	DEIS	FE/Access/HE
John	Yes, but just 2 years- First Communion and Confirmation	Did not transition	N/A	FE/Mature student entry route

Table 5: Female Traveller research participants' pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Completed primary	Transitioned to and completed post primary school	Type of post primary school attended (DEIS vs non-DEIS)	Route into F & HE
Mary	Yes	Yes	Non-DEIS	Access/HE
Chantelle	Yes	Yes	DEIS	FE/Mature student HE
Vicky	Yes	Yes	DEIS	FE/Access/HE
Winnie	Yes	Yes	DEIS	Mature student HE
Bridget	Yes	Yes	DEIS	Access/FE/HE
Ellen	Yes	Transitioned, but left in second year	N/A (was in UK)	FE/Mature student HE
Sally	Yes	Transitioned, but left in first year	N/A (categories did not exist)	FE/Mature student HE
Trisha	Yes	Transitioned, but left in second year	N/A (was in UK)	FE/Mature student HE
Maggie	Yes	Transitioned but left in first year	N/A (categories did not exist)	FE/Mature student HE
Meg	Yes, but just 2 years- First Communion and Confirmation	No	N/A	FE/Mature student HE

2.3 Experiencing Discrimination and Racism in Education

Most of the research participants reported experiencing discrimination and racism at some stage during their educational journey. Sometimes, these experiences occurred at the systemic level, while at other times they were experienced at the personal level during their interactions with their teachers and their non-Traveller peers. While discrimination and racism were more pervasive at post-primary level, many of the research participants recalled experiencing discrimination and racism in primary school. They talked about being treated unfairly, positioned as 'other', segregated, isolated, and feeling looked down on by their teachers and their non-Traveller peers in primary and post primary school. The research participants also reported encountering discrimination and racism, to varying degrees, in further and higher educational institutions.

Seven of the research participants described primary school as a "negative" experience, where they were 'othered' and learned that they were different. They recalled being "segregated" (Frank) from their non-Traveller peers and felt that their settled peers were being positioned at "the top of the hierarchy" (Eanie), while Travellers, in turn, were being positioned at the bottom.

I suppose primary school experience was probably very negative ... That's where I kind of knew I was a Traveller ... You know, it's kind of named out to you then ... so primary school was rough in a sense ... (Michael).

... around the time of PE ... [the PE teacher] would always allow the more upper-class students to pick their teams and the Travellers were always chosen last, we were never allowed to be the ones who chose the teams ... it sets out a hierarchy and it teaches the other young, settled students that they're at the top of the hierarchy (Eanie).

I went to [name of school] which was horrible. Very segregated ... Awful, really awful experience through the whole thing (Frank).

Twelve research participants described their primary school experience in predominantly positive terms, though some of those had encountered racism and experienced exclusion. For example, while Chantelle felt her primary experience was positive, she said it was in primary school where she was first called a "knacker" (Chantelle). While Patrick stated that he was "fairly happy" at primary, he had memories of "being isolated":

... like overall my experience of primary school was brilliant ... it was the first time then that I heard the 'K' word, that I was called 'knacker.' ... Fourth class. ... and I was devastated I remember the shame that was attached, cos other people were looking at me, and I knew... like I knew it was tied into my identity (Chantelle).

I do remember being isolated at that time ... (Patrick).

Some research participants felt they were ignored at primary school because they were allowed to do what they wanted, such as “run around the school” (Sally), which they thought was fun at the time but could see with hindsight how detrimental it was to their education. Some of the research participants remarked that they did not realise the negative impact of their primary school experiences until they were older and looked back.

I think I was a bit too innocent to understand the segregation ... (Eanie).

... for me in primary school you're young, you're naïve, you're vulnerable ... You're not passing much heed. But yet there's shit happening in the background, and you know it's not right ... (Sally).

... but at the time don't get me wrong, it was great, like you're young and you're getting to skip whatever needs to be done and you're getting to run around school and not having to do anything. So, this was absolutely brilliant of us, but when I think back now, I'm disgusted to be honest because we did miss out on so much (Sally).

I remember it feeling like, oh, this is a great class, sure we get out of the classroom, but when you look back now, they were hampering the children's education really, like (Tommy).

“

I suppose primary school experience was probably very negative ... That's where I kind of knew I was a Traveller ... You know, it's kind of named out to you then ... so primary school was rough in a sense ...

- MICHAEL

While five research participants recalled having some positive post-primary school experiences, for the majority post primary school was “way worse” than primary school. For example, Eanie spoke about how Travellers were segregated in the classroom and not allowed to participate in the same activities as their peers. Chantelle described it as “very difficult experience” because she felt isolated and experienced exclusion:

... in the Junior Cert year ... all the Travellers were made sit up at the front ... ‘Well hang on, I’ve got friends that are non-Travellers down the back of the class, why can’t I sit down with them?’, ‘No, this is where you sit ...’ we were doing the mocks ... and I asked, ‘Why are we still only using like big plain pieces of paper and crayons and markers and the rest of them are getting to use paints and they’re allowed to use the clay?’ And she said, ‘Oh that’s expensive’ ... (Eanie).

... that was a very... very isolating, very difficult experience for me, because ...when I went into secondary school ... all the other children had such a bad opinion of Travellers ... I pulled out of PE, because the... the other children ... wouldn’t pick me to be on their team (Chantelle).

Bridget recalled how the Traveller students “were always getting into trouble” for things that were often beyond their control such as not having their full uniforms on. She felt that the school did not take their living conditions into account. Tommy also noted how Travellers were also getting into trouble in school. He said the Travellers were made to feel as if they were always in the wrong and pointed out how that contributed to them not wanting to be in school because “they hated it” there.

The Travellers were always getting into trouble. And another thing I felt even for meself was, you know the dress code? You have to wear the school skirt into school and stuff. And you're probably being up all night freezing with cold. And it's many, many Travellers in the site as well that lived in trailers were even worser than me. And you're freezing with the cold, because... but yet, that was never taken into account (Bridget).

But the school would always suspend us or take the side of other people ... I found that right the way through secondary school. No matter what we said or done, like, if we said it wasn't us that started it, they wouldn't just believe you ... you have to be the instigator ... boys then weren't going to detention, so they were getting suspended ... when they realised ... they could get suspended and not much would happen, they were getting suspended on purpose. They didn't want to be there. They hated it. And so, they were getting into fights, and they were just doing things just not to be there (Tommy).

The research participants also encountered discrimination and racism in further and higher education. For example, Trisha and Winnie and others spoke about encountering indirect racism in spaces they had to share with non-Travellers and outlined how they dealt with it. Trisha felt empowered to challenge the racism but found that it was not a safe space to do so. She talked about seeking support from the university but did not feel that the support received was adequate and consequently, she completed most of her course “from home” (Trisha). Winnie had a similar experience at third level, though it had less of an impact on her because in her case one of the perpetrators acknowledged that they were wrong and apologised. She also challenged it differently. Chantelle noted how her first experience in higher education was difficult because she did not know how to challenge anti-Traveller racism when she encountered it. This changed for her over time, and she grew confident enough to challenge racism when she encountered it.

I confronted someone who said, ‘Knacker’, in the common area ... When I confronted him, he verbally abused me ... it was months and months of me constantly following up to see what was going to be done before I even got a meeting ... they said they were going to send out a school wide update on respect and dignity behaviour ... They never sent out the school wide thing and I did most of my college in [name of institution] I did most of it from home... I hated every minute, and it was not even because of the incident itself, because we used to, unfortunately used to that type of stuff but it was how it was dealt with (Trisha).

... none of the classmates knew that I was a Traveller there in the group ... and I remember one of them turning around and saying, 'It's actually how the knackers were, the Dolce and Gabanna jackets,' ... But I said nothing at that stage, I stayed quiet at that stage. Sure what, what could I say, I suppose at that stage on my own? ... a couple of weeks later when we had a presentation to do on a topic about labelling and stereotypes and I remember I put my presentation together and ... on one slide with just a picture of my grandfather on top of his horse, you know, and I put it, I put it up in class and I said, 'This is my grandfather,' and I remember the people that were after saying that comment, I remember their faces where ... I remember actually one person came up afterwards and actually apologised for their comment ... And you'd often ... might overhear something, do you know? (Winnie).

... the first time was very different ... because like I was very young, and I didn't have those language... the language now about, you know if somebody said something ... derogatory about Travellers ... I didn't have the knowledge or the words to say 'You know, that's very prejudiced' D'you know the academic words? ... to be able to say 'No, that's anti Traveller' or 'That's racist' you know? And 'That's your prejudice you're trying to deflect now onto me (Chantelle).

Bridget also recalled experiencing discrimination and racism in one of the institutions that she attended. While she described her experience in that institution as a “horrible experience”, overall it is worth noting that she went on to have better experiences in other institutions. Bridget hated going to one lecturer’s class because of the “indirect discrimination” that she experienced while there and stated that she would remember her negative encounters with that lecturer “for the rest of [her] my life” because they reinforced what she had learned about herself in primary and post primary school; that she “was the stupid Traveller in the class”.

[name of university] was a horrible experience ... I remember one of the lecturers, ... was her name, she was a biology lecturer... She was one that really stay with me for the rest of my life, she was so racist ... not direct, but indirect ... You could never really ask any questions because you were the stupid Traveller in the class (Bridget).

2.3.1 Experiencing ‘special classes’

Most of the research participants spoke about ‘special classes’. While Vicky felt that she needed the extra support, most of the participants did not understand why all the Travellers needed to attend ‘special classes’. Bridget recalled how she would have to explain to her non-Traveller peers why all the Traveller children were taken out for ‘special classes’ with the “Traveller teacher” during the day and remarked how hard that was when she did not really understand why herself. Some research participants noted that many Travellers liked being in the ‘special class’. For example, Maggie stated that “they all wanted to be in the remedial class” and that she herself “wanted badly to be in” it but was not in it because she “was ashamed to act up”. Tommy believed that Traveller students were sent to ‘special classes’ because the school had extra resources that needed to be used but he “didn’t think the teachers ... did it out of badness”.

... like so I did need those learning supports. They didn’t do me any harm, d’you know? So, I really benefitted from them (Vicky).

If the rest of your class friends asked you where you were going, you were out with the Traveller teacher and you always had to explain to the students what the Traveller teacher was. And nobody ever explained it to you ... (Bridget).

Strange kind of an experience in primary school in that all the Travellers had remedial class, and they wanted to be in the remedial class. Now, I wasn’t in the remedial class – I wanted badly to be in the remedial class, but ... I was ashamed to act up. So, I ended up not being in the remedial class. (Maggie).

“

you know how they say with microaggressions, it's like death by a thousand cuts – you know the constant, 'aren't you lovely and clean', 'aren't you beautiful and clean', and 'isn't your hair lovely', you know that kind of shit ... I didn't know that was wrong because that's supposed to be a compliment. But you know, you gut knows, ... here's the other things then as well, they would check your hair ... my mother was always spotless, and very meticulous over us ... there was settled girls in the school and their hair was walking. But our hairs was checked and theirs wasn't ... all the subtle ways that you get that information that you're different, and that it's not a good difference, do you know that kind of way?

- MAGGIE

Now, I could be wrong, but I don't think the teachers ... did it out of badness. I think it was just... I was about seven or eight at this stage and realising that all the children were Travellers (Tommy).

Terry remembered seeing "all the Traveller boys ... [being] taken out of the classroom" in playschool to attend "extra classes". He said that "it was kind of presented as kind of a fun thing to do" but said that he learned "to fly under the radar" at school and hide his identity for fear of being "taken out of class" because it was clear that the Traveller students in those classes were doing "baby stuff".

I think it kind of taught you to fly under the radar. Like it made me like not trust ... I was afraid of being ... you know what I mean ... I didn't want to be taken out of the class because I'd see what the lads were doing, the work that they were doing, and it was clear that it was baby stuff (Terry).

The research participants who had attended the 'special classes' confirmed what Terry believed. Both Sally and Tommy recalled how they were "learning nothing" during their time in the 'special class' for Travellers.

we were taken out of there every single day ... at a certain hour and we were put in like as... supposed to be for additional supports like. But the reality of it is ... you could do whatever you wanted to do in that class. You could be literally up on the ceiling if you wanted to climb up on the ceiling. And there wasn't very much heed gave. So, it was more or less deemed like as a special class, but the additional supports weren't there, you were learning nothing (Sally).

And nothing was happening in the class really. It was only we were colouring or... But we were missing out on our own kind of classroom stuff, you know what I mean? I was kind of smart enough in class, so I wasn't... I was able to catch up. But a good few of the other Traveller children didn't and they were struggling, and they left (Tommy).

Michael attended a primary school where he was the first Traveller. He recalled how the school staff had tried to exclude him by trying to convince his parents to send him to the 'special school' for Travellers.

the only Traveller boy to ever go to the school since it opened ... I was there for a couple of months. My Mam and Daddy got called in ... and they says 'Look, this is not for him. He can't sit in the seat. Talking too much. We think he's ADHD' and all this stuff, right? They wanted to send me to [name of school] ... all Traveller students duly went to [name of school], which was a special needs school ... (Michael).

Bridget shared a story about being misdiagnosed with a learning difficulty during post primary school. She had questioned her principal regarding why she was still illiterate at senior cycle and asked for a psychological assessment. She accepted the results of the assessment for years until she had the chance to pay to have another test done on herself as an adult. She recalled how the test result at post primary school had made her feel “so stupid”. Fortunately, in Bridget’s case, her experiences at post primary made her determined to do well “to prove the school wrong”. When she was accepted into an Access programme, she requested “extra supports” with her learning. She recalled with shame how the support worker “was going through the ABCs” with her. She assumed he had accessed her school records and therefore knew that she that she had been diagnosed with a low learning difficulty. Bridget did not access extra supports because the experience was so embarrassing for her.

And basically, I was told I was pure stupid in the psychologist test, my IQ, everything was just low, extreme low. And that made me feel horrible. But the thing was, it was a psychology test that was done through the system – I got the same test done when I went back to college as a mature student – I paid €500 to get the test done, to come out with a completely different result (Bridget).

Some research participants felt that they did not get the worst of it. Maggie, who had attended school in the 1970s, recounted stories from other Travellers who “were stripped – whether they needed to be stripped or not” when they went to school and then “they were all washed in a bath together”. Bridget, who attended school in the 1990s, talked about her older siblings who had attended a “Traveller school” where “they used to be brought ... and like washed and stuff”. Maggie, who described her primary school experience as “traumatic”, remarked on the ways in which microaggressions impacted on her describing them as “death by a thousand cuts”. Furthermore, Bridget recalled how on her Holy Communion Day, a “nun” assumed that her mother had bought her shoes too small because she was limping, but the limp was the result of an accident, not ill-fitting shoes. Her confirmation day also stood out because of “the way people looked at us and spoke to us in the chapel”.

you know how they say with microaggressions, it's like death by a thousand cuts – you know the constant, ‘aren't you lovely and clean’, ‘aren't you beautiful and clean’, and ‘isn't your hair lovely’, you know that kind of shit ... I didn't know that was wrong because that's supposed to be a compliment. But you know, you gut knows, ... here's the other things then as well, they would check your hair ... my mother was always spotless, and very meticulous over us ... there was settled girls in the school and their hair was walking. But our hairs was checked and theirs wasn't ... all the subtle ways that you get that information that you're different, and that it's not a good difference, do you know that kind of way? (Maggie).

... my mother, Lord have mercy upon her, there used to be so much pressure on her to make sure that we had snow driven and white stockings so that the teachers wouldn't judge us, or you know, think we were dirty and stuff ... 'Oh, [name of mother]', she said, 'you got Bridget's shoes too small for her'. And that was the assumption that the teacher made (Bridget).

2.3.1 Absence of Travellers in the Curriculum

Research participants also talked about the absence of Traveller culture and history from the curriculum in both primary and post primary school.

... you know, ever in the curriculum, as you know, of Travellers, or their history, or their place in society, or what they've contributed, and what they've not, you know there was nothing. It was mostly negative, but it was mostly like in small... just wee... in bubbles of conversations, you know? It was all really... around the Big Fat Gypsy Wedding was massive. It was, Jesus it was like a... such a pivotal point in my education in secondary school definitely (Michael).

Many of the research participants learned about Travellers in third level because of the types of courses that they took. One participant, Winnie, said it was “the first time” that she had “heard anything about [her] community” and remarked on the positive impact that this had on her. Winnie noted how learning about Travellers and their experiences in an educational way helped her to make “sense” of her own experiences and “negative encounters”. Chantelle recalled how one lecturer used a racial slur in class towards Travellers. She mentioned that she was able to challenge him because she had the language and confidence to do so at that stage in her life. Chantelle was also able to understand and forgive him, as she knew he did not mean to be offensive and that he just lacked knowledge. Further, like Winnie, Chantelle remarked how learning about social policy “was liberating” because it helped her to understand and make sense out of her own past experiences.

Teaching a class on Travellers, you know, and that was kind of the first time that I heard anything about my community ... I remember being fascinated ... it was one class a week ... I'd never heard of anybody talking like that ... in an educational way ... about our community ... Or in a positive way ... it kind of made sense to me all of these kinds of negative encounters that I have had in my past and kind of these kind of racist comments that I've had thrown at me and being singled out and marginalised and stereotyped ... (Winnie).

... my Lecturer ... started speaking about the importance of language, and so he said 'When you're working in a professional setting you have to be very mindful of different connotations, or emotions that are attached to certain words.' ... he gave an example ... his wife's friend had come down to visit them over the weekend, and the wife had used the term 'Knacker' and my Lecturer said 'But, you see, my wife's friend doesn't understand that ... it's a slang word.' ... nothing had ever come up in class ... there was never a time for me to say 'I'm Traveller' ... I said 'You're wrong there.' ... I said 'Stop trying to minimise ... What ye did ... That's racist.' And I said 'It is never okay to use the word knacker.' I said 'Just as that it's never okay' I said 'to use the word nigger' but I didn't... now I wouldn't even say the word nigger... I said '...the words hurt the same' ... I kind of felt sorry for the Lecturer ... I actually didn't feel vulnerable at all ... but I could see he did feel very vulnerable and very exposed, and I felt for him, cos I knew he wasn't saying it out of malice (Chantelle).

2.3.3 Positive Experiences in Education

While most participants reported having negative primary school experiences, for some primary school was a positive experience. Those who reported having positive experiences talked about being included and being made to feel like they belonged. John, who had spent little time in school, remembered his primary school experiences "fondly" and said he never "felt excluded" from any of the three schools that he did attend. Mary also couldn't remember being discriminated against in primary school.

... I didn't have a terrible experience. I probably wasn't long enough in it to have terrible experiences. And any kind of snatches of memory I have ... They were good experiences; I can remember them fondly. So, I never felt excluded from those schools (John).

... I don't ever remember feeling negative or any experiences of discrimination, to that extent ... (Mary).

So, really good primary school we were in. Lot of good work. Teachers I found very helpful and there was loads of Travellers in the school at the time. It was very... a very diverse school for back in the early nineties. And I found that they were very supportive and very helpful for Traveller children as well (Tommy).

The research participants felt more comfortable when they had other Travellers in school with them, as they were able to "kind of mind each other" (Winnie) because "there was safety in numbers" (Chantelle).

and I suppose there was a few Travellers in the school as well where it tended to be where all the Travellers would kind of stick together, do you know, and kind of mind each other, I suppose, and that was, that was kind of a sense of support ... and a sense of some sort of belonging, do you know where, where the Traveller girls would kind of include you and say, 'Come on, come on with us,' (Winnie).

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it was harder ... going into secondary school then ... I suppose in the beginning ... it wasn't too bad because ... I had a few of the girls, the Traveller girls in the class with me but when they all left, life, I ... I ended up being the only Traveller in the class in my Junior Cert, you know? So, that was ... that was kind of hard, because you lost all your friends, you lost all that kind of bubble of support.

- WINNIE

And then, sure all my cousins and everything were up there, so I was flying it then up there, because... .. even though we were a minority, we were a majority in the school ... there was safety in numbers (Chantelle).

Four research participants had attended primary school in the UK, and they reported having the most positive experiences in primary school. Winnie felt that because there was a lot more diversity in her school in the UK, her teachers were more “educated around diversity and inclusion”. She could not recall there being “any incident” of discrimination or racism in primary school. Ellen, who had also attended school in the UK, said that she “loved school”. She recalled some bullying but said it was because she was “Irish” not because she was a Traveller, and that seemed easier for her to contend with. Connie also found that his primary school experience was a good one. He felt that the school he attended suited him and attributed it to there being “more interactive learning”.

... there would have been ... a lot of different ethnicities in my class ... the teachers were much more educated around diversity and inclusion, you know ... But I can't remember ... being excluded or being singled out or marginalised in the classroom when I went to school ... I can't remember any incident of it happening, do you know? (Winnie).

... primary school might have been the best for the early part of it because I found that the school ... my memory of it was that it was more suited to the sort of way I think or something like that, it was more interactive learning (Connie).

While post primary school was by far the most negative school experience for many of the research participants, resulting in many of them leaving school early, some participants reported having some positive post primary school experiences. Being amongst their own was cited as a positive by the research participants who attended post primary school. Winnie noted how post primary school “wasn’t too bad” in the beginning because she had that “bubble of support”.

it was harder ... going into secondary school then ... I suppose in the beginning ... it wasn’t too bad because ... I had a few of the girls, the Traveller girls in the class with me but when they all left, life, I ... I ended up being the only Traveller in the class in my Junior Cert, you know? So, that was ... that was kind of hard, because you lost all your friends, you lost all that kind of bubble of support (Winnie).

While some negative experiences were noted in further and higher education, for many participants it was a positive experience overall. The research participants talked about feeling supported and encouraged by staff in the Access programmes and by the lecturers who taught them. Bridget, who had a negative experience in one institution, went on to have much better experiences in other institutions. In contrast to being made feel “the stupid Traveller”, she was made feel that what she had to say was “valuable” and that she was not “stupid”.

... it was a smaller college and, you know, I felt what I needed to say was valuable in the class ... and I didn’t feel stupid, you know? (Bridget).

The research participants spoke about feeling empowered by their higher education experiences because education helped them to understand their circumstances and develop the language required to articulate their experiences.

But during that journey in [name of university], I no longer felt the shame of being a Traveller, you know? (Bridget).

But doing that course made me realise, it wouldn't make a difference what Travellers do – Travellers were excluded because they were Travellers, for no other reason (Maggie).

It was very liberating... it explained a lot for me. D'you know like the questions that I couldn't answer when I was younger like, d'you know 'Why can't I go over to my grandfather, cos the other children will know I'm Traveller.' D'you know 'Why... what am I ashamed of?' ... And I couldn't answer those questions as a child, but then I kind of was able to take ownership then of that in third level education, and kind of, you know, hand that shame back to non-Travellers ... 'That's yere's to carry, not mine.' (Chantelle).

2.4 Interactions with Educators

The research participants had mixed interactions and relationships with their educators. While some had positive experiences, most of the research participants had some negative interactions with their educators at primary and post primary level and in further and higher education. Even those who had predominantly positive interactions with their educators, in primary and post primary school, recalled having some “horrible” teachers who were “racist against Travellers” (Winnie).

... there was a couple of nice teachers ... but there was a couple of really horrible teachers ... I would say racist against Travellers ... (Winnie).

... I was very good at maths; I was always like the best in the class at maths. But they never marked me any good merits, it was always like, it always had to be something negative – something spilt on your jacket, or it was all... (Bridget).

Tommy and Mary reported having good relationships with their teachers, but both recalled seeing teachers treat other Travellers poorly. Tommy felt that Travellers who lived on sites were treated worse than Travellers like him who were ‘settled’. Mary believed that the Travellers who teachers perceived not to be interested in education were “not given as much notice or attention” as she had been given.

But then I could see that some of the others... There was other Travellers who were living on sites or that and definitely that just felt like... Maybe I just didn't notice it at the time but looking back, there was definitely more... They were kind of treated worse (Tommy).

...I do remember there was other Travellers in the school that may not have been as interested in education as I would have been, and I felt like they were just being left colour, or not being given as much notice or attention as they should have been, to be honest (Mary).

Some research participants talked about the negative encounters that they had with their educators. While Connie said that "there was a couple of supportive teachers", he felt that, overall, he was treated unfairly in post primary school and remarked on how one teacher would always try to blame him for different things. Trisha felt that she had been 'picked on' by one teacher and that another had accused her in the wrong. Chantelle recounted a story about one teacher who scared her so much that she "soiled" herself "several times in school".

... it was terrible, the way that I feel I was treated at that school was bad. There was a teacher there, the deputy head teacher who was actually an ex-police officer and he was always trying to implicate me for different things ... (Connie).

I went into secondary school ... an all-girls school and I was picked on by one teacher and another teacher then said I was bullying other students ... (Trisha).

“

I remember one of the male teachers said to me ‘Oh ... you’re still in school’ ... he said “I thought you were going to be like Dolly Parton, like all the Traveller women, go on and get your breasts done and spend all your money in that way” ... while that was a horrible moment, it was something about it ... I wouldn’t please him to quit school ... So, kind of that determination to outdo him ...

- BRIDGET

Cos, I had it all blocked out, until I was doing personal development and kind of like a group therapy thing, and I had journal, and I was talking to my mother about it one day, and my mother was saying that the teacher used to give me an awful time, and that I had come home soiled. I had soiled myself several times in school because I was obviously so frightened of her, you know? (Chantelle).

Michael spoke about one teacher who was “sneering and laughing” when he talked about Travellers in class. Eanie recalled how one teacher would try to make him feel stupid when he asked a question.

Religion was a very strong one, had very strong opinions about Travellers and, you know, about the way they went on, and she was teaching Religion ... remember one class and me saying ‘Oh the Travellers, like that they don’t have sex before marriage’ and she was sneering and laughing, and she says ‘Do you see the way they’re dressed, they’re like’ ... (Michael).

... when I’d ask a question, the teacher would be very kind of you know sarcastic or would respond like I was asking a stupid question ... I remember one phrase that one of my teachers had ... whenever I asked a question, it was always like, ‘Meanwhile back at the ranch’ ... in other words, you know meanwhile back in reality or whatever (Eanie).

At further and higher education levels, the research participants also reported having some negative interactions with their educators. Some recalled interactions during lectures that were inappropriate and made them feel uncomfortable, while others did not feel that some of their lecturers were supportive. For example, Trisha recalled an incident where a lecturer negatively stereotyped gypsies during a lecture. Chantelle also recounted an incident where a lecturer used the word 'knacker' inappropriately in class. She said it did not make her feel "vulnerable", however, and ended up feeling sorry for the lecturer.

they always had different speakers in, about different things, one of the speakers was offensive to everybody ... then he started talking, 'I describe myself as a bit of a gypsy', and then proceeded to talk about how we robbed and stole off people ... (Trisha).

I said, 'Do you think the use of the word knacker doesn't hurt the Traveller child as much as the other word does a Black child?' So, I said, 'Those words are never okay' and he was trying to justify it, and d'you know he was like 'Oh no, I'm...' and he's a lovely Lecturer... I kind of felt sorry for the Lecturer ... I actually didn't feel vulnerable at all ... but I could see he did feel very vulnerable and very exposed, and I felt for him, cos I knew he wasn't saying it out of malice, d'you know? (Chantelle).

Vicky spoke about a time during her undergraduate course when she was experiencing stress and anxiety to such an extent that she had to see her local GP. She found that her lecturers during her undergraduate were unsupportive and believed that they "were nearly stopping" her from progressing through higher education.

Like I remember going into [the GP] and he gave me a book to read, like, you know, he was like, 'Read this, you can get through it.' ... and you went into college, and it was just, it was just terrible that you were trying to get through college and the people that were near stopping you were the people in the college. You know? So, I didn't like my undergrad. I hated it (Vicky).

2.4.1 Educator Expectations

Low educator expectations were identified as problematic for most of the research participants in primary and post primary school. For Sally, a negative encounter with one teacher, who had extremely low expectations of her, was the last straw and resulted in her leaving school. Tommy, who had returned to school after completing his Junior Cert, was told by a teacher that they were "surprised" to see him back in school. He also subsequently left school. While the overt expression of low expectations caused some of the research participants to leave school, such expressions made some of the participants more determined to succeed because they "wouldn't please [them] to quit school" (Bridget). Bridget's response is a reminder that all children react differently to negative encounters.

I remember going back into school anyway, being on the corridor, loads of pupils ... teacher saying, 'Oh, where were you for the last few days?' ... 'But anyway', she said ... 'it's not as if you're going to get anywhere anyway' ... And the remarkable thing was, nobody came looking for me (Sally).

And I'll never forget this ... There was a teacher said a comment to me, she said, 'Surprised to see you back here. We weren't really planning to have...' Basically any Travellers back (Tommy).

I remember one of the male teachers said to me 'Oh ... you're still in school' ... he said "I thought you were going to be like Dolly Parton, like all the Traveller women, go on and get your breasts done and spend all your money in that way" ... while that was a horrible moment, it was something about it ... I wouldn't please him to quit school ... So, kind of that determination to outdo him ... (Bridget).

Bridget remembered how she and her sister were often put down the back of the class and allowed to colour or practice their handwriting while the non-Traveller students did their schoolwork. Chantelle recalled how the teachers told her parents that she was doing great, even though she was "clearly struggling" and attributed part this to their expectations being so low.

And again, like even being put down the back of the class, doing handwriting while Irish was going on ... if not you were out with the Traveller teacher ... even in English we'd be colouring in at the back of the class, myself and [name of sister] like (Bridget).

... the Teachers used to be telling them that I was amazing, and sometimes I think were the Teachers saying it because the expectation was so low. Because I was clearly struggling (Chantelle).

One research participant was triggered to the point of tears when she recalled an experience she had with one of her teachers. Winnie was so hurt when she remembered how a teacher assumed that she would not "be needing" a CAO form to fill out that she needed to stop the interview for a minute to compose herself.

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‘I’m gonna tell the Teachers what worked for me ... what was a really nice experience ... I was in the Remedial Teacher’s, like I dunno should I have been there, shouldn’t I have been there, but it was lovely, cos she was so nice, and because she was so nice to me ... I felt so relaxed, I was more open to the learning, d’you know that kind of a way.

- CHANTELLE

... coming up to Leaving Cert ... when they hand out the CAO forms for the colleges ... the teacher ... just passed me by and she says, 'You won't be needing one of these anyway' ... that was just kind of a hit as well for me at that stage ... I was just thinking to myself ... 'Of course, I don't need it,' ... 'why am I getting upset about her?' ... there wasn't even a hint of college or anything ... Sorry, now (Winnie).

Low teacher expectations were not always expressed so overtly. At times, they were expressed by teachers not checking homework and labelling Traveller students as problematic.

... my homework wasn't being checked by a few teachers ... [one teacher said] 'I've already been warned about you' ... 'I won't be putting up with the same level of shite that your last teachers did' ... 'This is not the primary school now.' This is my first day! (Eanie).

Reflecting on the importance of positive student teacher relationships and high teacher expectations, Patrick pointed out how having good relationships with his teachers had a positive impact on how well he did academically.

... in the subjects I excelled at, I excelled, and the subjects that I struggled at, I struggled at. But a lot of that was down to ... the amount of input the teachers put into me or the amount of belief the teachers had in me had direct correlation with my achievements in those classes (Patrick).

2.4.2 Positive Interactions with Educators – One Good Teacher

While the research participants talked about having negative interactions with their educators across the continuum of education, they also spoke about the positive interactions that they had with educators.

I never felt bullied or victimised by the teachers – in fact, I felt encouraged by the teachers ... (John)

... my own personal experience of it was that all the teachers were lovely, they were really encouraging and engaging (Mary).

The research participants acknowledged the impact that positive interactions with their educators had on them. Winnie talked about how important it was for students to have access to “one person” who “believe[d] in them and pushed them forward”. Chantelle noted how important it was to let educators know what worked well and adopted that approach when she was invited to speak to a group of teachers. For Mary, “one of the standout points” of her educational journey was when one of her educators took her out of the ‘special class’ for Travellers.

But then there was, there was one particular teacher that was really good, and I think it’s important for, for there to be that one person as a kind of support for any student, not just a Traveller student but for any student I think it’s important that there’s that one teacher to kind of believe in them and kind of push them forward, you know? (Winnie)

‘I’m gonna tell the Teachers what worked for me ... what was a really nice experience ... I was in the Remedial Teacher’s, like I dunno should I have been there, shouldn’t I have been there, but it was lovely, cos she was so nice, and because she was so nice to me ... I felt so relaxed, I was more open to the learning, d’you know that kind of a way. (Chantelle).

...one day when I was in that [special] class, my base class teacher came to the classroom and spoke to the resource class teacher, and said, 'I don't want Leanne to be here anymore, I want her to come back to her actual class'. And I did, and I never returned to, let's just call it the Traveller class. And I remember, that's one of standout points for me in my educational journey ... the importance of that for me was that the actual teacher that brought me back..., believed in me as an individual (Mary).

In some cases, the research participants attributed a large part of their success in education to having positive interactions with one or more of their educators. For example, Eanie, who reported having mostly negative encounters, recalled how his remedial teacher at post primary positively impacted on his education. Frank, who was like Eanie in that he recalled mostly negative encounters, also mentioned the teachers who he found to be supportive during post primary school.

... it was her who told me that what was happening to me was wrong and that it won't always happen to me you know in life ... in fact if I was to put a point in my life to where I was given the encouragement to develop my creative side and to have confidence in my academic ability, it was down to that remedial class ... it was her who got me to start writing poetry, you know properly, it was her who started making me think about going and maybe you know entering into the Listowel Writers Week, this is even before my Junior Cert (Eanie).

... apart from [name of teacher] and there's a woman called [name of teacher] ... they were the two teachers who kind of ... who had a sense of support there. And then there was my chemistry teacher ... [they] would talk to you about ordinary stuff or this is a poet, or have you read this book ... or this show ... So, kind of treated you as if you had some intellect and some cop-on or you had interests (Frank).

Both Tommy and Terry talked about teachers who inspired them to pursue their current professions. Tommy recalled the importance of having at least one teacher who believed in him and pointed out that those encounters “do make a difference”.

There was one particular teacher I had in primary school ... She saw something in me at the start ... she kept saying, 'You'd be a fantastic [type of profession].' And I remember she kept saying it to me ... If she said it once, she said it a hundred times. And I remember thinking, sure how could I be a [type of professional]? ... But it did stick with me ... someone like her who just kind of makes... Even instils a little belief into you to tell you that you're good enough or you can do it. Just things like that. They do make a difference ... (Tommy).

Winnie spoke about how one teacher went beyond the call of duty to teach her Irish which she had missed learning because she had attended primary school in the UK. She was offered an exemption from Irish when she returned to Ireland, which she took but later regretted. In post primary school, she was allowed to sit at the back of the class during Irish, but her Irish teacher took it upon themselves to offer Winnie the chance to learn Irish and stayed after school every day to teach her.

... what ended up happening is the Irish teacher ... in secondary school ... she said, 'Look, if you want to try your hand,' ... 'we can, we can start' ... 'I can spend an hour each afternoon,' (Winnie).

Bridget recalled how the support of one good lecturer in higher education helped her to complete an Access programme. She also spoke about other lecturers and tutors who saw her "potential" and encouraged her to do well. She noted how important it was to have tutors who understood that she was prone to self-sabotaging due to a lack of confidence in her ability, which was rooted in her early negative experiences of education. Meg and Winnie also remarked on the importance of meeting good educators who believed in them during their educational journeys.

And she was a lovely lecturer. And she really... I think only for her I wouldn't have even completed it. Because I used to look forward to going into her... But I'll never forget the night before the thesis was due in, I was only halfway through it and at that point I didn't want it ... I didn't feel good enough to have a degree ... you know, feeling the levels of rejection all the time can have an impact on you and even when you're just about to cross the line to achieve something ... I remember one of the tutors ringing me, saying to me, 'Please get it in, like you're good enough for this degree. Just get it in and you'll have it and you'll be as good as everybody else around the table and stuff.' (Bridget).

“

I suppose going in for me, I was conscious right, and my fear was again because of past experience in primary and post primary, like am I going to be left isolated ... I tried to actually encourage other Travellers to come with me ... my fear was kind of being isolated and maybe excluded and kind of just left there by yourself and I didn't want that.

- SALLY

You know, I mean [name of lecturer] was a God send ... and there were a few lecturers ... They will help you, you know, and sometimes it would be just a word of advice, a word of encouragement ... [name of lecturer] was a good person, you know and a very, a man who was academic but very human ... he would give you direction and he would say, 'I believe you can do it'. And sometimes, that's all you need to hear, something like that, you know (Meg).

... I got support from my lecturers ... got great support ... made good friends with ... with some of them ... they kind of supported me and encouraged me to continue ... They were saying like, that you could, you can do it ... that one person ... that believes in you ... is important (Winnie).

2.5 Relationships with Non-Traveller Peers

The research participants had complex relationships with their non-Traveller peers throughout their educational journeys. Some of the research participants remarked how they were “very much on their own” (Maggie) and how “none of the Traveller children ever got an invite to any of the birthday parties” (Patrick) during primary school.

... I was kind of very much on my own, and didn't have friends in primary school, because you couldn't bring them home, or they didn't want to come home. That's how I copped on we were different because they used to go home to other girls' houses that lived around, but they would never come to mine (Maggie).

None of the Traveller children ever got an invite to any of the birthday parties (Patrick).

For most of the research participants, post primary school was where they really noticed how they were being excluded by their non-Traveller peers. Terry recalled how the “nastiness” and “name-calling” really started when he went to post primary school. Tommy said that the Traveller students and non-Traveller students were “fighting a lot” in post primary school. While most of participants never witnessed any physical bullying, Chantelle recalled how one of her non-Traveller peers “spat” in her face and caused her to change schools.

Secondary school was when the nastiness from the kids started really ... you started hearing the name calling and stuff ... there was never any physical bullying, it was like mental and isolation and that kind of stuff ... Everyone had a problem with who I was and like my cousins and all of this (Terry).

... we were kind of fighting a lot with settled people. They were calling names and we were calling names back ... (Tommy)

... but he spat anyway in my face on the bus, and I just went home to my mother and father, and I was like I was dropping out of school ... I got moved, within one or two days, up to the vocational school, and that was a DEIS school (Chantelle).

The research participants talked about not getting invited out to social gatherings or “down to the canteen” (Chantelle) by their peers at post primary school, having “no real friends in there” (Eanie).

... it wasn't a very friendly environment ... you know that you've got no real friends in there ... your friends are starting to have parties or going to discos and you're not getting invited (Eanie).

... they'd go down to the canteen, and some days I wouldn't be invited down, so a lot of the time then I used to spend it in the toilet on my own ... (Chantelle).

In some cases, the participants were able to 'pass' and 'play white' and so they had superficial relationships with their peers. Terry, who had been 'passing' was found out and noticed that his non-Traveller peers would no longer use derogatory comments about Travellers in his company thereafter. He felt that this "made relationships hard to develop". William worried about being found out and questioned if his friends would still be his friends if they knew he was a Traveller. He said this kind of pressure to conceal his identity resulted in him having "an identity crisis or something". Chantelle also spoke about the pressures of having to 'play white' to be accepted and the guilt that she felt as a result.

... after they learned my background, you wouldn't hear these words in my company, but you'd know what they were ... like say if I wasn't there ... it made relationships hard to develop ... (Terry).

... maybe kind of an identity crisis or something. I nearly wanted to say I was a Traveller ... It's like who are my friends? Are they, my friends? Will they still be my friends if I identify? ... I had this conflict ... And then as time went on, there was ... like less friends ... so I got a bit lonely at times (William).

... so, we could go downtown for our lunch ... I used to feel so sad because I couldn't go... I was too embarrassed to go over and say 'Hello' to my Granddad ... cos I didn't want the other girls knowing ... I'm Traveller ... I'm so mad at myself now that I did that ... (Chantelle).

Some of the research participants found that the cultural clash between them and their non-Traveller peers was difficult to contend with. Michael said that he got on “superficially” with his non-Traveller peers but that he “couldn’t understand the way they were going on”. However, he did make some real friends at school, who he is “still best friends with to this very day”. Vicky recalled having positive relationship with her peers who she described as “really lovely girls who just didn’t care about my background”, though she felt that “cultural expectations ... put a strain on [her]”.

I had two male best friends ... I would have got on with the class superficially, but ... it was just a culture clash... I couldn’t understand the way they were going on in the class (Michael).

... I think going into third year then was the, the realisation that the cultural expectations for me were very different to my friends ... that did put a strain on me as well. ... (Vicky).

While attending further and higher-level education institutions the research participants had mixed experiences with their non-Traveller peers. Some of the research participants found it hard to make friends with their non-Traveller peers and had difficult interactions with them. Vicky talked about how she felt she was being pitted against the working-class students who she felt were almost competing to be at the bottom. Trish also found that her working class peers looked down on her and sensed some begrudgery when she did well.

... the Access programme wrecked my head ... it was gas because people always say, like, 'Oh, you know, working class people, you know, we get it.' I felt like I was in the lions' den ... I just felt like when we were introducing ourselves ... especially one girl, she found out I was a Traveller and she was like, 'Ah, you think you're special, do you?' ... within the working class, there's little boxes that they put you in as well. They're like, 'I'm above you because you're, you're a Traveller,' ... it's this competition the whole time, so the year I actually hated it. I was ... I had such a tough time; I didn't like it all (Vicky).

... in my first year I made some friends, I made a friend first of all ... and then in second year, she wasn't in the first week and so I made some new friends ... they seemed like nice people and as soon as the other girl came back I introduced her to them so we all hung around together then but as soon as she had some new non-Traveller friends, her attitude changed ... I know it was because I was a Traveller because it was nothing that I did ... everything again was going really well until I started doing really well. We both applied for the [name of a programme], she didn't get in and she said the only reason I got in because I was a Traveller (Trisha).

Some of the research participants talked about how their earlier encounters with their non-Traveller peers had impacted on them as they tried to negotiate relationships at third level. For example, William, who spoke about developing an identity crisis at post primary said that by the time he got to third level he “didn’t really feel ... like [he] could make friends”. He felt that he was lucky in that he attended an institution in his local area and therefore had “friends outside of college”. Michael also mentioned how his earlier experiences of being isolated left him “very guarded” because those experiences were traumatic. Winnie also remarked how coping mechanisms, developed at post primary school, resulted in her “not allowing people to get close” to her. Sally also referred to how her experiences at primary and post primary made her fearful about being isolated at third level.

... one of my friends from Leaving Cert done the Access [programme] with me so I suppose I only really talked to him ... then in first year I was kind of left on my own ... I just found it hard making friends. Because the friends I had in secondary school weren’t so nice if they knew you were a Traveller ... So, I didn’t really feel... like could I make friends ... I think it was good I came to [name of place] because you’d have friends outside of college, but if I had to move to [name of place], it probably would have been a bit harder (William).

... it leaves an imprint in you. You know that isolation leaves an imprint in your life where you’re very guarded ... because whatever space you occupy, you’re very scared of judgement, do you know what I mean? Because them early imprints in your life nearly determine your future, you know that kind of way. Which is sad, and you have to work at it ... I think there’s a scale of trauma (Michael).

... I made friends with a couple of people ... I suppose, a bit of support but ... it was always kind of, it seemed to be kind of always kind of just in the same mind frame as I would have been in when I went back to do my Junior Cert and Leaving Cert ... of that nothing else matters, just the education, get this done, do you know? So, so, I don't know if it was part of myself isolating myself, do you know, in that kind of sense as well. I suppose maybe not allowing people to get close in a sense. You know? (Winnie).

I suppose going in for me, I was conscious right, and my fear was again because of past experience in primary and post primary, like am I going to be left isolated ... I tried to actually encourage other Travellers to come with me ... my fear was kind of being isolated and maybe excluded and kind of just left there by yourself and I didn't want that (Sally).

Sally was relieved to find that her fears were unfounded and that third level "wasn't the same experience" as the ones she had "in primary and post primary" school. She "really enjoyed" her social life in college and made good friends during her time there.

... it took me a few days to kind of find me feet and kind of get settled in and once you did then you kind of got chatting to other girls or boys that was in the class. And then after that then I felt very comfortable ... So, like I built good relationships there in... and I still keep in contact with them ... in the lines of social life ... I really enjoyed it ... It wasn't the same experience in primary or post primary and that's what I really, really enjoyed about it (Sally).

Bridget attended three different third level institutions and had mixed experiences with her non-Traveller peers. For example, in the first institution she felt she did not fit in. The next institution that Bridget attended was a local college and she found that she really fitted in there and got to be "an ordinary young Traveller woman" (Bridget). The reason Bridget had such a complex educational journey was because she did not receive adequate supports during her first programme, so while she completed the programme she could not move forward because her grades were too low. She attended another institution where she did get the supports she needed to succeed academically. This gave her the confidence to return to third level to pursue further studies.

[name of institution] was very therapeutic for me, it was very good... I had experience, like, of even smoking a joint for the first time in ..., it was being an ordinary young Traveller woman ... And at that point I was mixing along with many different people I just loved it; I just loved it being able to get out with the people and mingle and stuff. (Bridget)

Patrick, Maggie, and Tommy also reported having positive encounters with their non-Traveller peers in further and higher education. They attributed these positive experiences to different things. For Patrick, he stayed friends with students he had transitioned from post primary school with. Maggie found it easy to make friends because of the type of course she was doing, as “there was no issue around them saying anything offensive” and Tommy made friends with his fellow mature student cohort.

Yeah, I would have mixed with people ... I would have had college friends. Ironically though, the best friends I made and the best friends I kept were still fellas and people I'd gone from secondary school over to [name of institution] with. And to this day, they're still the best friends I have in my life (Patrick).

... the group I was with were all into community development and had done some work on the ground before that, had a bit of experience. So, there was no issue around them saying something offensive or... they were very curious, and very wanting to know things. But it was a nice experience (Maggie).

I've loads of support ... We kind of made our own little mature student WhatsApp groups ... Do you know the way some people might feel shy about reaching out for help or something? I've no problem banging the lads a WhatsApp message going, 'what the f*** are we talking about here?' (Tommy).

While Vicki claimed to have good friends at third level, she noted how her friendships with her non-Traveller peers were often complicated because of her identity.

The friends I made, yes, they were great, but it was very much like if you did something it was like, 'Oh, you're doing that because you're a Traveller.' Or you're ... if I got angry, like, if I was like, 'Hang on,' like I remember having an argument with one of the girls and she was alike, 'Oh that's because you're a Traveller. You're aggressive. People like that are aggressive.' ... I was sick of the comments, and you couldn't do anything ... like you couldn't mess up because it was thrown in your face (Vicki).

2.6 Financial Barriers/Pressures to Engaging in Education

The financial cost of participating in education, at primary, post primary, and third level, was named as an issue by many research participants. For some, a lack of money in the home meant that they did not always have lunch or the proper uniform in primary school.

... and that does stick out to you because you're going in and ... children make comments... 'Why aren't you in the right uniform?' ... often you wouldn't have your lunch ... on the Monday morning going in until she [her mother] gets her welfare payment, and she's coming in to drop the lunch in ... (Vicky)

Other research participants talked about being excluded from school outings in post primary school because of financial barriers and explained how this made them feel unwanted. Eanie explained how he was at a disadvantage because his parents could not afford to pay for him to sit his Leaving Cert mocks.

... like we wouldn't even be encouraged to go on the outings to Dublin and stuff and I don't know was it the school trying to be sensitive and saying mightn't have the money. But them I'm thinking they just didn't want us. You know? Because if you don't have money and you're rich, you'd find the money to help the people (Frank)

... but going to the Leaving Cert then like there was no ... yeah, I didn't do mocks or anything like that or ... Because it would cost money (Eanie).

A lack of money contributed to some research participants leaving school early to start working as they needed and/or wanted to make money.

... no money, living from hand to mouth ... So, at the age of 15 ... I started working ... (Maggie).

. ... I used to work with my dad. And then I wanted to leave school just to get money ... So, I got a job when I was about 14 ... (Ellen).

While financial barriers were identified as a problem for many in further and higher education, the research participants reported being affected to varying degrees depending on their personal situations. For example, William and Mary found that the financial assistance that they received was adequate to meet their needs.

I did get the SUSI grant ... back then it was a lot more than what it is now ... that completely covered travel, and it covered my lunch, which was all I needed. And I probably even think I had some disposable money left over at the end ... I was delighted with life ... (Mary).

I was thinking of different universities, but I just thought this part time job, rent, and I like the comfort of home, you know that kind of way. No rent and free food (William).

Eanie and Vicky, on the other hand, recalled how much anxiety they experienced at third level because of financial pressures and spoke about the humiliation they felt at times because of poverty.

... they're chasing you up, 'You won't be getting your exam results ... if you don't pay this ... is that a repeat exam because you couldn't afford to come in, now you got a fee on top of that, oh and you didn't pay that on time, so here's another fee on top of that' ... , they're dealing with a lot of people who are already on the breadline ... it's like they're doing you a favour by allowing you to pay it off over time .. they act like you're taking money out of their own pocket ... (Eanie).

It was the whole thing of like, 'Ah, you're not that worst ... you can't be that bad off because I mean you look fine, I mean you ... you're getting on grand; you look ... you can't be that poor,' you know? You have to present yourself as a run-down, I'm on death's door, I need money, please, you know. And that's what I hated about college ... To get the hardship fund you'd to email them giving them a big sob story of, 'Please help me, I need money. 'Oh, do you now? Send me your bank account details for the past three months ... 'why did you buy a cup of coffee there?' You felt like just begging the whole time. And often they'd say to me, 'Oh, we didn't know you were stuck. Why didn't you tell us?' Because I just don't want to have to go beg, like (Vicky).

Both Vicky and Eanie went on to have better experiences in different institutions. Vicky recalled how different her experience and said she was appreciative that there was "no interrogation".

“

I got a lot of help from the chaplains actually, they were incredible, I have to say, they would have written to the fees office to get rid of penalties, they would have given a loan to pay off the fees ...there was great sense of shame also going to the chaplains, you'd nearly be ducking and diving going in to the door because everyone knows that's where you go when you've got no other avenues of support ...

- EANIE

'There's genuine support here. It's not ... it's like when I started here, and I was sending [name of lecturer]' I said, 'Okay, I'll send you my bank stuff,' and she was like, 'What are you on about?' And I said, 'I'll send you my bank statement to show that I have no money in my account or I've only 200 quid or whatever.' And she was like, 'No. No, no, no. We don't do that.' So, that kind of thing. So, there's none of that compared to what it was before. There's no interrogation like that which I really appreciate (Vicki).

While doing her Access programme, Bridget recalled being so poor that she could not afford public transport to get to college or a cup of tea to sustain her while she was there. She found it hard to focus while in college, as she was hungry. She did not want her father to know that she was struggling, so she pretended that everything was okay.

... and I'd have 70c to get a cup of tea in the college so that no one would judge me for not having the lunch money and not eating the lunch and stuff. So, at least I'd have something in my hand. And I couldn't really function or focus ... But I couldn't let [my father] know that I was living on a cup of tea a day in college (Bridget).

The research participants had different financial responsibilities. Some were living at home, but others were "living independently" (Winnie) and, therefore, had rent and other bills to pay. Both Winnie and Chantelle spoke about quitting jobs to attend college and the impact that had on them. Chantelle was on the verge of dropping out, as she could not financially afford to stay in college and was under huge pressure to pay her bills. Tommy highlighted the pressures he was under because he had a family to look after.

I was nearly two and a half to three years working ... with a pay cheque ... we were living independently as well, and we had rent to pay, and we had electricity to pay ... trying to live your life ... away from being a burden on your family ... (Winnie).

... I had a good bit in savings, d'you know by the time I went back ... come Christmas the money was gone. I hadn't got the SUSI... my savings were very low ... my washing machine went, the car had to be serviced, the shower was gone, and I was like 'That's it.' I was working so much ... Like I was doing college 25 hours a week maybe, but I was working ... maybe 30 or 40 hours a week, d'you know? (Chantelle).

I had to fund it myself ... I was on part-time wages and that, so that was a challenge ... I suppose some people won't realise but it takes a big commitment to stick with it when it's challenging. Like, challenging for money ... We just had [name of his child] at the time as well ... (Tommy).

I got a lot of help from the chaplains actually, they were incredible, I have to say, they would have written to the fees office to get rid of penalties, they would have given a loan to pay off the fees ...there was great sense of shame also going to the chaplains, you'd nearly be ducking and diving going in to the door because everyone knows that's where you go when you've got no other avenues of support ...(Eanie).

Not having access to money impacted on choice. In most cases, the research participants “couldn’t afford to move away” (Michael) from home. Michael had to get a job in a local shop to pay his fees, as he did not qualify for the SUSI grant. While working in the shop, he was subjected to abuse and racism, and he was under pressure to put up with it because he had to pay his fees. With hindsight, Michael did not know how he “didn’t have a breakdown”.

It was finance, ... I couldn’t afford to move away then, because I didn’t get my SUSI, so I thought if I stayed at home, and I paid my fees. ... You are talkin’ about abuse, and the name calling, and the bullying, and the racism, and the discrimination ... but I had to stay there to pay my fees. I had no choice. The fees were three grand, and you had to fork out the money some way ... I don’t know how I done it. I don’t know how I didn’t have a breakdown. I don’t know how I sustained myself mentally (Michael).

... this sounds mad now ..., but I was going to drop out anyway, because I had no SUSI, I started panicking over all the bills. I was like ‘Jesus Christ, I’m going to lose the house.’ D’you know like ‘There’s nothing is worth this.’ ... I wanted to go to [name of institution] to do the [type of course] masters, but I couldn’t afford the rents (Chantelle).

Patrick pointed out how “there were better supports ... during the Celtic Tiger” era.

... there were times where it was hard, but there were supports, there were better supports back then than there are now actually, ironically ... I was lucky to have been at the tail end of those supports that were brought in during the Celtic Tiger (Patrick).

The research participants talked about the ways in which they managed financially. Some were supported by scholarships made available through the Access programmes. Some received SUSI grants, some received social welfare payments, and some received charity or, as in Tommy's case, funding from a philanthropy. Vicky said she would have been lost without the support she received from "St. Vincent de Paul". Maggie was financed through funds raised by a group she was involved in. She felt that the absence of independent funding was a hindrance, as the charitable funders had expectations of her in return for the money.

I would have been lost without St Vincent de Paul, like. Being able to text them and go, 'Look, I need €100 for this,' ... (Vicky).

And [a group she was involved with] did a fundraiser where I had to go and explain to people why I wanted to do the course, and they would donate money. So, they collected donations to support me to go to... but then, Hannagh, they felt that they owned me, and then they wanted to tell me what to say or what to promote, and what to do (Maggie).

... if you need support or financial supports whatever', she was saying, 'yeah'. So, she was like, '... just go to the Access Office', and I did. For the whole three year, like they really supported me (Sally).

Yeah, basically. So, then I ended up just about getting my SUSI grant and Back to Education, so... And then I had found out about ... Uiversity ... Private philanthropist group, they granted me a scholarship of [amount of money] a year while I'm in college (Tommy).

In many cases, it was a case of luck that the research participants received funding. They were lucky to meet the right people at the right time who could help them access funding through unconventional routes.

... I was lucky enough, I went to social welfare, and I was able to get a grant for my BA you know, because I couldn't afford it ... I was just lucky enough I got... I think it was just persistence ... I went to social welfare, and they told me I wasn't eligible ... I remember going back and I was very upset. And I met this woman in the social welfare office, and I told her my story and I explained and by the time I got back into [name of place], because I was working there, she'd everything sorted (Meg).

I had bumped into her pure coincidental ... I was worried, I thought I was going to be thrown out of the college for not paying my fees, and she said to me ... 'You know, I work in the Access Department.' I'd never heard of it. And she said, 'Will you come up to me tomorrow?' ... all that funding [for Travellers] had all been allocated out and that was gone, and then there was a pot there for DEIS school students, and the school I went to be a DEIS school, so I actually got the grant, the scholarship, because of the DEIS school (Chantelle).

... when I got accepted into the place ... I had left my job ... but I wasn't unemployed nine months or more, so I couldn't get my fees, SUSI, or anything ... I was panicking and I was ringing around the college and seeing is there any other way my fees could be covered ... then I reached out to [name of person] ... because I had met him before ... and he said, 'Look, leave it with me.' ... he lobbied with some of the politicians, and it became into government that year that I got my fund because so many people had lost their jobs from COVID ... (Tommy).

A list of the types of supports mentioned by research participants is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Types of financial supports mentioned by the research participants.

Financial supports	Other supports
– SUSI grants	– Saint Vincent's
– 1916 Bursary or other scholarships for disadvantaged students	– Uiversity
– Student Hardship Fund	– Fundraising
– Back to Education Allowance	
– Chaplains	
– Financial Assistance Fund	

2.7 Intergenerational Educational Capital

The research participants spoke about the intergenerational factors impacting on their own engagement in the education system, including their own parents' level and experiences of education.

In the case of all ten of the female research participants, their parents level of education was low. Only four of the ten female research participants had fathers who attended post-primary school but in all cases they had left either in first year or by the age of sixteen. The remaining six of the ten female research participants had fathers who had not attended school at all, had only attended to receive the sacraments or who had only attended primary school. Two of the ten female research participants had mothers who had transitioned to post-primary school but dropped out in their first year. The other eight female research participants had mothers who had never attended school, had only attended primary school to receive the sacraments or who had only attended primary school.

One of the nine male research participants stated that neither of his parents had attended school. The remaining eight male research participants reported that their parents had varying levels of education. Four of the ten male research participants had parents who had either not attended post-primary school or who had left early. Interesting, in all of these cases, the parents had returned to education as mature students. Furthermore, three of the nine male research participants had parents who attended post-primary school and stayed in school long enough to complete their junior certificates. Of these three male research participants, one had a mother and one had a father who completed their post primary education. None of the research participants had two parents who completed post-primary school. One male research participant did not talk about his mother's level of education and was unsure when his father left school.

Only two of the nineteen research participants, one male and one female, said that both of their parents had no literacy skills. Two of the ten female research participants had fathers who could not read or write but both of their mothers were literate while three of the ten female research participants had mothers who could not read or write but fathers who could. Four of the ten female research participants reported that both of their parents were literate. Seven of the nine male research participants had parents who were both literate. It was unclear in the case of one of the nine male research participants whether or not their mother could read or write but the father in this case was literate.

All the research participants, bar two who stated otherwise, were the first member of their family, including their extended family, to have attended university. Table 5 presents the research participants parents' level of education.

Table 5: Parents' level of education

Research participant	Mother	Father
Chantelle (mother is a settled person)	Could read/write Some education-not known whether or not she completed school	Could <u>not</u> read/write Not sure if he attended school at all
Bridget	Could <u>not</u> read/write Only went to school to receive the sacraments	Could <u>not</u> read/write Only went to school to receive the sacraments
Winnie	Could <u>not</u> read/write Did not attend school	Could read/write Left school after making his holy communion
Mary (mother is settled person)	Could read/write Attended primary school only	Could read/write Attended post primary for a few days only
Ellen (father' parents were mixed)	Could read/write Attended primary school only	Could <u>not</u> read/write Never attended school
Sally	Could read/write Left school in early post-primary years- not clear when exactly	Could read/write Left school in early post-primary years- not clear when exactly
Trisha	Could read/write Attended primary school only Attended STTC	Could read/write Attended primary school only
Maggie (father is a settled person)	Could <u>not</u> read/write Attended school for the sacraments only	Could read/write Attended an industrial school until he was 16
Meg	Could <u>not</u> read/write Never attended school	Could read/write Attended an industrial school-not sure when he left
Vicky	Could read/write Dropped out in first year of post-primary	Could read/write Attended primary school only

Research participant	Mother	Father
Eanie	Could read/write Left after junior certificate	Could read/write Left after junior certificate
Terry	Could read/write Attended post-primary but dropped out in 5 th year	Could read/write Finished secondary school
Frank	Could read/write Left school at 14 Returned to education as a mature student	Could read/write Not sure if he attended school Returned to education as a mature student
Patrick	Could read/write Never attended post-primary Went back to education as a mature student and completed third level	Could read/write 2 years primary school (communion and confirmation) Went back to education as a mature student and completed third level
Michael	Could read/write Did not attend post-primary Received education through NGO	Could read/write Attended school to receive the sacraments Did not attend post-primary Received education through NGO
William (mother is a settled person)	Could read/write Completed post-primary	Could read/write Left school after junior certificate
Tommy	Could read/write Did not attend post-primary Learned to read and write in STTC	Could read/write Did not attend post-primary Learned to read and write through STTC
Connie	Did not talk about her much	Could read /write Left school early- not sure when
John	Could <u>not</u> read/write Never attended school	Could <u>not</u> read/write Never attended school

The research participants talked about how their parents wanted them to have an education.

She said she missed it herself and she didn't want her own children to miss it. She said, 'Once you can read and write', she said, 'I know you'll be okay in the world', you know that kind of way, that you'd have independence (Meg).

In most cases, it was the mothers who were "pushing" (Tommy) their children to go to school, though fathers were sometimes involved too if they could be.

My mother would be more the one pushing us to kind of go to school. Not so much in primary school. We were going anyway. But when it got later into secondary, she was the one that was kind of keeping us going ... (Tommy).

... my mother was always kind of the person that was kind of giving out to us to do our homework or get our work done and ... more than my father ... but I suppose my father was always the person then that if we were stuck on ... he'd help us with our reading ... and our writing (Winnie).

Several research participants noted how a parent's lack of education meant that they were often unable to support their children through education. They pointed out that it was "very difficult" (Michael) for parents and students who were trying to "challenge what was happening" (Patrick) in schools.

often there's issues in school where their parents just don't have the knowledge ... to challenge what's happening to their children ... (Patrick).

... and then trying to challenge that on your own is very difficult, and even though you know you should, because I came from that very strong kind of activist background from my parents like, but it was very, very difficult... (Michael).

I don't think Traveller mothers and fathers, Traveller parents, have the support to be able to support their children at home with the poor level of education that they've got theirselves, you know (Bridget).

Some research participants recalled times when their parents did go to schools to challenge what was happening to their children. For example, Chantelle's mother would not accept that her daughter needed to attend the 'special class' for Travellers in post primary school. Maggie recalled going to her own daughter's primary school to challenge it on the same issue. Eanie recalled a time when his mother went into the school because he was "getting shamed alive" by his art teacher who would not allow him to use the same art materials as his non-Traveller peers because they were too "expensive".

... but when I went up there, they put me into remedials⁵ ... Without no assessment or nothing. ... I went home then I said it to my mother, but my mother was like 'No' ... she knew it was the Traveller thing, and so then they put me into the highest class, because they were afraid of their life of my mother (Chantelle).

⁵ Chantelle is referring to being taken out of class for extra educational supports. Such supports are often colloquially referred to as 'remedials'.

I said, well I'm sorry, but she's not going to that classroom ... she said, 'she's a Traveller, and she is going ...' ... I said 'no' ... the principal came then, and she told me, 'She's not getting extra resources, she's not getting extra supports', and I said, 'that's fine with me, she doesn't need them'. So, she goes to the mainstream class (Maggie).

... and I asked, 'Why are we still only using like big plain pieces of paper and crayons and markers and the rest of them are getting to use paints and they're allowed to use the clay?' And she said, 'Oh that's expensive', I said, 'How do you mean it's expensive? Isn't it there for everyone?' And I remember looking back and I was thinking because I said to a fella in the class who was poorer than me and there's no way that his parents were paying for it ... the teacher pulled me aside and she said, 'You either like the class or you don't like the class' ... So, I went home, and I told my mother about this, and I said, 'You're going to have to go into school', I said, 'You're going to have to go in, I'm getting shamed alive', I said, 'I'm up there like a five-year-old child with colouring pencils and big pieces of white paper', she went into the school ... I did get to use my clay for the Junior Cert, and it was only after that then that things started to change in that particular class (Eanie).

Some of the research participants talked about their own parents' experiences of education. They reported how their parents' own negative experiences of education made them worry for their children. For example, Bridget recalled how her father wanted her to leave school because he was worried about her and how she would be treated in school. She understood that "that was his way of protecting" her. Sally pointed out how her mother was supportive of her leaving school because she believed it would be of no benefit to her.

My father ... was able to read and write coming out of the industrial school – very damaged and traumatised, I think, from the experience. But having said that, a very gentle and loving man, but a kind of a lost spirit, in a sense (Maggie).

The old man, Lord mercy on him, came back from the market the one day and he wanted to know what was going on... 'Daddy we did the Junior Cert'. 'That's great anyway, that's very good. When are yous quitting out of the school now?' And the pressure was kind of coming from two sides ... some of that is actually out of protection, while Travellers value education, we also want to protect our children too... 'Yous are never going to be anything, you're auld Travellers and that's how it's going to be.' And that was his way of protecting us to say, 'Don't keep going because you're both going to get hurt and hurt through the system' (Bridget).

I went home and I remember saying to me mother, 'Look it, I'm not going back to school', and she said, 'You are going back to school'. I said, 'No, I'm not'. So, I tells her what happens ... she's like, 'Yeah', and she says, 'it's the same shit all the time, they've the wrong expectation of Travellers, they're not to stay in school, you're not going to get any far' (Sally).

Winnie's mother did not want her to leave school, so she "tricked" her into going back by allowing her to stay home and giving her so many jobs to do that Winnie was glad to go back to school after some time 'off'.

I remember asking my mother ... 'Please, can I leave school?' ... after a few weeks, my mother got sick of me and she just said, 'Look, right, right, you can leave school, yeah, yeah.' But she tricked me ... (Winnie).

The research participants who had parents who finished school or who had done at least the Junior Certificate were all expected to complete school. Terry highlighted how his own parents' experience of education meant that "there was never any idea that [he] would not do his work and get it all finished". He said that his grandmother was his main influence and that she always "encouraged" him and "helped" him out when it came to his education. While Terry said that he "always knew [he] wanted to go" to university, he did not mention being expected by his parents or grandmother to attend. He recalled how they were unable to help him progress beyond post primary because they did not know "how to progress it any further". He noted how the guidance counsellor just pointed him towards "prospectuses" because they assumed his family would have gone to university and would be able to help him go through them.

... my father finished secondary school ... My mother dropped out the year before finishing the Leaving Cert. But she regretted it afterwards ... they were very supportive and like there was never any idea that I wouldn't do all of my work and get it finished ... they associated not finishing school with getting into trouble ... [my grandmother] in a very positive way always like checked how I was doing and encouraged me and helped me out... Like it was just pointing at prospectuses and expecting to you know because most kids, their families have gone... they know how to do it themselves (Terry).

Education was viewed as a form of capital by the research participants. They understood how their own parents' lack of education was a hindrance to them. For example, Tommy noted how his own parents' lack of education meant that he "didn't even see" college "as an option" and he compared his own experience to that of his non-Traveller college peers who had parents at home who could help them academically. Chantelle pointed out how she felt that third level "was definitely an option" for her because she had extended family members who had already been, whereas her parents had not been to college and did not really know how to support her to go.

I didn't see any Travellers in my school or my town going onto third level ... We didn't even see it as an option. Never had it from home. My parents never went on. They never spoke about it... Like, I hear a lot of the students in my class now who are sons or daughters of teachers, so it's kind of like a natural thing for them ... If they're struggling at home with lesson plans ... the mother and father can help them ... sometimes I feel like I'm on my own because, like, God love my parents, they can't help me anyway other than... They're very supportive in many ways but just not academics (Tommy).

... it was definitely an option for me. I knew it was an option for me because my cousin ... had gone on to do teaching ... and then [name of other cousin did something ... my parents, because they hadn't gone to college ... [they] didn't know about the CAO. ... they did everything ... but my mother never forced... education ... so we were never pressured, and maybe a bit of pressure at that stage might have made me a bit more coordinated. But it was just a new experience to all of the family, d'you know? So, my mother and father, like they had a different understanding then when it came to [names of siblings] going on to college (Chantelle).

Maggie's mother and sister played a significant role during her education journey because she was a single mother and needed help with childcare.

... my mother was always very good and always very supportive ... my sister and my mother said, we'll support you, we'll mind the girls (Maggie).

Ellen explained that her family were generally unsupportive of her decision to return to education. While her husband was “very supportive”, much of her extended family could not understand why she wanted to pursue education.

I would have had no support ... my husband would have been very supportive of me at the time. He encouraged me to go and ... he would have encouraged me to stay. But other than that... it was ‘You’re a countrywoman. What are you in college for? ... Are you going to get a job?’ Oh, I got a tough time, I really got a tough time when I was in college ... I must have had boyfriends then and all that kind of stuff. So, it was the internal stuff I got an awful lot of backlash from ... my community ... my people anyhow ... my people ... they’re not really educated or work for women orientated. More so I find some of the other Travellers around the country ... I should be more traditional now doing the traditional stuff (Ellen).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the types of challenges and barriers to educational participation and engagement faced by the research participants across the continuum of education. This study found that education was often a negative experience for Travellers. The research participants reported being excluded and talked about their experiences of racism in education. Furthermore, the research participants noted how low teacher expectations negatively impacted on them and spoke about the positive impact that some of their educators had on them. They also stated that their relationships with non-Traveller students were often tense and/or superficial in nature. The study found that while Travellers experienced financial barriers to participating in education, in some cases they were more acute than others. Not having access to intergenerational educational capital was also identified as problematic.

Chapter 4 will present the research participants' suggestions for improving access to and participation in further and higher education, based on their own experiences of trying to access and participate in education and on their professional experience of trying to encourage and support other Travellers to do the same.

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I didn't see any Travellers in my school or my town going onto third level ... We didn't even see it as an option. Never had it from home. My parents never went on. They never spoke about it... Like, I hear a lot of the students in my class now who are sons or daughters of teachers, so it's kind of like a natural thing for them ... If they're struggling at home with lesson plans ... the mother and father can help them ... sometimes I feel like I'm on my own because, like, God love my parents, they can't help me anyway other than... They're very supportive in many ways but just not academics.

- TOMMY

CHAPTER 3

Improving Access to and Participation in Further and Higher Education

3.1 Introduction

This findings chapter presents the research participants' suggestions for improving access and participation to further and higher education for Travellers. The suggestions put forward by the research participants were based on their own experiences of trying to access and participate in education and on their professional experience of trying to encourage and support other Travellers to do the same.

They suggested simplifying the application processes required for entry to third level courses and to access funding. They also felt that information needed to be made more accessible, as many of them did not know about the different programmes and supports that were available. The research participants highlighted the need for good career guidance for Travellers. In terms of early interventions, they identified the need to have open days for Traveller students; work with the parents of Traveller students; and build better links between further and higher education institutions and schools. Supports, such as access to mentoring and counselling and academic supports, were also deemed important by the research participants. Finally, they felt it was essential to increase Traveller representation and to create safe spaces for Travellers in institutions where they may be underrepresented and feel vulnerable.

There are five sections in this chapter. Section 3.2 outlines the research participants' suggestions for improving access to information about educational opportunities for Travellers. Section 3.3 details the research participants' recommendations for early intervention, while section 3.4 discusses the suggestions put forward for supporting Travellers in further and higher educations. Finally, section 3.5 highlights the key role played by Access Programmes in supporting Travellers to progress through third level and suggests ways of improving their impact.

3.2 Accessing Information about Opportunities in Further and Higher Education

The research participants often found their way into further and higher education through non-conventional routes. They had to take long and complex pathways to progress into their chosen careers. Few of the research participants stated that they always “wanted to go” (Terry) to third level. Terry mentioned that he “always knew [he] wanted to go”, but most research participants “didn’t have college in [their] mind” (Winnie).

... like I always knew I wanted to go; I was excited to go ... it was in one way, the opportunity to have a fresh start from the politics of secondary school or everyone knew who I was, and everyone had a problem with who I was ... (Terry).

... I didn’t have college in my mind or anything like that ... But I went on my first holiday ... I could bring my younger sister with me ... I liked to be able to help my family ... that was kind of a thing that kind of made me think ... about college ... what ended up happening was as I ended up meeting [name of partner] ... we got close ... we were talking about going to college together and we ended up going to college together. We both applied to college at the same time, and we went into college ... (Winnie).

The research participants learned about further and higher education opportunities in diverse ways. Table 6 presents the sources of information regarding further and higher education.

Table 6: Sources of information

- College fair
- Career guidance teachers
- Prospectus
- Informal networks/word of mouth
- Online searches
- Traveller Non-Government Organisation (NGO)

Some learned about opportunities through formal means such as the “college fair” (Chantelle) or “guidance counsellor” (Terry), others through informal networks, such as the Traveller network, while others stumbled across opportunities by chance or because of searching for something to do.

At a college fair ... and they're handing out all the leaflets ... so I'd obviously taken it and just filled it in ... I knew I wanted to do it. ... I didn't know anything about points (Chantelle).

I said to [name of Traveller activist], 'how did you get into doing all this' he said, I went to [name of institution] ... I always had this thing in my head that the only way you could get college was by going through secondary and doing your Leaving Cert ... then he said to me, 'why don't you just apply for the fun of it and see do you get it'. I sent in an application, and I got a place ... (Maggie).

It kind of came about by chance ... really because the recession came ... and I was let go ... I was just turned nineteen, I had no job, basically I had no Leaving Cert ... I didn't really know what to do with myself. So, I start talking to some of the boys on the soccer club that I play with, and we were looking into doing sports and rec courses. You know, PLCs and things like that. But I missed the deadline for that or something, so I went to an adult education, just an opening evening, one night that I found out about on... I think it was in the paper ... it was kind of just down to myself nearly burrowing my own trail ... then you kind of find a few people like yourself ... (Tommy).

... I just spoke with the guidance counsellor and used the internet myself. But I did all of that really on my own ... Like it was just pointing at prospectuses and expecting to you know because most kids, their families have gone... they know how to do it themselves (Terry).

A few of the research participants talked about the need to ask for help with filling in CAO forms and other course application forms. They noted how off-putting this could be for Travellers and suggested simplifying the application process for entry into further and higher education.

so, I think the biggest challenge is the paperwork ... I found it very difficult myself, Hannagh, filling in the CAO going back the second time (Chantelle).

Yeah, well what I think is the application process is probably the worst thing because like I know colleges are doing a lot of stuff with Access [programme] and like holding, like recognising Traveller Ethnicity Day and stuff like that. This is all nice. But the application process for getting into college is so... it's like a labyrinth (Terry).

The research participants talked about the importance of informal support networks for sharing information with each other and supporting each other in education. Maggie was supported by a Traveller woman who had already completed the course Maggie was doing and both Tommy and Chantelle shared information about funding opportunities with other Travellers that they encountered.

... while I was there [name of Traveller activist] put me in contact with [name of a Traveller who previously completed the course], and [they] came out to visit me ... and talked about ... how [they] got through the course and stuff. So, there was good support to do it (Maggie).

... at that point then, I was telling all the other Travellers about University, to apply them and to get onto them and whatever. And I think one or two more have got it since (Tommy).

... normally with the young people that I meet now ... I always ... let them know about the funding, the different scholarships, the SUSI applications (Chantelle).

Tommy noted how he learned about other educational opportunities when he was already involved in education.

... then through that year then I was learning about other things, other ways into education ... Heard stories of other Travellers who had different routes in education ... sport obviously as you know is my kind of passion ... and I did a PLC⁶ course in sports and rec ... I applied to [name of institution] for a youth and community work diploma ... I just started googling everything ... I can't remember did I just google youth and community work or something youth and it came up (Tommy).

The reasons research participants chose the institutions that they did include the suitability of courses on offer and the location of an institution because of financial constraints and other commitments.

... at the time in [name of institution], there was no courses in [area of study research participant was interested in], and that's what I kind of wanted to do. I would have done it if there was. Now, afterwards, after I'd finished, they did start one there (Maggie).

... He was getting me to look at all these courses in [name of place] and I was saying 'Oh Jesus Christ, I can't go to [name of place]. So, I started looking at the courses then in [name of place] (Chantelle).

6 Post Leaving Certificate

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Yeah, well what I think is the application process is probably the worst thing because like I know colleges are doing a lot of stuff with Access [programme] and like holding, like recognising Traveller Ethnicity Day and stuff like that. This is all nice. But the application process for getting into college is so... it's like a labyrinth.

- TERRY

3.2.1 Providing Better Access to Information

The research participants felt that access and participation in further and higher education could be improved by making information, regarding the different supports and programmes available, more accessible. Winnie pointed out that Travellers would not “have that knowledge around what to do or where to go” because they did not have a “history of family being in higher education”. She recalled how she “didn’t even know of any supports that were available” during her undergraduate study.

... a lot of people ... that grow up particularly when they don’t have ... that history of family being in higher education ... you don’t have that knowledge around what to do or where to go ... you can’t just ring up an aunt or ring up an uncle or ring up a cousin and, you know, say, ‘How did you do it, or did you ...’ for communities that haven’t had that knowledge ... it’s important to have that kind of structure with universities ... during my undergraduate. I didn’t even know of any supports that were available (Winnie).

Chantelle recalled reaching out to Traveller organisations to inquire about supports available but found that they did not have any information. Likewise, Eanie spoke about a time when he was looking for funding support and recalled reaching out to a Traveller NGO he was involved with locally. He was angry to learn that non-Travellers were being funded by the NGO to pursue MAs in a higher education institution but there was no funding available to support Travellers in HE.

Well, I know that my time in the [name of Traveller NGO} ... I remember having a conversation with a director of that organisation asking him what kind of supports are in place for people like me that are struggling and I was told that there were none, unfortunately what transpired after that was that I found out that settled members of the same organisation had their Masters courses paid for essentially and they were actually paid to take time off and no Traveller was offered that kind of reward where you had actual Travellers then suffering and struggling to get into college ... it was one of the many reasons why I decided to leave those kind of organisations and structures – it broke my trust with all Traveller organisations to see that I couldn't even get the prices of petrol covered to go to university whereas settled members of staff ... were fully funded to do that ...(Eanie).

3.2.2 Providing Good Career Guidance

The research participants talked about the importance of providing young Travellers with good career guidance and access to a broad range of opportunities. For example, both John and Connie identified the need to provide Travellers with information about all the different career paths that they could take, and not just “social work or community work” (John).

I also think access to particular types of courses, because not every Traveller necessarily wants to do social work or community work ... so getting into the engineering courses and getting into ...the medical courses. And I think there has been some progress there (John).

I think it's important not to just take every Traveller student and make them do social studies because that's all about racism and then they all become a certain type of thing. I think we should try and diversify it. We have to be something other than activists as well, do you know what I'm saying to you? We have to actually be accountants or be whatever it is (Connie).

Referring to Traveller organisations, Chantelle felt the "NGOs" who wanted to "wheel [Travellers] out" were trying to "stream Travellers ... into community development". While Chantelle did not see anything wrong with community development, she felt that the NGOs had low expectations of Travellers and didn't think Travellers were "clever enough to become psychologists or psychotherapists".

They want to wheel us out ... it's like they're trying to stream Travellers ... into community development. Now there's nothing wrong with community development ... Travellers can be Doctors ... but only community development now because we're not... we wouldn't be clever enough to become Psychologists, or Psychotherapists, and that's what it feels like with the NGOs ...

Tommy opined that it was important for career guidance teachers to be able to "make connections" to areas of interest for Traveller students so that they could "support them" and "direct them" towards those areas of further study. Terry pointed out that it was hard for a guidance counsellor to provide all students with adequate support because they had so many students to support.

Whatever they're interested in basically to try make those connections for them. And then try to support them while they're in school and direct them that way as well ... (Tommy).

... because like guidance counsellors have a very limited time to spend with kids it would at least in some way be helped with a different way of doing guidance counselling because guidance counsellors are... their job, it's a job really for three people when you think of it ... especially in a big school (Terry).

The research participants noted the importance of providing Travellers with information about all the different career paths that they could take, as opposed to just focusing on trying to get everyone to attend higher level institutions. Tommy and Connie mentioned the need to provide information and "apprenticeships" (Tommy) and "vocational training" (Connie).

... there needs to be sort of like career path discussions happening in schools ... if it's not third level that they can go to ... apprenticeships ... I just think we need to get to them when they're young (Tommy).

I personally think that there should be other options for people to learn different types of things that are related to their characters personalities, what they want to do. Some people should be getting vocational training, you know what I mean because there's some great jobs in those fields (Connie).

3.2.3 Simplifying Funding Application Process

All research participants talked about the importance of providing funding for Travellers to access and participate in further and higher education. Some participants noted how difficult it was for them to know what, if any, funding was available to them, highlighting the need for improved access to information.

I don't even know where I would get funding ... None of [the Traveller organisations that she called] had a clue of the fundings that were available (Chantelle).

I had to fund it myself. Didn't know about any funders or whatever, so... (Tommy).

... it's the financial barriers then was one of them, and no one knew how to navigate it. At that time, now, if I had the information I have now then, in terms of like DARE and HEAR and you know, the... the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and all them kind of things that are going, like no one even said, no one even bothered, no one really cared if you did know or didn't know (Michael)

It was suggested that all fees should be waived, and that "enhanced grants" (John) or "specific grants" should be made available for Travellers.

... looking at the finances that are put in, or the supports ... whether that's waiving of fees, or whether it's increased grants or whether it's enhanced grants ... (John).

... there should be specific grants as well for, for Traveller students ... (Winnie).

... cut out all college fees for students, and especially for Traveller students ... (Bridget).

One participant felt that there should be “an oversight committee” (Eanie) who dealt with the penalties incurred because a student was unable to pay their registration fees.⁷

... there needs to be an oversight committee and there needs to be a committee that you can approach and say, ‘Listen, this is my situation at the moment’, ‘Susi have already paid for all the fees, I mean you’ve got your money, don’t be charging me extra penalties to try and get a couple of extra quid ... (Eanie).

The research participants pointed out that ‘one shoe does not fit all’ and suggested that funders needed to take into consideration everyone’s personal circumstances.

... then if there’s specific needs within those individuals ... I’m a man, I did have children, I had responsibilities to those children at the time ... (John).

... didn’t have any financial assistance, was two, and the third thing, I lived in rural [name of place] and the cost to get on the road and to get insurance, like that was unbelievable, and there was no buses ... (Michael).

The application process for grants and funding was flagged as problematic by many of the research participants. Tommy mentioned the fear of not being funded” and suggested that that should be taken away from Travellers. In Michael’s case, his family were just over the “threshold” of means assessed to qualify for the grant.

⁷ While grants usually cover tuition fees, universities charge a registration fee or student levy which is not covered by the grant. They also charge fees when a student needs to repeat exams.

Now the SUSI application ... when the SUSI comes back and it's like you have five days, or you've ten days, and you're like, you're saying to them like SUSI will cancel, you know you will not get this, they're very strict, and then I'd be WhatsApp Ing, d'you know 'Where are we on this?' and I mightn't hear back from 'em for a week, and the day before SUSI is due ... so SUSI was a block (Chantelle).

There should be something nearly where you can kind of take away the fear of not being funded. You can kind of enjoy it then. Because at the moment... Like, even when you're going for the 1916 Bursary, you have to put huge amounts of work in and interviews and everything ... You might not get it (Tommy).

... applied for SUSI and I got denied, because my parents were like eight hundred over the threshold, I think it was at that time ... (Michael).

3.3 Early Interventions

The research participants identified the need for early interventions and provide some suggestions on what these could look like. Bridget pointed out how the “societal stuff” and accommodation issues needed to be “tackled” first to improve Traveller access to, and participation in, education.

I think accommodation has a lot to do with your outcomes in education ... in primary school, if you're in a cold, damp house ...you need a suitable home ...you need warm food on the table ... That there's the starting point ... the societal stuff ... that needs to be tackled (Bridget).

... there's stuff that we need to do structurally, the big pieces about the fact that politicians are still allowed to say stuff about Travellers without consequences ... it's not just fixing the stuff specifically in education, you're also fixing stuff in access to services, accommodation issues, government issues, you know and that's even in Utopia you'd be working for a while to fix it with all the magic wands you have to do ... (Trisha).

All the participants felt that it was important to work with schools. Maggie suggested working “intensively with primary” and post primary school students, especially those in their last years of primary and first few years of post-primary school. Bridget noted that Traveller students needed to be treated “with dignity and respect”. She believed that the Traveller Education Bill would go a long way in terms of addressing the issues that Travellers experienced in school.

I would work intensively with primary, fifth and sixth years, and secondary first and second years ... we need to get Travellers through the second level system (Maggie).

I genuinely believe if the Bill ... was implemented in our education system that [it] might create some kind of a change where Travellers feel we are equal in the education system (Bridget).

... the Traveller Culture and History and Education Bill is essential. We need to know that we're part of this world and this world is a part of us (Frank).

I think it would help if you had more Travellers who are actually teachers like yourself ... you're just going to be more relatable to them instantly because of ... your identity because of the way you relate ... there's a certain way the Travellers can connect with each other ... (Connie).

Research participants noted that it was important for Traveller students to have access to a diverse range of Traveller role models. Chantelle pointed out that there was no lack of positive role models but found that they were not linked in with students in any coordinated way.

they're not lacking in role models. They're maybe lacking in the access, because they're not given the access to the role models ... (Chantelle).

3.3.1 Engaging Families

The importance of engaging families was highlighted by some of the research participants. Terry believed that it was “going to be a Trip for the whole family” if one member was the “first to get into college” and pointed out that it was important to “be engaging with families”.

They need to be engaging with families to I think developing... Because like for Traveller kids, it's going to be a family experience really because most of them are... they're going to be first generation students ... it's going to be a trip for the whole family, the first to get into college (Terry).

3.3.2 Open Days Specifically for Traveller Students and their Families

The research participants agreed that it was important for further and higher education institutions to create better links with school. All the participants suggested having “open days” on campuses and some suggested that lecturers should “go out into schools” delivering “mini lectures” (Tommy) and talk to students “about what higher education is” (Winnie).

I'll add first that I think universities should develop better contacts with the secondary schools (Terry).

... there's lots of things to do from, from primary school to secondary school, but I suppose then in higher education, I think ... I think what, what higher education institutions can do is connect more with the schools ... to kind of reach out to, to students in schools (Winnie).

... have a day that, that lecturers of different subjects go out into schools and talk to students about ... about what higher education is like ... because I had none of that ... when I was in school (Winnie).

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there needs to be kind of specific resources put in place ... for Travellers. Particularly around trauma ... there should be kind of access to, to a counsellor ... perhaps maybe the Travelling Counselling Service because I'm not sure if a counsellor from the settled community would understand what the Traveller student would be going through or if the Traveller student would be comfortable to talk to a settled person about the experiences that they're going through.

- WINNIE

3.4 Supporting Traveller Participation

The research participants identified the types of support Travellers potentially needed to progress in further and higher education. “Child-minding supports” (Chantelle) and access to counselling were considered important by a few of the research participants.

there needs to be kind of specific resources put in place ... for Travellers. Particularly around trauma ... there should be kind of access to, to a counsellor ... perhaps maybe the Travelling Counselling Service because I’m not sure if a counsellor from the settled community would understand what the Traveller student would be going through or if the Traveller student would be comfortable to talk to a settled person about the experiences that they’re going through (Winnie).

3.4.1 Mentoring

The research participants felt that it was important to provide Traveller students with access to mentoring support in further and higher education institutions. Many of them talked about their own lack of confidence and how that acted as a deterrent for them during their own educational journeys. While some felt it was important to have other Traveller as mentors, others felt that it did not matter if the mentors were Traveller or non-traveller; if the mentoring was good and was delivered by someone who understood the issues that Travellers faced. While Tommy and William felt that Travellers should have someone from “their own community ... where they can go for support”, Bridget and others pointed out how sometimes Travellers had “little trust in each other” and suggested that professionalism was more important than ethnic background when it came to mentoring.

... if we could create something that's almost in a way... And I don't know how the TGN (Traveller Graduate Network) is going to go ... but something where people can go to ... someone from their own community ... where they can go for support ... where Travellers can reach out to people who are experienced or who have experienced something similar. They can kind of share their ideas, you know? (Tommy).

think just say Traveller Education Officers in maybe all the colleges. But that they are Travellers themselves (William).

... we've very little trust in each other, and like I found that a lot ... when I worked onsite and stuff ... to be fair ... even now the men would still ring looking for advice ... but that's like after nine years trying to build up relationships with them (Bridget).

Trisha argued that there should be a dedicated "Traveller specific" Access programme. Eanie felt that it would not be viable to have dedicated Traveller workers in every institution because the numbers of Travellers attending them were so low.

I would have a dedicated Traveller specific like an Access office ... that people who are working in there are Travellers... that people who are not Travellers in there are educated properly, going through rigorous training so that if a Traveller need, have a traveller-only space in the college you know when you'd first get into the college that you would be told about all these services the moment you first come in, the moment you identify as a Traveller (Trisha).

I think it might be a bit early to have Traveller specific workers, I think given the volume of Travellers entering into any one university that ..., so one staff member for just that reason, I don't know ... (Eanie).

3.4.2 Academic Supports

For most of the research participants, academic support for Travellers was considered important. They talked about the difficulties they had encountered themselves and identified the types of supports that they required. For some, it was help with academic writing, while for others it was having additional time in exams or extensions with deadlines. Winnie recalled how she had needed an extension with an essay after a sensitive family tragedy had occurred. She found that her lecturer was insensitive and noted how she did not return to that class after her experience.

... my first essay came up, and I had never done an essay in my life. And I'm thinking to myself, Jesus, what am I going to do here (Maggie).

I think there are certain supports ... in terms of time extension on some of the exams because of my lack of a formal education, and lack of a formal writing ability, and my scribe, it's complete scribble when I write for stuff (John).

I remember I had an assignment due, and I didn't have it completed because ... I went into the classroom ... lecturer, asked me if I had my assignment, I said no, because ... and before I even got to explain anything, she ate me like a dog, in front of the whole class ... I think that without their understanding ... without them understanding like what you're going through ... but I remember I walked out of the class, and I never went back into that lecturer's class again (Winnie).

... like none of the Lecturers ... ever gave me a wee bit of leeway, or extra support... I didn't know how to write an academic essay, you know? (Michael).

3.4.3 Training for all Staff

Some of the research participants highlighted the need for all staff in further and higher education institutions to receive anti-racist training.

... need to also like get the Traveller training. I think it's important to have the cultural awareness training, and to have the racism training and stuff, but sometimes Hannagh, in my opinion, that's kicking the can down the road, you know? (Bridget).

They've a lot to do and they need better cultural training (Terry).

3.4.4 Increasing Traveller Visibility

Increasing Traveller visibility was identified as important by all the research participants. Tommy said that “first of all we need to be seen” and Maggie expressed that she “would like to see is more visibility of Travellers at third level”. Winnie recalled how hard she found it when she first entered “those big white gates” and did not “see any kind of Travellers around the university”.

... looking around ... and not seeing any kind of Travellers around the university ... it was kind of like this strange place for me ... entering those big white gates ... ‘do I belong here,’ and I often asked myself, ‘What am I doing here?’ Do you know? ‘Why am I putting myself through this suffering?’ (Winnie).

All the research participants talked about the importance of Traveller role models. While none of them objected to being seen as a role model, some expressed being uncomfortable with the title because they didn’t want “all the children to turn out like [them]” (Chantelle). Eanie didn’t think he would make “a great role model ... because the route [he] took was borne out of desperation” and he didn’t want any other Traveller to have to endure what he did.

I wouldn’t be a great role model because the route that I took was borne out of desperation and no child should have to go that route, so I wouldn’t be a good inspiration in, like don’t follow what I did, you know because there are better easier routes, there are easier routes (Eanie).

Nevertheless, the research participants felt that it was important for younger Travellers to see “somebody that’s like them” (Winnie) and, therefore, were able to put their own uncomfortableness with the title aside.

... I've no problem being described as a role model ... because there's a lack. But people don't have to be role models (John).

I'm not comfortable with being told that I'm a role model. But I'm much more comfortable in being told that, that when, when young Travellers see me in my position that they have that kind of hope that they can continue and they can be in that position ... they see a representative in somebody that's like them up there ... but at the same time, I say they can be themselves (Winnie).

I suppose no one really wants... well maybe not no one but most people probably don't ... want to have that kind of a responsibility ... considering the difficulties that our community have had and continue to have and will have for many years, I don't really think that my feelings have a huge part in this (Terry).

Bridget felt that Travellers needed to see other Travellers doing well because it would encourage them to pursue further and higher education opportunities. Tommy talked about the key role that Traveller role models played when he was questioning if college was "even for [him]" and said that it was "stories" like the author's story and "other Travellers" that motivated him to stay in education.

For third-level education ... you need to see it. You need to... Like, people working in employment. ... if you can't see it, you can't be it ... We need to see actually this is how life does go, this is how life can go. You go do primary, secondary, university, and you see the progress ... to understand that being a Traveller, you know, your life is not always full of pain and anger and stuff (Bridget).

... I did struggle a few times. I was thinking about is it even for me, like? Is it worth it? But I'll be honest with you ... but it's stories like your own and other Travellers at the time. They were able to kind of push me on as well (Tommy).

Some research participants recounted times when they really understood the importance of seeing people like them in further and higher education settings. They talked about the power of such encounters and the impact that they had on them and others. Tommy mentioned how seeing Travellers gave one Traveller he met the confidence to "basically come out" herself.

... but I do remember sitting in the room, and I was looking over and I could see [name of other Traveller], she was over on that side, the left-hand side, and you were there, and I was like 'Lads, there's three Traveller women in the room' d'you know? ... And I was... and then I got emotional, and I could feel my eyes welling up ... I never, even though we say 'Oh representation matters' ... it wasn't until I had actually experienced the representation in the room that emotionally it hit me (Chantelle).

... And again, this is one of the proud moments for me is [name of a Traveller] was kind of hiding her identity. She wasn't confident in herself. But over the course of a couple of weeks chatting to me and a few of the other Travellers... She was able to ... basically come out ... Like, her confidence just grew from there (Tommy).

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if you're in an environment where you feel at home, I think you're more likely to stay there for longer otherwise there's a constant pressure that you might not be able to get through it. You know you've got every right to be there, officially, legally and all that but then there's a social aspect of it which I think is more powerful in the sense that the legal part of it ...

- CONNIE

A few research participants stressed the importance of being exposed to a diverse range of role models to reflect the diversity that existed within the Traveller community. Chantelle noted that this was important so that Travellers understood there were infinite ways of being a Travellers and that how one chose to be did not make them more or less of a Traveller.

... we had then in our heads there's only one way 'This is if you're Traveller, this is... has to be your experience, and if this isn't your experience, then you're not really a Traveller.' (Chantelle).

The research participants talked about the importance of seeing how education benefited Travellers. Frank felt that it was "dangerous" being held up as a role model if you were not doing well in life. He argued that having "pathways for progress" was more important than putting the pressure to succeed "on the shoulders of others".

I think the idea of role models is very important. I also think it's very dangerous, because role models don't just stop. If you become a role model, you're a role model for the rest of that person's life. Which means when you have your bumps in the road or you have your own kind of under-deliveries or you have your own bad day, suddenly if someone has invested in their goals via you, that can be really unnerving, because suddenly it's like oh you're going well, they're not doing very well, so if they're not doing very well and their my goal, what's the chances of myself, so I think having an ideal and pathways for progress is far more important than putting it on the shoulders of other people (Frank).

3.4.5 The Importance of Safe Spaces

The research participants noted the importance of being able to feel safe and comfortable in different spaces. They noted how having a sense of belonging would increase their likelihood of staying in educational spaces.

if you're in an environment where you feel at home, I think you're more likely to stay there for longer otherwise there's a constant pressure that you might not be able to get through it. You know you've got every right to be there, officially, legally and all that but then there's a social aspect of it which I think is more powerful in the sense that the legal part of it ... (Connie).

... I imagine a lot of Travellers probably feel quite lonely in college. Like I know, like that was a thing for me, when I was in college for my bachelor's degree anyway, it was just me ... But developing an atmosphere where people feel comfortable, and I don't know how to do this. People feel comfortable having an actual community in the college. I suppose like that's the ... like a Travellers Society (Terry).

They felt that Travellers might not feel that further and higher education institutions were "safe space[s]" (John) and suggested providing Travellers with "their own space" (Maggie) within further and higher education institutions.

... if it was just a room where Travellers could go, that could call their own space within it, and other people knew that this was a Traveller space ..., you don't have to go there, but you know that it's a space for you (Maggie).

If they're coming from a stage where ... they've done Leaving Cert and they've been able to get through that and make it into college on the points, then I think that all they would need ... would be ... a safe space ... somewhere where Travellers can be themselves (John).

A few participants talked about the importance of supporting Travellers societies. Terry suggested that Travellers should be helped to set up societies in institutions where they did not already exist.

Giving a helping hand to whatever Traveller societies exist, helping them setting them up (Terry).

3.5 Promoting Access Programmes

Some of the research participants noted the vital role that Access programmes played in supporting them through further and higher education, though some complained that they “didn’t know that Access Department was there” (Chantelle).

... there was a block in that people didn’t know that the Access Department was there ... the supports were there, but people didn’t know they were there (Chantelle).

Access wasn’t always well known, or I didn’t know about Access until... probably until I got chatting to you even or like even later on. Because it wasn’t stuff that we were told about in school (Tommy).

I didn’t even know about the Access course, Hannah, to be honest with you, at that stage. I didn’t even know that that was available, do you know? (Winnie).

Those that accessed supports through Access programmes praised the programmes for the type of “wraparound support” (Chantelle) that they provided.

... it's like that wraparound support ... and it's a flexible support ... their biggest aim is that you get through university, or college ... They know where everything is. If they can't help you, they'll be able to point you in the right direction. They've a great follow-up service as well ... you get those calls a couple of times out of the year, and they might say 'Will you just come up for 10/15 minutes and we'll just link in' and it's a courtesy thing, you know? ... cos any time you'd go up to the Access ... they'd give you a voucher for your dinner ... it was great, because like the dinner was seven or eight euro ... it was always done so discreetly ... (Chantelle).

I went over to [name of institution] and gave a speech one day to a group of medical students on how to approach speaking with Travellers ... when I was over there, I met the Access team ... I mentioned that I'd love to go back to college but couldn't afford it and couldn't fund it or whatever. And they basically said, look, just put your CAO in and see how you get on. And it was nearly as simple as that. I just needed nearly someone to say, look, we'll look after it or whatever. Or you probably will get it. And then I applied and ... I was accepted (Tommy).

Chantelle found that some of the Travellers that she encountered in third level would not "go next to near" the Access Department for supports because they were so afraid of having to identify as Traveller.

they would not, for love nor money, go next to near the Access Department for supports, because they were so afraid ... of having to identify as Traveller. And I was trying to explain to them ... that it is confidential (Chantelle).

John felt that Access Programmes could be improved by broadening the types of courses that students could access.

... it's great to have Access courses ... I think they have to be improved ... when I talk about improving them, I talk about Access has to open up into the, shall we say, the quality courses ... the engineering, the architecture, it's the medicine, it's the law (John).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research participants' suggestions for improving access to, and participation in, further and higher education. The suggestions were based on their own experiences of trying to access and participate in education and on their professional experience of trying to encourage and support other Travellers to do the same. The suggestions made by research participants included improving access to information; simplifying application processes for funding; providing good career guidance to Traveller students; engaging Traveller families; creating safe spaces for Travellers; increasing Traveller visibility; and promoting Access programmes within the community.

Chapter 5 will provide recommendations for improving Traveller access to, and participation in, education across the continuum.

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... it's great to have Access courses ... I think they have to be improved ... when I talk about improving them, I talk about Access has to open up into the, shall we say, the quality courses ... the engineering, the architecture, it's the medicine, it's the law.

- JOHN





CHAPTER 4

Discussion and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

While there is no one way to address the inequalities in Traveller education, there are several recommendations that can be implemented to address the key issues impacting on Traveller access to, and participation in, third level education. Improving participation and progress in further and higher education will involve a 'whole education approach' and the inclusion of a range of stakeholders such as parents/carers, students, teachers, academics, and policy makers.

There are four sections in this chapter. Section 4.2 makes recommendations on how to improve access, participation, and success in further and higher education for Travellers. Section 4.3 details opportunities for improving inclusion in further and higher education while section 4.4 highlights how the inequity accrued by Travellers within the education system can be redressed.

4.2 Whole Education Approach

To improve access, participation, and success in further and higher education for Travellers, a whole education approach is required (HEA, 2022). Ideally, this will start in early childhood education settings and continue as the Traveller child progresses through primary and post primary education and on into further and higher education. The NAP (2022-2028) recognises the importance of early interventions and of creating a sense of belonging in education. It also recognises the need to identify suitable pathways for students that help them meet their full potential, raise their expectations, and pursue further and higher education. There is a need for a cohesive policy, which specifically supports Traveller engagement with, and experiences in, education, which spans the continuum of education from early years through more formal spaces in education (schooling) into further, higher, and adult education. This policy should promote the importance of a comprehensive approach to supporting Travellers across agencies and institutions providing a cohesive framework to support Travellers into, within and through the continuum of education.

4.2.1 Gather Data to Assist Planning and Interventions

Keeping in mind the problems associated with non-identification, data relating to Travellers' attendance and participation is being gathered in HEIs on an on-going basis. However, there is a lack of in-depth and comprehensive data on Traveller completion and progression in education. Specific research focusing on Traveller experiences within education should be conducted in a collaborative and genuinely participatory way from start to finish. Ideally, Travellers would lead research on their community, where possible. If not possible, Travellers should be involved in the design of the research and the analysis of the data.

There is a dearth of research looking specifically at Traveller experiences of education within the Irish context, as well as internationally. This report highlights the urgent need to gather data on the experiences of Travellers across the continuum of education. As it stands, the lack of empirical evidence makes it difficult to develop the types of supports needed to improve the educational inequalities Travellers face in education. Furthermore, there is a failure to identify, and hence address, the complexities impacting Traveller engagement with, and experience of, education across the continuum.

The males in this study stayed in post primary school just as long as their female Traveller peers. In the literature, it is often assumed that Traveller families follow “gender-centric roles” (Bhopal and Myers, 2016, p.6) and that sons leave school early in order to work in the Traveller economy, while girls leave in order to help their mothers with domestic chores or because they are getting married (Levinson, 2007; Cudworth (2018). None of the research participants in this study mentioned leaving school to get married. While some mentioned leaving school to find work, it was not work in the ‘Traveller economy.

Eleven research participants completed post primary school. Nine of these attended non-DEIS post primary schools where there was little to no diversity. While there is no data available on Traveller participation, attainment, and progression in non-DEIS schools, research shows that an over concentration of disadvantage worsens inequality in education and negatively impacts on progression (OECD, 2018). It also shows that students attending non-DEIS schools tend to do better academically and that there is a higher transfer rate of students from non-DEIS schools to third level education (ibid.). As approximately half of the Traveller school aged population attend non-DEIS schools (Kavanagh, Weir and Moran, 2017), it would be useful to understand if school type has a significant impact on Traveller progression. Data on Traveller participation, attainment, and progression rates needs to be collected in a more systematic way.

At primary and post primary level, especially in non-DEIS schools, there is little data available in relation to ethnicity. All schools should be required to keep data relating to Traveller enrolment, attendance, participation, and progress. Having access to such data would assist with planning and the development of targeted interventions. Furthermore, a longitudinal study that examines the experiences of Travellers in further and higher education, from entry to completion (or not), and the benefits thereafter in terms of accessing employment, would help us to understand how participation in further and higher education benefits the Traveller community.

4.2.2 Support Retention and Transition

As early intervention is key to supporting success in education, it is important to work with Traveller children and their parents in early childhood settings. While there is little known about the experiences of Travellers in early childhood education, this research highlights how early encounters with educators can leave a lasting impact. It is important to capture the experiences of Travellers through research, to develop services that are a welcoming and positive experiences for Traveller children and their parents.

Considering the issue of early school leaving, it is important to work extensively with students in upper primary and lower post primary school. This will require the development and implementation of targeted early interventions and education initiatives with Traveller families and ensuring the supports to address the costs associated with attending school are available for Traveller families who are experiencing poverty.

As evident from this report, Traveller parents' expectations in relation to their children's education are often exceptionally low because of their own negative experiences of education. It is important to raise the expectations of Traveller parents. It is also important to recognise their experiences of intergenerational trauma and to help them understand how intergenerational trauma has impacted on how they view school. Traveller parents need to feel empowered to challenge discrimination and racism in schools in an effective way so that they can 'fight' and not take 'flight' (Derrington, 2007). Traveller parents need to be made aware of the benefits of further and higher education, as many would have been denied such opportunities in the past and do not understand how it will benefit their children. Because of their own negative experiences of education, many Traveller parents feel uncomfortable in educational spaces. It would be beneficial to make campuses familiar and friendly places for them, preferably when their children are still young, and then on an on-going basis, so they feel a sense of belonging. This could be achieved by adopting an intergenerational approach to Access programmes, working with families from a young age, specifically targeting Traveller families.

4.2.3 Career Guidance in Schools

There is a need for the development of bespoke career guidance initiatives for Traveller students. As the research participants argued, there is a need to invest in such endeavours, as opposed to just focusing on providing funding for higher education courses. Travellers understand what good career advice looks like and therefore they should be engaged in developing initiatives targeted at young Travellers. Because of their experiences in education and in society more broadly, Travellers often have little knowledge about the types of career paths that they can take. It is important to identify clear pathways and transitions for Traveller students. This could be done through the development of individual plans, developed in partnership between teachers, parents, students and further education and training and higher education institutions. It would be helpful to reach out to local communities including businesses as partners to ensure successful outcomes and pathways to work. Training for career guidance teachers working with Traveller students should be Traveller led.

4.2.4 Maintain Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training as a Compulsory Component

Anti-racism and intercultural training should be provided to all frontline staff across the continuum of education and should be a core component of teacher training at pre-service and in-service levels for early childhood practitioners, primary and post primary teachers and further and higher education staff. As racism towards Travellers is often not understood, and therefore deemed acceptable, in society and in education, it is important that such training be specific to Travellers. Anti-racism training needs to move beyond the black/white binary and engage more critically with the different forms of racism experienced by ethnic minority groups in Irish society. Anti-racism training should therefore be specific to the issues that directly impact Travellers. CPD in this area should be provided on an on-going basis to support early childhood practitioners and primary and post primary school teachers at all stages of their careers.

Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training

needs to move beyond the black/white binary and engage more critically with the different forms of racism experienced by ethnic minority groups in Irish society. It should therefore be specific to the issues that directly impact Travellers.

All early childhood settings, schools, and third level institutions should be required to have clear and accessible anti-racism policies and initiatives in schools. Again, such policies should specifically refer to anti-Traveller racism. Traveller students should be taught how to respond to racism and discrimination in education settings in a way that causes them to expend the least amount of energy. There should be clear anti-racist policies in place in all educational settings and Travellers should be made aware of their existence and shown how to follow the procedures in place.

UDL training should be expanded, and trauma informed training should also be provided to those working with vulnerable and marginalised groups, to help them understand the impact that intergenerational trauma has on those groups.

4.2.5 From One Good Teacher to All Good Educators

The importance of teachers having high expectations of all their students cannot be stressed enough. The literature is clear on the importance of teacher expectations and the negative impact that low teacher expectations have on their students. To boost teacher morale, it is important to share stories about the significant positive role that they, as educators, play in the lives of their students. There should be more recognition of teachers who go beyond for their students in order to create a climate that values teachers who have such a positive impact on their most marginalised students. This recognition could take place publicly through the granting of awards in FE and HE institutions for such teachers/educators.

4.3 Improving Inclusion in Further and Higher Education

4.3.1 Mature Students

Many of the research participants in this study returned to education as mature students. Given that Travellers often tend to marry younger than the general population and start their families younger, many of them will not be able to return to education until they are older. It is important to facilitate access and participation for mature students by creating the conditions and opportunities required to help people transition to and progress through higher education at a time in life that suits them.

4.3.2 Mentoring

Informal support networks are especially important to Travellers. Members of the community who have been through education often support and share information with other Travellers embarking on educational journeys. The importance of these networks cannot be underestimated. This unpaid work should be acknowledged and supported. The Traveller Graduate Network could be further developed and properly funded so that Travellers could provide and have access to peer support.

More formal mentoring within the education system from early years through the continuum of education should be provided by Travellers. It is important to ensure that this is paid and valued work, as it is unfair to make those who are deemed successful in education feel pressurised or overburdened to take on mentoring roles.

Opportunities for Employment

When Travellers who have been through education and 'done everything right' are highlighting the difficulties encountered when trying to find meaningful work, it is discouraging for their family members and for other Travellers.

4.3.3 Create Opportunities for Employment

It is important for Travellers to see the benefits of education. It is impossible to promote education to the broader community, if the first generation of Travellers who have already succeeded in education are not seen to be in gainful and secure employment in their chosen fields. The Traveller community is small and news between members travels fast, whether it is news of failure or of success. When Travellers who have been through education and 'done everything right' are highlighting the difficulties encountered when trying to find meaningful work, it is discouraging for their family members and for other Travellers.

Workplace transitions should be supported and monitored to ensure that Travellers are not 'working harder' than their non-Traveller peers to find employment. This could be achieved through a transition to work programme for Travellers to support them into their profession.

4.3.4 Financial Supports

Financial supports should be provided across the continuum of education and consideration should be given to the specific needs of individuals. As noted by the research participants, not all Travellers experience the same levels of hardship. Some will be able to remain at home while studying, while others will have to move away and therefore incur additional costs. Some Travellers will have families to support while others may not. While each case should be dealt with on an individual basis, it is important to earmark specific funding for Travellers and to make that funding accessible to Travellers without humiliating them and/or pressuring them to 'out' themselves to receive it.

In terms of childcare provision, Traveller parents who want to pursue education may not trust non-Travellers to provide childcare to their children. In such cases, they may prefer to have their children cared for by family members who are not registered childcare providers and who they may not be able to afford to pay as a result. Traveller specific funding should take the complexity of the issues faced by Travellers into account.

To address the 'educational debt' (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to Travellers, all fees and student levies should be waived automatically for Traveller students. In cases where Traveller students need to repeat a year, consideration should be given to the long history of exclusion experienced by the community and the lowered self-esteem that has resulted from it. Students should be given 'second chances', and third and fourth if needed, as it takes time to repair the damage done to a person's confidence and expecting them to follow the same trajectory as their non-Traveller peers is not realistic or fair in many cases.

To repay the educational debt owed to Travellers, funding should be made available for Traveller children, as needed, to get support in their learning as they progress through the continuum of education. They should be supported to engage in after-school activities and clubs with their peers. Creating such opportunities are important to ensuring that Travellers have equal access to resources as they engage in the education system.

Furthermore, funding for postgraduate programmes should be made available to all Travellers who want to pursue postgraduate studies. Information about such supports should be communicated to the Traveller community in an accessible way.

4.3.5 Review of Access Programmes

The delivery of Access programmes should be mainstreamed. Through Access programmes, HEIs could enhance or create partnerships with Traveller groups, home-school liaison teachers, career guidance teachers, and Access officers in HEIs. Working in partnership with the Traveller community, the current Access programmes should be reviewed to enhance the provision of access supports to the community. More comprehensive and streamlined channels of communication with the Traveller community on the opportunities and pathways into education need to be identified.

A community of practice that brought leaders in Access programmes together to share good practice and identify opportunities to improve Traveller specific supports across the system should be created. Where possible, consideration should be given to the creation of a Traveller specific access role in all institutions across the country, with a network to bring these practitioners together to create increased visibility for Travellers in further and higher education. Data regarding Travellers experiences of Access programmes needs to be collated and the learning regarding what works and does not work should be shared.

4.3.6 Simplify Information and Improve Access to Information

Travellers often have little or no experience of formal education. While glossy booklets look nice, they can be off putting for people with poor literacy skills, as they contain a lot of information that is irrelevant to someone who may just be looking for information about a specific course or funding opportunity. An information booklet for Travellers, which only provided information relevant to them as a group, might help to address this problem.

The 2016 Census found that 59.9 percent of Traveller households did not have internet access (CSO, 2017). Referring Travellers to websites for information is often not appropriate or practical because of literacy/digital literacy issues and no internet access. Other channels and modes of communication need to be considered. While social media is an effective way of sharing information, it is important to keep up to date with social media use trends. For example, while few Travellers use Twitter, many use Facebook and TikTok. Not many would have access to Zoom and those who do would be able to access the internet for information in the first instance.

In-person meetings, where possible, would be a much more suitable way of ensuring that Travellers have access to information about the various FET and HE opportunities available. Creating opportunities for Travellers to speak directly to someone is important and there are many ways that this can be achieved. For example, providing Traveller leaders and role models with information about courses and supports available would be useful as often Travellers learn about opportunities through the Traveller 'grapevine' (Ball and Vincent, 1998) and members of their own communities are the first point of contact. In the first instance, there should be recognition of the key role that these Travellers have played and continue to play by linking members of the community in with FET and HE opportunities, and then it would be useful to capture how these informal mentors have successfully supported other Travellers to participate in FET and HE. According to the experience of the author, something as simple as accompanying one of their peers on campus for the first time, showing them where they could park, having a cup of coffee in one of the student cafes, walking them to the door of the Access office, and introducing them to a friendly face was required to help Travellers overcome that fear and awkwardness often felt in settled spaces.

While open information evenings might work well for the general population, such spaces might feel unsafe for Travellers entering settled spaces for their first time. Information evenings and events for Travellers and their families would help to alleviate this problem.

Travellers will often contact their local or national Traveller organisations for information. Frontline staff in these organisations should be able to provide information to any Traveller who expresses an interest in third level education and/or know who to link them in with in their local further or higher education institution. Further, Access programmes should make sure to build links with their local Traveller organisations and provide information to them as required and keep them updated in relation to the opportunities available.

Travellers already completing community employment (CE) schemes in Traveller organisations should be encouraged and supported to explore further and higher education opportunities during their CE programmes. Traveller Primary Health Care (PHC) should also be provided with information about opportunities to upskill and engage in further and higher education and should be encouraged and facilitated to do this as part of their work.

4.3.7 Create Safe Spaces

The creation of safe spaces in HEIs is important for the wellbeing of Travellers and fosters a sense of belonging. Good practice in this area should be acknowledged and replicated in other HEIs where possible. Travellers should agree what good practice is and be asked for feedback from HEIs to help them avoid superficial responses that maintain the status quo.

Traveller visibility is important. There is a lot of rhetoric about the need to increase diversity in the teaching profession. While there has been a little bit of progress made towards realising this aim at primary and post primary level, to date, there has been little progress in diversifying the teaching population at third level. To date, only one 'out' Traveller is employed in such a capacity in the whole of Ireland. Traveller role models are important for building a sense of belonging in education and supporting student ambitions.

Travellers need to see themselves represented at all levels of education, and not just in Traveller specific roles. i.e., Traveller education workers. It is important for Travellers to know that they can work in a variety of different disciplines and to see that their skills are considered transferable to other areas of work in the same way that their non-Traveller peers' skills are deemed transferable to other areas of work.

Further and higher education staff need to be cognisant of the fact that Travellers may be in their classes. Not all Travellers 'out' themselves, and nor should they have to, but people often assume that they will recognise Travellers by their "look" or "accents" (McGinley, 2020, p. 182). Staff should always assume that one of their students may be a Traveller and create safe spaces in their classrooms for all students equally.

Travellers should be supported to access counselling if needed. Links between the Traveller Counselling Service and Access programmes should be developed and strengthened.

4.3.8 Wraparound Support for Travellers

Given the complexity of Travellers' experiences within the education system before they come into further and higher education, it is important to provide academic, social, peer, psychological, and financial supports to Travellers who need it. It is also important to support Travellers into employment. As some of the research participants pointed out, the type of wraparound service provided by Access programmes was what helped them most as they navigated their way through HE. Such a service should consider the specific types of supports that Traveller students may need. This may include providing additional support with academic writing or having additional time in exams or extensions with deadlines. It could also include providing emergency funding for students in financial crises.

Focus on Pathways

It is important to develop strong links between further education and training and higher education because both sectors play equal roles in increasing access to and participation in lifelong learning.

4.3.9 Developing a Stronger Focus on Pathways

The research participants in this study accessed higher education through various routes. While the traditional entry route worked for some of them, for others their trajectories were quite different. It is important to develop strong links between further education and training and higher education because both sectors play equal roles in increasing access to and participation in lifelong learning. Both sectors also have equal roles to play in providing Travellers with learning and development opportunities that meet their needs. This work should begin early within the education system so that students are aware of their options outside of the CAO.

4.4 Redressing the Accrued Inequity within the Education System

Many of the Travellers in this study had accrued inequity within the education system, as they had to take a much longer route in and through education than their non-Traveller peers. This came at a cost to their finances, family life, mental wellbeing, and self-confidence and self-esteem. There was no guarantee of a return on their investment in education, with some participants reporting difficulties in overcoming the challenges and barriers to securing a full-time role in their chosen profession due to their identity as Traveller. Indeed, many participants in this study recounted their experiences with a depth of emotion and turmoil to express the deeply embodied psycho-social impact on their lives. It is incumbent on the education system, comprised by all the educational institutions, organisations, agencies, partners, leaders, and educators, as well as students themselves, to respond to such deeply impactful lived experiences in a pragmatic and proactive manner to meaningfully support Travellers as they engage in and through our education system across the continuum.

4.5 Conclusion

This research report examined the experiences of Travellers accessing, participating in and succeeding in further and higher education in Ireland. While it is significant to see that Travellers have been identified as a priority target group in further and higher education strategies, it is clear that there is a need to prioritise the inclusion of Travellers across the continuum of education.

The 2011 austerity measures need to be reversed and there needs to be more targeted investment by the state at all levels of education to ensure that Travellers are participating in and progressing through the education system. Considering that 50 percent of Travellers attend non-DEIS and therefore do not benefit from the additional supports available in DEIS schools, Travellers and Traveller organisations should be consulted about how best to invest in Traveller education.

The lack of education within the broader Traveller community contributes to lowered expectations of Traveller parents and Traveller students. It is important to raise awareness about the impact of transgenerational inequality in education among the Traveller community so that they can understand their situation and how it potentially affects how they engage with their children's education. Traveller parents need to be supported to engage with schools. Members of the Traveller community should be trained as advocates so that they have the skills and expertise required to support the engagement of other Traveller parents.

Training for school staff and further and higher education staff regarding how to engage with Traveller parents and students in a culturally competent and understanding manner should be explored. It is no longer acceptable to suggest that Travellers simply do not 'value' education. New strategies for facilitating the engagement of Traveller parents and Traveller students need to be developed. Furthermore, schools and universities should be required to have clear anti-racist policies and procedures in place.

This research highlighted the importance of having Traveller culture and history adequately and appropriately reflected in the curriculum at all levels. Educators need to receive adequate training regarding how to adopt anti-racist and intercultural approaches to education so that they can be culturally responsive educators. Educators need to be provided with opportunities to learn how to engage critically with the curriculum and there needs to be systems of support in place to help them enact the curriculum more critically.

The importance of mentoring and having access to positive role models featured strongly in this report. Initiative such as the Traveller Graduate Network should be funded, supported and expanded to provide mentoring and support in a more concentrated manner.

Financial barriers to accessing and participating in further and higher education need to be removed for Travellers. This research is clear that 'one shoe does not fit all', therefore, financial supports should be tailored to the needs of each individual.

This research suggested that there is a huge need for good career guidance for Travellers that starts at an early age. There is an expectation that attending further and higher education will lead to gaining quality employment. Given the high level of sacrifice and compromise that Travellers make in attending further and higher education, outcomes and progression need to be given considerable attention when promoting Traveller access to and participation in education. This includes developing real pathways to employment and linking with potential future employers.

Research highlight

The importance of having Traveller culture and history adequately and appropriately reflected in the curriculum at all levels. Educators need to receive adequate training regarding how to adopt anti-racist and intercultural approaches to education so that they can be culturally responsive educators.

As research into Travellers experiences in school within the Irish context is relatively limited, there is significant scope for future research in the area. Research is urgently needed in number of areas. These include research into: Travellers' academic and sociocultural experiences in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools; literacy and numeracy programmes in primary schools and the pedagogical approaches adopted to deliver these to Traveller students; and teachers' attitudes towards and experiences with teaching Traveller history and other controversial issues.

This research report examined the experiences of Travellers accessing, participating in and succeeding in further and higher education in Ireland. In doing so, it has somewhat bridged the gap in qualitative research that previously existed in this area. It has identified the need for further research to support policy and practice in the area of Traveller education and has made a number practical recommendations for improving access, participation and success for Travellers in further and higher education. The targets set by the HEA for Traveller participation in further and higher education should be more ambitious and reflect an eventual goal of having the same percentage of Travelers attending further and higher education as the non-Traveller population.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology Chapter

Introduction and Research Questions

This report presents the findings from a qualitative research study with nineteen members of the Traveller community who had completed, or were in the process of completing, studies in further and higher education institutions in Ireland. In Loxley and Finnegan's (2021) chapter on Irish Travellers in higher education, they pointed out that there was a lack of consultation with 'target groups', such as Travellers. Furthermore, they argued that given the position of Irish Travellers in education and Irish society "there are clear scientific, ethical and political reasons to approach such research in a collaborative and genuinely participatory way" (Loxley and Finnegan, 2021, p. 134). This research aimed to explore the lived experiences of Travellers as they negotiated their way through the education system, with a specific focus on further and higher education. It adopted a "genuinely participatory" (ibid.) action research approach from start to finish.

APPENDICES

Nineteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Travellers (nine males and ten females), who had experience of further and higher education, to understand the challenges and barriers that they faced in education, as well the opportunities they had for engagement and participation. The qualitative data was analysed across a range of key themes, seen as directly, and indirectly, related to Travellers' experiences of further and higher education. The current report aims to give a comprehensive overview on the findings across a range of dimensions: experiences with education at all levels; interactions with educators and non-Traveller peers; barriers, and challenges to, and opportunities for, participation and engagement. Most of the data was collected virtually in March 2022, however, two interviews were conducted in April, and one was conducted in May 2022, during COVID-19 restrictions.

This chapter highlights the methodology used to conduct the study. As it aims to make the research design transparent, it will provide an account of the steps undertaken to develop and address the research questions.

There are seven sections in this chapter. Section two outlines the research design and locates the research methodologically. Section three discusses how the research was conducted, while section four explains how data was analysed. In section five, ethical considerations are detailed, and in section six the limitations to the study are considered. Finally, section seven includes some reflections from the author about how their identity affected the research process.

Research Design

Participatory Action Research

Marginalised communities are beginning to demand 'nothing about us without us' and are calling on researchers to conduct research with them, as opposed to merely about them (Fine, 2013). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a methodology that, put simply, means we do research with people who have experienced injustice (Fine, 2013). Green (2003, as cited in Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003, p. 420) defines PAR "as systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change". This current research study is situated in the 'research with' camp, which Fine (2013) explains is cultivated by an ethic of participation which acts to strengthen the power of the research and advance its policy and practice agenda.

PAR views the research participants as the experts. PAR recognises that those who have experienced injustice have great insights about the nature and origins of injustice, as well as the possible solutions to tackling injustice (Fine, 2013). Elements of PAR include the meaningful participation of marginalised communities, actions to bring about better outcomes, collaboration with marginalised communities, capacity building, and the sharing of knowledge (Walker, 1993). PAR begins with a research topic of importance to a marginalised community. It stresses the need to look at how the research will serve and benefit the community.

This study aligns with PAR principles. Before commencing this study, the author and a member of the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning team met with a group of Travellers and Traveller representatives, who were already working in partnership with UCD's Access and Lifelong Learning Centre, to discuss the aims of the research and refine the research questions. Before commencing the study, Table 7 presents details about the group members.

Table 7: Partnership Group Member Details

Name	Role	Organisation
Geraldine Dunne	Director	Southside Travellers Action Group
Cathleen McDonagh Clarke	Service Manager	Exchange House
Amylouise Hussain	TASK Coordinator	Southside Travellers Action Group
Rose Kinahan, Education and Training	LTI Assistance coordinator	Exchange House
Margaret O'Leary	LES Coordinator	Southside Travellers Action Group
Lorraine O'Connor	LTI Coordinator	Exchange House
Jules McDonagh	Resource and Information Officer	Exchange House
Gonchikhhand Byambaa (Handaa)	Community Liaison Officer	Southside Travellers Action Group

An advisory group was also established at the outset. The role of the advisory group was to offer a broad range of experiences and provide practical advice during various stages of the research. The advisory group also provided feedback on the research findings and the progress of the research. On completion of the project, the advisory group will also play a significant role in disseminating, promoting, and raising awareness of research findings. The author met with the advisory group five times in total; three times to finalise the aims of the research and refine the research questions, once to provide feedback on the findings, and once to discuss how to disseminate and promote the research findings. Table 8 outlines the advisory group meeting schedule and the purpose of each meeting.

Table 8: Advisory Group Member Details

Name	Role	Department/ Organisation
Thomond Coogan	Mature Years Access Coordinator	Access and Lifelong Learning, UCD
Dr Deirdre McGillicuddy	Assistant Professor in Education	School of Education, UCD
Anna Kelly	Director of Access and Lifelong Learning Centre	Access and Lifelong Learning, UCD
Fiona Sweeney	Head, Outreach Engagement and Transition	Access and Lifelong Learning UCD

Contracting a peer researcher to conduct the research also aligns with PAR principles, although in most research projects on minorities in Ireland, the lead researcher is not from the community being researched. Furthermore, the research participants were all members of the Traveller community, and the research topic is one of great concern for the community. All research participants were supplied with a copy of the final draft of the research and invited to review it before publishing the research to make sure that they:

- Felt a sense of ownership of the research
- Were satisfied that their anonymity was protected
- Agreed that the data analysis reflected their experiences
- Felt that the recommendations made reflected what was important to them.

It is hoped that the research will benefit the Traveller community by contributing to knowledge in Traveller education and bridging the gap that exists in research about Travellers experiences of further and higher education. Finally, the research is action oriented and will be used to inform policy and practice regarding Traveller participation in further and higher education. It will inform UCD's practice and next steps as it moves forward engaging members of the Traveller community, to make the university a welcoming space for them. This will include the development of a 10-point recommendation plan.

Sampling

Given the small number of Travellers in HE and the author's position within the Traveller community, the potential research participants were known, to varying degrees, by the author prior to being invited to participate in the study. In February 2022, the author contacted members of the Traveller community, who had attended further and HE, via Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The author informed the potential research participants about the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. The author stressed that there was no pressure to participate. Once a potential research participant indicated that they were willing to participate, the author asked them for their preferred email address so that they could send them information sheets and informed consent forms.

In research, 'snowballing' refers to a method of participant recruitment whereby existing research participants recruit other participants from among their peers (Johnson, 2014). Through 'snowballing', the author received, with their permission, the contact details of other potential research participants.

Permission and Consent

When initial interest was indicated, all potential research participants were sent a letter of invitation to participate in the study and were provided with information sheets and informed consent forms. These forms clearly stipulated the nature and purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and participants' right to withdraw consent at any time, the steps taken to protect participants' privacy, and the possible benefits and potential risks associated with participation. These forms also explained that interviews would be audio-recorded. Potential research participants were given time to review the information sheets and consent form and were invited to contact the author if they agreed to participate in the study. Once the research participants returned the signed consent form, they were then invited to participate in the interview.

Research Tool

Instrument Design

The author interviewed nineteen Travellers in total, including ten females and nine males. Interviews were arranged around the schedules and availability of the research participants. Many of the research participants were willing to talk beyond the scheduled 60 minutes, resulting in interviews typically lasting between 60-120 minutes. The research participants were asked about their primary and post primary school experiences, their experiences in further and higher education, their parents' experiences with education, and the support structures available in further and higher education.

COVID-19 restrictions meant that in-person qualitative research interviews had to transition to virtual platforms. Consequently, all interviews for this study were conducted online using Zoom. There are strengths and limitations to conducting online virtual interviews. In terms of strengths, virtual platforms are more time and cost efficient and allow researchers to include research participants from a large geographical region without incurring costs and having to factor in time for travel (Olliffe, Kelly, Gonzalez Montaner and Yu Ko, 2021). It also allows researchers and research participants to reschedule interviews with little effort (ibid.). Research participants have reported feeling more at ease in their home environments (ibid.; Jenner and Myers, 2019; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014), which Jenner and Myers (2019) argued led to richer disclosures from research participants. However, others like Deakin and Wakefield (2014), concluded that virtual platforms aided rapport building. Other limitations of virtual platforms include issues with technology and connectivity (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, and Cook, 2020). Olliffe et al. (2021, p. 5) found that connectivity issues “negatively impacted the flow of conversation” in some instances and led to challenges in building rapport. There were also concerns about security risks and privacy violations (Harwell, 2020).

The author used the semi structured interview to gather data, as they wanted to give the research participants the freedom to express and discuss their experiences in their own words and from their own perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the author to gather rich data that they may not have been able to obtain using any other research method. The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview allowed the author to alter the order of questions, modify wording, and omit irrelevant questions where appropriate (Robson, 2005) while still providing the research participants with the opportunity and freedom to lead the conversation without constraint.

Interview Schedule

As previously noted, an advisory group was established to offer a broad range of experience, contacts, research knowledge, and ideas, in order to achieve the aims of the research. Developing the interview guide involved translating the aims of the research into questions. After consulting with the advisory group three times to finalise the research aims and refine the research questions, the interview guide was developed. The advisory group shaped the research because they emphasised the importance of capturing the experiences of the research participants across the continuum of education. They also stressed the importance of understanding how transgenerational educational trauma affected Travellers in education. The themes and subthemes of the interview schedule are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Interview schedule

Theme	Prompts
Educational Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Can you tell me about your primary and post primary school experiences?– Tell me about your family’s experience of education.– What role did your family play in your education?
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What made you want to go; how did you hear about college/university?– Why did you choose the university you did?– How did you learn about your course?
Identifying the barriers and supports for Travellers engaging in Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What challenges/ blockages did you/do you face?– Where did you/ do you go, who is/was there to support you?
Importance of having role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Have you had any role models in education you look up to? Do you think role models are important?– Are you comfortable with being a role model for others?
Supports needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– If you had a magic wand..., how would you improve the system to support– Travellers into, and to persist in, in FET/University?– Would Traveller specific support help?– Why, why not?

Scheduling

The interviews were scheduled around the research participants' availability. This was often at weekends, during lunch breaks, or in the evenings. When mutually available times and dates were agreed between the research participants and the author, the author emailed a password protected Zoom interview invite to each of the research participants in advance of each interview. Sixteen of the nineteen interviews were conducted in March 2022; however, two interviews were conducted in April 2022, and one was conducted in May 2022.

Recording

With the permission of the participants, all interviews were visually, and audio recorded. The recordings were stored in a password protected folder on the author's personal password protected computer.

Data Analysis and Storage

Data Transcription

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. A conscious decision was made to ensure authentic transcription without any correction to language, syntax, or grammar, as well as Traveller specific language and colloquial terminology. The author listened to the audio-recordings of each of the transcriber's transcripts and edited the transcripts where necessary, before sending hard copies to the research participants for verification and comment. All participants agreed the transcripts accurately reflected their interviews and no changes were required.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed manually by listening to the interview recordings, reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and coding and categorising the data. Drawing on some grounded theory coding techniques (Charmaz, 2005), data was coded line by line. This is like Strauss and Corbin's (1990, p. 12) "open coding" technique. Line-by-line coding allows the researcher to interact with the data, pose questions, label, separate, and compile the data (Charmaz, 2005, 2008).

The author began by reviewing all the initial codes and bringing forward the most significant and/or frequent ones (Charmaz, 2014). They then categorised focused codes by placing relevant codes under broad headings such as Barriers and Challenges to Engagement and Participation, Improving the Further and Higher Education Experience, and Pathways to Education.

As the author started to write up the findings based on the categories identified above, it became apparent that the initial categories were too broad, as there was overlap between the sub-categories. As Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 13) point out, the "researcher may inadvertently place data in a category where they do not analytically belong, but by means of systematic comparisons, the errors will eventually be located, and the data and concepts arranged in appropriate classifications". To counteract this problem, the author did a mapping exercise with a research advisor to analyse the focused codes more deeply and prevent overlap. Codes were regrouped and clustered through this process. The mapping process led to thematic analysis (Petty, Thomson and Stew, 2012) of the existing codes and provisional categories. Further reflection and writing up drafts of the potential categories and their contents, facilitated the development of the final themes and sub-themes, which are outlined below in Table 10.

Table 10: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges and barriers to educational participation and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Experiencing discrimination and racism in education– Interactions with educators– Relationships with non-Traveller peers– Financial barriers/pressures to engaging in education– Intergenerational educational capital
Improving access to and participation in further and higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Accessing information about opportunities in education– Early interventions– Supporting Traveller education– Promoting Access programmes

Data Storage

All files were clearly named and dated, therefore the data was well organised and easy to access and retrieve. Interview recordings were numbered and the pseudonyms for each interview were documented on a list.

Ethical Considerations

Keeping in line with best practice, ethical approval was sought from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of UCD prior to gathering data for this research. While formal ethical approval was not required, the author carefully adhered to UCD's ethical protocol (Table 11) at all stages of the research process.

Sensitive Research

At the commencement of each interview, full information was again provided, and the interview process was fully explained. After each interview, each participant was asked for feedback, in relation to the interview questions and process, to ascertain participants' views about whether the questions were comprehensible and appropriate.

During the interview process, every effort was made to avoid leading questions and to articulate questions simply and clearly (Creswell, 2007; Robson, 2005). Patton (1990) reminds us of the importance of using singular questions, as asking more than one question in one sentence can confuse research participants and result in the loss of information. The author endeavoured to keep each question singular throughout the interview process and employed the use of open-ended questions to elicit greater depth and breadth of information (McCaffrey, 2003).

Although the researcher took all precautions to ensure that no participant was harmed during the research, the nature of the research and topics being explored relating to educational experiences resulted in some of the research participants becoming upset at times. In these situations, the researcher invoked a distress protocol, the stages of which are detailed below in Table 11.

Table 11: Distress Protocol

Distress Protocol if Participant becomes distressed	
Stage 1	<p>The interview is paused, and the interviewer asks the participant if they would like to take a break. The discussion/ interview is stopped. One of the researchers will offer immediate support. Thereafter, mental status will be assessed:</p> <p>a) "Tell me what thoughts you are having?"</p> <p>b) "Tell me what you are feeling right now?"</p> <p>c) "Do you feel you are able to go on about your day?"</p> <p>d) "Do you feel safe?"</p>
Review	<p>If the participant feels able to carry on, the interview/ discussion will resume. If a participant is unable to carry on, Stage 2 will proceed.</p>
Stage 2	<p>The interview will be discontinued. The participant will then be encouraged to contact a support service or offered, with consent, for a member of the research team to contact UCD ALL for further advice/support.</p>
Follow Up	<p>If the participant consents, a courtesy call will be made to follow up with the participant OR the participant will be encouraged to send an email, either if he/she experiences increased distress in the hours/days following the episode of distress.</p>

All participants who did become distressed decided to continue with the interview after they had a short break. No participant moved to stage 2 of the distress protocol. When the interviews ended, the author stayed online and talked with any of the research participants who had been distressed. They followed up with the research participants afterwards via a phone to check in and make sure that they were feeling okay. The author also stressed that they were available for follow up questions or clarity, as needed. At all stages, the author's commitment was to the welfare of the research participants, and they were prioritised above "the advancement of knowledge" (Miller and Boulton, 2007, p. 2209).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality as far as possible, the informed consent forms stated that the names of participants would not appear in any documents either published or unpublished and that all research participants would be assigned pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are used throughout the report to attribute select quotes and findings to specific research participants. While every effort has been made to guarantee confidentiality, 'deductive disclosure' is a risk, as it is with any research. Deductive disclosure is the identification of an individual's identity using known characteristics of that individual (Tolich, 2004). Even though direct identifiers are removed from data, it may be possible to identify respondents with unique characteristics.

The author made every effort to protect the anonymity of the research participants. For example, the names of the schools and further and higher education courses that they attended were not included in the report. Furthermore, details about the research participants' familial connections were omitted and the types of courses that the research participants studied were also removed. Furthermore, the author did not include details about the professional identities of the research participants, as many of them were 'firsts' in their 'chosen' fields and, therefore, would have been easily identifiable. Given that Travellers are a small community (less than one percent of the overall population), and the number of Travellers who have third level qualifications is 167 (CSO, 2017), these additional precautions were deemed necessary to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

Limitations to the Study

While nineteen Traveller research participants participated in this study, in all cases they were known by the author and were 'out' as Travellers. Travellers who were not 'out' and known to the author were not given the same opportunity to participate in the study because the author reached a saturation point with ease and did not need to advertise the study or recruit participants unknown to them. It has been suggested that in instances where a community might be 'hard to reach' or difficult to gain access to, between six and twelve interviews will reach a data saturation point (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). 11.4 percent of the total number of Travellers who had completed further and higher education took part in this study.

Researcher Reflection – Relating

The author of this report is a member of the Traveller community who, like the research participants, has had both positive and negative experiences of education. The positionalities (Traveller, woman, lone parent to a child in post primary education, carer, researcher, educator, early school leaver) of the researcher vis a vis the research participants is unique in relation to research on Travellers in education because most research on Travellers is conducted by non-Travellers, even when it is adhering to PAR principles.

While there are arguments for and against the need for researchers to be from the communities being researched, it was clear at all stages of this research process that being an 'insider' had significant benefits. In terms of recruiting participants from 'hard to reach' communities, the researcher's insider status meant that the community proved quite 'easy to reach' depending on who was trying to reach them. The researcher could bypass the need for 'gatekeepers'⁸ and make direct contact with their Traveller peers. This is important in research, as no community should be dependent on gatekeepers, and potential research participants should not feel like any particular organisation or person has the power to grant or deny them the opportunity to participate in research or make them feel obliged to participate in studies which they endorse. Because of their own positionality and subsequent experiences, the researcher understood that potential research participants were contacted on a regular basis to participate in other unpaid work and, therefore, stressed that there was no pressure on them to agree to participate just because they knew the author.

Some of the research participants explicitly mentioned that they made themselves available to take part in the study because the researcher was a member of the Traveller community.

I always agree to travellers who are doing research, if I can find the time, if I'm not busy or anything like that', you know yourself, I always know it's for the betterment of our community whereas when it comes to settled people and again it's not because I think they've bad intentions, however, I always ask them, 'What is this for?'

In cases where this was not mentioned, the researcher knew that some research participants would not have engaged in the study if it had not been conducted by a Traveller and by a Traveller that they trusted. The researcher's insider status and professional reputation instilled a sense of trust in research participants, many of whom mentioned having been mentored, encouraged, and/or inspired by the author in some way.

⁸ In research, gatekeepers are those who have the power and authority to grant or deny the researcher/s access to groups which are usually considered vulnerable.

Interviewing can harm participants directly, by arousing painful memories and/or feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or anxiety (Coyle and Wright, 1996). There were moments during some of the interviews where research participants were visibly distressed by the feelings evoked by the memories that they were asked to recall. The author felt a sense of guilt evoking such raw emotion, but they also felt that it was good to give the research participants a space to talk about their experiences. While it is impossible to safeguard against arousing such feelings, when conducting research in an area that is likely to cause discomfort, it is important to ensure that research participants' welfare is considered (ibid.). Throughout the interviews, because of their own positionality, the researcher frequently used the words "I can relate". This put the research participants at ease and encouraged them to keep talking about experiences.

The research participants engaged well with the author and the interview process. The author stressed how thankful, grateful, and honoured that they were to the research participants for allowing them to listen to their "inner stories" (Baek and Damarin, 2008, p. 195).

The author of this report has been asked to take part in PAR prior to conducting this study. It was always in the capacity of data collection (not analysis) for non-Traveller researchers. The researcher refused to participate because they felt that it was unethical and a breach of trust to their community to use their 'insider' status to gather data for non-Travellers to analyse, discuss, and present to the world. The researcher has taken great care to treat the stories and the identities of the research participants with the respect and care that they deserve at every stage of this research journey.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the PAR methodological approach adopted in the research and provided details of the steps taken to answer the research questions. It provided information about the research participants' levels of primary and post primary education and their entry routes into further and higher education. It included details about how research participants were recruited for the study and provided information about the interview process. It also explained how the qualitative research data was analysed and how the findings categories were developed. Finally, it provided information about the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the research participants.

Appendix 2: List of Tables

Table 1	Number of Travellers in Republic of Ireland
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Appendix 3: List of Acronyms

AITHS	All Ireland Traveller Health Study
APT	Access to Post Primary Teaching
ASLHA	American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
CAO	Central Applications Office
CE	Community Employment
CERD	Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DCU	Dublin City College
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FET	Further Education and Training
FSD	Funding for Students with Disabilities
GLD	General Learning Disability
GRT	Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller

HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
JTTC	Junior Traveller Training Centres
MU	Maynooth University
NAP	National Access Plan
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
PfG	Programme for Government
PHC	Primary Health Care
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
SAF	Student Assistance Fund
SEN	Special Educational Need
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centres
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
TE	Traditional Entry
UCD	University College Dublin
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UK	United Kingdom
VTS	Visiting Teacher Service

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Access and inclusion is everyone's business



