The Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) (http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/step/) responds to this Call for Evidence within the following context. STEP is a Scottish Government funded Knowledge Exchange and Transfer service located within The University of Edinburgh. It has a remit to support and research access to Curriculum for Excellence for the four diverse groups of Travelling people living in Scotland; Scottish Gypsy/Traveller families, Show and fairground families, New Travellers and more recently Roma families from Eastern Europe. These communities do not comprise a homogeneous group; their diversities show the cultural and social complexities that define them relative to each other, and to non-Traveller communities.

STEP finds that many national and local level providers, including many teachers, have little knowledge of the cultural and social differences between Traveller communities, with the result that ‘one size fits all’ policies and practices inevitably fail to ‘fit the requirements’ of families or service providers.

STEP welcomes the Scottish Parliament’s interest in Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, and places its response within the context of evidence collected by the Scottish Parliament (2001) and by other researchers since then (See 2nd STEP submission). It highlights relevant observations about Scottish Gypsy/Travellers and their experiences within Scottish education and society.

THE LEAFLET
STEP is concerned that the leaflet, ‘Gypsy/Travellers - Where you live’, makes no reference to ‘travelling’, which is a significant omission as ‘travelling’ is culturally symbolic. It is also a practical response by a family to occupational needs, or to avoid ‘bother’ in relation to non-Traveller and other Traveller families, which impacts on education. Accessing entitlement to education and learning support (children’s interrupted learning constitute additional support needs due to mobility) and other services e.g. health care is a major challenge for mobile Gypsy/Traveller families. Parents who contact STEP report driving many miles everyday to ensure their child’s attendance at a valued school, or to attend a trusted GP or health centre.

The leaflet offered several different written options to respond, text / email etc., however, it is well known that literacy may be a problem for Gypsy/Travellers to respond directly, which might well contribute to low response rates. Telephone responses were welcomed, but undoubtedly calls would have cost implications. Video communications, however, did help broaden the leaflet’s scope.

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1 Other Gypsy/Traveller families visit Scotland such as romanichals, Irish Travellers, Welsh and English Gypsies. Also Circus, Show and fairground families visit Scotland for occupational and family reasons.
STEP’s close working with teachers of Travelling children (See below) has revealed a general lack of information about the Call for Evidence at local authority level. Discussions between teachers representing 4 local authorities for example found that 3 had had no information about the Call for Evidence either from their local authority or through contacts with families. The teacher in the remaining local authority had received and distributed leaflets, but reported these as being met with very little interest from children and adults.

The leaflet narrowly focuses on a well-researched area of public services. STEP’s contacts from parents, suggest that many Gypsy/Traveller families experienced research as an intrusion, and feel that participation is fruitless as services rarely follow from findings. STEP’s long-established engagement with local authorities shows that very few acted upon the EOC 2001 Enquiry’s 37 recommendations. For example, a key recommendation was that local authorities appoint a Gypsy/Traveller liaison officer. This lack of follow through limits many local authorities’ capacity to engage directly with Gypsy/Traveller families e.g. to distribute leaflets or support evidence gathering with Gypsy/Travellers whether living on a site or in a house.

STEP considers that lack of a safe place to live impacts negatively on any child’s education, and particularly for Gypsy/Traveller families. Wherever a Gypsy/Traveller family lives many report painful experiences of racist treatment that negatively influences a family’s engagement in education.

PERSPECTIVES ON GYPSY/TRAVELLER EDUCATION
Across STEP’s twenty-year history, Gypsy/Traveller parents and children, teachers and support staff consistently report that a trusting relationship between educators and family is the basis of a family’s continuous engagement in education, whether in school or in an out-of-school setting. This point highlights the significance of a local authority’s appointment a named teacher (or named person in education), a Gypsy/Traveller liaison officer, or Site Manager. Depending on the size of the local ‘settled’ Gypsy/Traveller population, or ‘patterns of mobility’ through a local authority such appointments enable Gypsy/Traveller families’ access to ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ policies and practice e.g. linking issues of accommodation, education, health and social support where needed.

STEP closely engages with key education stakeholders, the Traveller Education Network (TENET). TENET is a formal association of teachers and other professionals with a remit to support Gypsy/Traveller families’ access to Curriculum for Excellence, either through schools or in out-of-school settings. Approximately 19 of Scotland’s 32 local authorities currently belong to TENET, to provide mutual support and share good practice through networking and CPD sessions. A few of these local authorities are proactive in their provision and offer excellent models of good practice.

However, education delivered in out-of-school settings continues to be a marginal experience for learners and teachers e.g. access to Internet for communication, research and interactive learning purposes, as available to school based teachers and learners, continues to be impossible for some and
unreliable for others. STEP coordinates a number of local authorities’ development of a service that includes face-to-face learning, supported and enhanced by anytime/anywhere access to learning and teaching via the web. Local authority leadership is needed to ensure the potential of E-Learning and Traveller Education Scotland (eLATES) services i.e. offering flexible provision as a way forward for mobile Gypsy/Traveller young people and those educated out-of-school (with an added value of its potential for delivering access to other learners not able to regularly attend school).

REGISTRATION AND ATTENDANCE
STEP’s long engagement with local authorities and specialist teachers has shown that while Gypsy/Traveller families register their children at primary school, it remains the case that registration of secondary-aged Gypsy/Travellers is much less likely. School registration and attendance remains problematic partly due to:

- Families’ fear of losing their cultures or for the safety and well being of their young people,
- Families’ need for the flexible delivery (not necessarily in a school) of a relevant curriculum (one that meets learning and qualification needs).

Lack of registration however, should not be interpreted as lack of interest in accessing education. STEP receives a small but significant number of enquiries from Gypsy/Traveller parents, asking for support and advice about how to access education, frequently but not always, that wouldn’t involve school attendance. Parents’ comments show that they balance tensions between retaining family/cultural life and finding a sympathetic school. Such calls require careful handling as a positive outcome is shaped by the limits of a local authority’s Traveller education support service.

STEP’s research into and anecdotal reports from local authorities shows that while all face considerable challenges in delivering access to Curriculum for Excellence for secondary-aged Gypsy/Travellers, provision varies; ranging from school attendance to two hours per week tuition in an out-of-school setting. Exceptionally some local authorities provide tailored flexible responses including a service offering access to three days a week in an out-of-school setting. Many local authorities are briefly reactive in their provision of support, which may involve a meeting with a mobile Gypsy/Traveller family to encourage the family to stay in touch with education, to register in a school or to provide basic paper resources.

Variations in provision reflect variations in leadership within an authority. Long experience with professionals demonstrate that delivery of effective provision depends on mutual cooperation between education providers and the growing numbers of Gypsy/Traveller families who increasingly recognise the need for education, however as distinct from attending schools.

GYPSY/TRAVELLER FAMILIES’ CONCERNS
STEP notes that school attendance is a high priority for local authorities. Attendance as school raises a number of parental concerns, some of which
have generally not changed over twenty years of STEP’s research/engagement in these issues. Top of parents’ list is that being identified as a Gypsy/Traveller leads to stigmatisation, non-acceptance and misunderstandings around socialisation into non-Traveller ways of interacting.

STEP has noted professionals’ concerns that placement requests / availability of school places are areas fraught with challenges. Local authority colleagues report no or very little flexibility in schools’ rolls for mobile families, and that a common response is to split up children/families between different schools. Gypsy/Traveller families’ likelihood of using a school in these circumstances is lowered due to concerns for their children’s safety. Older siblings or cousins traditionally keep ‘an eye’ on the well being of younger siblings.

Another area of parental concern is transportation between home and school. It crucially influences regular school attendance. A family would find it difficult to deliver children to a range of schools (if split as above). Even if a good bus service existed, parents’ concerns regarding safety are an issue for families. Gypsy/Traveller children are highly unlikely to travel alone on a service bus. School bus transport between a site and school are frequently reported as opportunities for bullying and racist behaviours from peers. In the rare event that a local authority provides a taxi peers will want to know why and the family’s Gypsy/Traveller identity becomes known. School trips are also reported by schools to be an aspect of school life that raised parental safety concerns.

Gypsy/Traveller families generally report difficulties in supporting homework activities. Partly due to limited space and partly due to interruptions to learning, families welcomed the arrival of a teacher on a site as an opportunity to ‘catch up’.

POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

Positive engagement in education, as with any family, is reflected in the following quotes recently gathered with Gypsy/Traveller children. The quotes confirm earlier research to show the relevance of Gypsy/Traveller lifestyles as a key consideration for policy makers and educators in ensuring access to education.

“Homework is OK and if I need help Mum’s there and I can Google things on her phone.” Gypsy/Traveller Girl aged 9 attending primary, 2012.

“I like how the young ones are taught in class now – they don’t sit separately from the others doing ‘lower’ work and be made to feel different – if they are off it’s good that someone can help them to catch up” Gypsy/Traveller Mother of two primary children, 2012.

“I like school – it’s where I can find things out for myself – maybe I could join the Army but if I have to go to high school I will stay and work with my Dad” Gypsy/Traveller boy aged 6, 2012.
SUMMARY
STEP’s annual engagement with local authorities shows that a majority of local authorities have limited accurate knowledge of Gypsy/Travellers and their lifestyles. Very few appoint designated staff with a remit to make initial contact with families, e.g. when a family arrives at a site or on an unauthorised encampment or is living in a house. This aspect of provision is frequently carried out on an ad hoc basis. However, in these times of financial constraint, some local authorities are working flexibly with Gypsy/Traveller families. Many Gypsy/Traveller families demonstrate an interest in education as an important element of their children’s and young people’s future in a safe Scottish society that recognises their right to and pride in being Gypsy/Travellers.

Dr. Pauline Padfield
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the Scottish Traveller Education Programme
12 July 2012

REFERENCES


