

# New migration new challenges

*Eastern European migrant pupils  
in English schools*



## About this report

---

Dr Antonina Tereshchenko was the lead researcher of the project, working with Professor Louise Archer. The 24-month research project was funded by the British Academy through the Newton International Fellowship, hosted by the Department of Education & Professional Studies at King's College London.

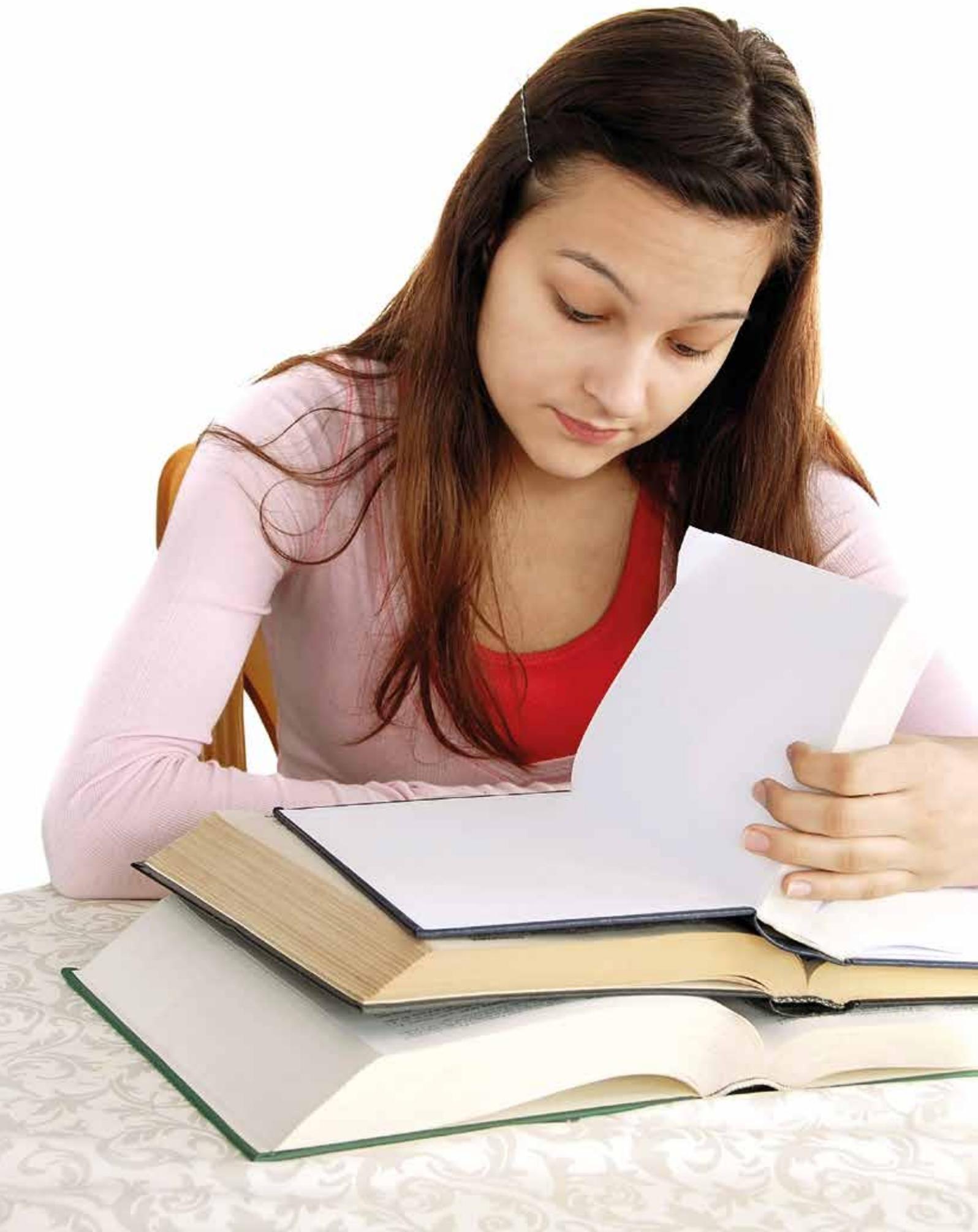
The final report is written by Antonina Tereshchenko, with contributions from Louise Archer. We are grateful to Rodolfo Leyva for assistance in the statistical overview of the Eastern European student attainment, drawing upon the data from the National Pupil Database.

We would like to thank the staff of all the schools who assisted in the completion of this project. We are particularly grateful to teachers, students and parents who gave their time for the interviews.

---

## Contents

Executive Summary	3
1. Background	9
1.1 Hot topic – East European migration	9
1.2 School attainment statistics at age 16	10
2. Methodology	19
2.1 Focus of empirical research	19
2.2 Research design	19
3. Findings	21
3.1 Students’ aspirations: education & career choice	21
3.2 Parental perceptions & responses to schooling in England	24
3.3 The impact of EAL status on the education of students	27
3.4 Young people’s experiences of racism	31
4. Conclusions	35
5. References	39



## Executive summary

### BACKGROUND

Immigration from East European countries is a 'hot' topic in the UK. Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU), and in the wake of the recent end of labour market restrictions for Romania and Bulgaria, the rapid inflow of these migrants has attracted a considerable amount of public attention. These migrants are well integrated into the labour market but are described as working in unskilled, precarious and more informal jobs that pay low wages and do not always require English language proficiency. The common phenomenon of 'downgrading' among immigrant populations is much more pronounced for Eastern European migrants than for the UK's other immigrant groups: they tend to be over-educated for the level of work they perform. This state of affairs has implications for equality and possesses certain risks to upward social mobility of these migrants and their children.

- examining young people's aspirations and factors that might enable and constrain their educational success in England.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design included field work in four state-funded secondary schools in London and the East of England. The schools had a significant minority of students from the East European countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, especially pupils from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia (although other national groups were also present). A total of 22 teachers or specialist English as an Additional Language (EAL) staff and 71 students born in different East European countries were interviewed individually and in groups. The large majority of students came from families, in which parents did not hold higher education degrees and were doing what could be classified as manual work. Parents of thirteen students also took part in research.

A statistical analysis of the Key Stage 4 (KS4) attainment of pupils across England whose first language is recorded as being Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian (Romania), Slovak, Slovenian, and Russian also formed part of the research project. The English National Pupil Database linked to the Annual School Census data was used for this overview. Examination results over the last five academic years were considered.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### *Differences in achievement are found among different groups of Eastern European pupils*

- Over the last five years, pupils speaking Eastern European languages as their mother tongue have seen a steady improvement of their KS4 results. For example, between 2009 and 2013 the proportion of these pupils leaving secondary education with 5 GCSEs at Grades A\*-C increased by 22.2 per cent, compared with an average for the national cohort of 11.8 per cent. As a group, Eastern European pupils still attain below the national level. However, this group of pupils is characterised by the diversity of their language and ethnic

## Pupils speaking the languages of Eastern Europe as their mother tongue are the fastest growing group in English schools.

Pupils speaking the languages of Eastern Europe as their mother tongue are the fastest growing group in English schools. Their number increased by 135 per cent between 2008 and 2012 and they are portrayed in the media as putting a significant strain on school resources due to their language needs. Despite the prominence of this group of migrants in public policy and media debates, there is still no picture of the educational achievement and experiences of schooling among Eastern European migrant students in England, although available research suggests that pupils (and their parents) might have benefited from strong educational institutions in their home countries.

This report seeks to contribute to the understanding of the educational achievement of Eastern European migrant students in England, and the structures and processes that affect their learning and outcomes by:

- describing the current national patterns of educational attainment within Eastern European immigrant groups by language, gender, 'social class' and mobility indicators;

## The FSM/non-FSM attainment gap is much smaller among Eastern European pupils than the national average.

backgrounds, socio-economic status, length of residence in England, their experiences of schooling in the country of origin and their home cultures.

- In line with other research in sociology of education, we found that social identity factors impact on the achievement of different pupils:
  - Girls outperform boys in all attainment indicators at the end of compulsory schooling.
  - Pupils taking free school meals (FSM) perform less well generally than their non-FSM counterparts, but the attainment gaps are far smaller than national FSM/non-FSM gaps. In some language groups, pupils taking free school meals exceed the attainment of those who are not taking free school meals.
  - Analyses show statistically significant differences in attainment by the first language spoken by pupils, with Estonian speakers being the highest and Slovak and Czech speakers the lowest achievers in GCSEs. Pupils speaking Russian and Bulgarian as their first language are relatively high achieving groups, with Russian speakers performing above the national level in English Baccalaureate.
  - A significant number of pupils from underachieving groups of Slovak and Czech speakers may be from a Roma ethnic background.
- The factors which hinder Eastern European students' educational success and chances for mobility are amplified in the case of Roma students who face multiple inequalities, including racism from other Eastern European migrants and prejudice from teachers in school. Roma families also tend to have lower levels of cultural capital.

### *English language proficiency is key for educational achievement*

- Attainment data show that pupils in all Eastern European language groups perform significantly better in the attainment indicator 5 A\*-C GCSEs which does not include English and mathematics, than in the attainment indicator 5 A\*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics.
- Data from the National Pupil Database show that those pupils whose school entry date is within the previous two academic years (Years 10 and 11) record a striking attainment gap in GCSEs and English Baccalaureate compared to pupils whose entry date is earlier. Hence, although these pupils' English might have developed to a reasonable level for day to day communication, newly arrived learners are unlikely to reach an appropriate level of English for passing GCSEs.
- Teachers highlight English language as the main problem of Eastern European students, pointing out how English hinders the performance of these students not only in subjects such as English and humanities but notably in mathematics. Students feel that their status as an EAL learner could be a barrier to achieving success, with some stating that teachers hold lower academic expectations of EAL students like them and perhaps unwittingly 'channel' them into particular subject areas due to their perception of the EAL students' disadvantaged position.

### *Eastern European migrant families have a strong impact on aspirations and engagement with education*

- Eastern European parents we interviewed share similar perceptions about the opportunity structure and what is necessary to succeed in England. They see England as a place of opportunities

## Teachers highlight English language as the main problem of Eastern European students.

## Well over half of students we interviewed said they intend to go to university, and describe being strongly encouraged to do so by parents.

and pragmatically believe in individual efforts to take advantage of the existing opportunities. They tend to see the barriers to achieving aspirations as linked to not working hard enough rather than socio-economic inequalities or discrimination. They emphasise the importance of learning English and getting English education, often at the expense of literacy in their native language. These views underpin parents' positive engagement with education in England, trust of teachers and schools.

- Well over half of the students we interviewed state that it is their intention to go to university, and describe being strongly encouraged to do so by their parents.
- Boys in our study were most likely to express aspirations for careers in business and technical fields such as ICT, engineering and construction. Their choices appear to be shaped by their (and their parents') ideas about the 'market value' of different careers, that is, likelihood of securing a job.
- The girls we interviewed were most likely to aspire to stereotypically feminine careers in the arts/humanities, psychology, and beauty sector. They are more likely than boys to ground their aspirations in personal interests and aptitudes. However, their career aspiration discourses are also to a certain degree influenced by the family/community perceptions and the broader economic and social context in which their experiences are shaped.

### *Racism is an issue for Eastern European students*

- Our interviews have uncovered a distinctive set of cultural stereotypes which young people believe are indiscriminately applied to Eastern European migrants in England (e.g. as being heavy drinkers and smokers,

jobless, aggressive and so on). The seemingly positive stereotype of Eastern European migrants as being 'hard workers' associate them with working-class jobs such as being a builder. Some students suggest that teachers may be influenced by this stereotype in their expectations of their career pathways.

- One implication of the widespread anti-immigration discourses (including by the mainstream political parties portraying immigration as a problem) is that most young people from Eastern Europe are seen as a new 'Other' in English schools both by the white majority and more established minority ethnic groups. This undermines Eastern European students' ability to 'belong', and also links to parents' implicit views about the 'lesser' status of their home language and their desire to escape the 'immigrant' label through acquiring an English accent, English education, a degree, a professional job for their children.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Department for Education needs to collect better and more systematic student level data via the Annual Student Census regarding the country of origin for 'white other' students. This would enable a more accurate picture of student numbers, geographic spread and attainment, facilitating better understanding of Eastern European students' needs and outcomes and facilitating analysis of gender, language, ethnicity and socio-economic status of new migrant pupils' attainment.
2. English as an Additional Language support should be ensured and extended beyond the initial stages to enable the education system to continue to close attainment gaps and to build on the progress secured for minority ethnic and EAL pupils under the previous government's funding arrangements. Employing bilingual EAL support staff is beneficial for the educational engagement of students and can be vital for improving home-school links with migrant parents.
3. Careers education in secondary schools needs to support young people so that they do not automatically fall into



stereotypical career decisions and understand the impact of subject choice on future options. Careers professionals also need to be adequately prepared and supported to ensure young people are not inadvertently channelled into stereotypical pathways on the basis of gender, ethnicity and/or social class.

4. More support is needed to help migrant parents to better understand and navigate the education system in England (including but not limited to language support).
5. To respond to the challenges brought about by new patterns of migration and to secure the educational wellbeing of new migrant children, teachers and students on teacher education programmes (and careers professionals) require an understanding of new forms of non-colour based racism, as well as encouragement and support to enable them to reflect on issues of social justice and stereotyping/assumptions in their practice.

6. The findings on attainment patterns among Eastern European pupils raise several areas for further research: (i) why is the attainment gap between FSM/non-FSM pupils so much smaller among Eastern European pupils compared to white majority pupils? (ii) what causes the significant attainment gaps between different Eastern European language groups?

---

**Young people from Eastern Europe are seen as a new 'Other', both by the white majority and more established minority ethnic groups.**

---





## Background

### 1.1 HOT TOPIC – EAST EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION

The accession of eight East European countries to the European Union (EU) in 2004 led to a significant and unanticipated increase in the inflow of ‘new’ EU citizens to the UK. According to the 2011 Census, 1.1 million of so-called A8 migrants – citizens of the eight countries that joined the EU in May 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and A2 migrants – citizens of the two countries that joined the EU in January 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) resided in the UK. The latest figures from the Labour Force Survey estimate that the number of A8 citizens in employment in the UK stands at 723,000, while the number of A2 citizens employed in the UK is 127,000 (Vargas-Silva, 2014).

### 1.1 million citizens of Eastern European heritage currently reside in the UK. Pupils who speak an Eastern European language as their mother tongue are the fastest growing group in English primary and secondary schools.

EU nationals are a key group in the UK immigration debate as they enjoy free movement within the EU; hence, the government cannot restrict their entry and exit under EU law. A public opinion poll found that over half of respondents in the UK normally have in mind EU citizens when thinking about immigrants (Blinder et al., 2011). Analysis of major British national newspapers with respect to migration issues found that across all publication types, but especially in tabloids, the EU and Eastern Europe emerged as the main geographic focus of migration-related news coverage during 2010–2012 (Allen and Blin, 2013). The wave of migrants from Eastern Europe has received much negative media attention. They are often portrayed as a drain on public resources, particularly in light of national budget cuts.

These migrants come from a diverse set of countries, but, as a whole, differ from the UK’s previous non-European migrant groups. Drawing across available research, it is possible to establish some common

facts about Eastern European migrants that illuminate social inequalities:

- They are young compared to the UK-born population and to other migrant groups: 70 per cent were aged 18–35 in 2008 (Sumption and Somerville, 2010).
- Their employment rates are above that of British-born workers and almost all other significant migrant groups (Rienzo, 2013).
- They tend to cluster in unskilled jobs with low career prospects, despite having substantial levels of education (Sumption and Somerville, 2010; Ciupijus, 2011), albeit not necessarily degree-level qualifications (Lympelopoulou and Parameshwaran, 2014). In 2012, workers from the A8 countries earned the lowest average wages among different groups of migrants (Rienzo, 2013).
- They are dispersed across the country more than previous migrant groups, although A2 migrants primarily live in London (24 per cent of all Polish born residents in the UK live in London, while this number is 54 per cent for Romanians) (Vargas-Silva, 2014).
- They have more informal, distinctive patterns of social networks and interactions: rely significantly on ethnic social contacts to find work while already in the UK, and on employment agencies for their first job (Sumption and Somerville, 2010).
- Language barriers are greater than for other migrant groups. Many arrived with little English; their jobs may not require English competence, and, in the workplace, they may be mixing mainly with other non-English speakers (Sumption and Somerville, 2010).

Migration from new EU states poses new challenges with regard to integration and upward social mobility for those working to promote equality in the UK. To support equality in the long-term, policy-makers and others responsible for ensuring inclusive educational provision should give greater consideration to children of these immigrants. Education is recognised as being one of the important facilitators of social mobility (Francis, 2013). Table 1 shows that pupils speaking languages of

Eastern Europe as their mother tongue are the fastest growing group in English primary and secondary schools. While the number of Romanian speakers has seen the largest increase over the last years, the most sizable Eastern European language groups remain Polish and Lithuanian.

Like other public services, British schools have been described in the media (e.g. Daily Mail reports) as ‘changed’, ‘stretched’ and ‘overwhelmed’ by the influx of children who do not speak English as their first language, and, further, that these trends could be detrimental to the educational attainment of native English speakers.<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence that the assumption about EAL children lowering standards in schools is true. On the contrary, pupils whose first language is other than English now perform better as a group than those whose first language is English in some of the attainment indicators, such as the English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2014a). Research conducted by London School of Economics and Political Science points to Polish students boosting results at Catholic primary schools in subjects such as mathematics (Geay et al., 2012). Eastern European parents are often praised for their strong ‘work ethic’ and high educational

<sup>1</sup> Headlines like ‘Influx of immigrants forces council to build four new schools’ (*Daily Mail*, 10 January 2007), ‘Schools are stretched to breaking point by immigrant children’ (*Daily Mail*, 31 May 2007), ‘Immigrant pupil numbers rise 50 per cent since 2005, with 20,000 joining last year’ (*Daily Mail*, 10 January 2008), ‘School need money to cope with influx of thousands of immigrant children, say teachers’ (*Daily Mail*, 20 March 2008) and ‘English is now second language in one in nine schools after influx of Eastern Europeans’ (*Daily Mail*, 21 February 2014) heightened public concern with numbers of migrant children.

expectations of their children, perhaps reflecting their own relatively high level of education. Children’s education features as an important factor in parents’ migratory decisions (White, 2011). Polish working-class mothers were found to express high academic aspirations and uphold ‘strict’ parenting practices (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Erel, 2011).

Yet, Eastern European parents express anxieties due to their limited English language skills, lack of knowledge about the British education system, the testing culture, and school choice that, together with lack of social capital, could become potential obstacles to the educational and labour market success of the children (Sales et al., 2008; Valkanova, 2009).

## 1.2 SCHOOL ATTAINMENT STATISTICS AT AGE 16

To date there is no picture of attainment among Eastern European pupils. To provide an indicative picture, we have analysed data extracts from the National Pupil Database, merging Key Stage 4 attainment with information from the Pupil Level Annual School Census. This section concentrates on the three key indicators of achievement: (i) 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or equivalent; (ii) 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent *including* English and mathematics GCSEs; (iii) the English Baccalaureate. The figures combine the information on the final attainment data for the 2008-9 to 2012-13 academic years matched to the Spring School Census.

	January 2008	January 2012	% increase
<b>Romanian</b>	1,420	8,000	463
<b>Latvian</b>	999*	4,195	320
<b>Hungarian</b>	999*	3,450	245
<b>Bulgarian</b>	1,220	3,430	181
<b>Slovak</b>	2,510	6,760	169
<b>Lithuanian</b>	4,350	11,275	159
<b>Czech</b>	1,870	4,515	141
<b>Malayalam</b>	4,030	8,850	120
<b>Russian</b>	3,840	7,760	102
<b>Polish</b>	26,840	53,915	101
<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>44,048</b>	<b>103,300</b>	<b>135</b>

**TABLE 1 TOP 10 FASTEST GROWING LANGUAGES SPOKEN AS A MOTHER TONGUE AMONG PUPILS IN ENGLAND**

\*Exact number unknown, recording less than 1,000 pupils  
 \*\*Total excluding Malayalam (a non-European language)  
 Source: NALDIC,  
[www.naldic.org.uk](http://www.naldic.org.uk)

The school census does not collect information on the nationality of pupils. It does collect information on the first language spoken by pupils, but this is not necessarily an indication of nationality. To be consistent with looking at ten EU accession countries, we have requested the data on the attainment of pupils in maintained schools in England whose first language is recorded as being Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian (Romania), Slovak, Slovenian, and Russian. Nine of these languages are among the top ten fastest growing foreign languages spoken in English schools (see Table 1 above). Due to the lack of sufficiently fine detail on national background, it is not possible to discern the origin of pupils speaking Russian: while some originate in EU accession countries (e.g. Baltic states), others are predictably from non-EU countries.

### 1.2.1 ATTAINMENT – GCSES

The government benchmark at Key Stage 4 is for students to pass at least 5 GCSEs with C or better, including English and

Mathematics, which in 2013 was met by 59.2 per cent of pupils across England.

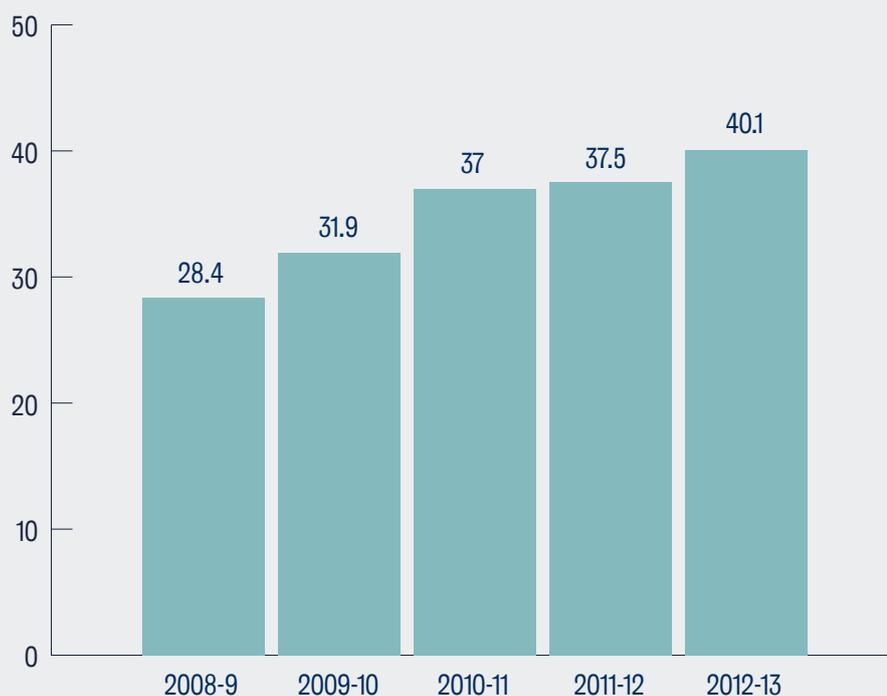
Pupils of Eastern European origins (as a group) performed below the national average in the 2012-13 academic year: 40.1 per cent of pupils achieved 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent *including* English and mathematics GCSEs. This is also lower than recorded attainment in other key ethnic groups except Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

A higher proportion of pupils (71.6 per cent) achieved 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent (not including English and maths). This is still 10.2 percentage points lower than the national level figure in the academic year 2012-13.

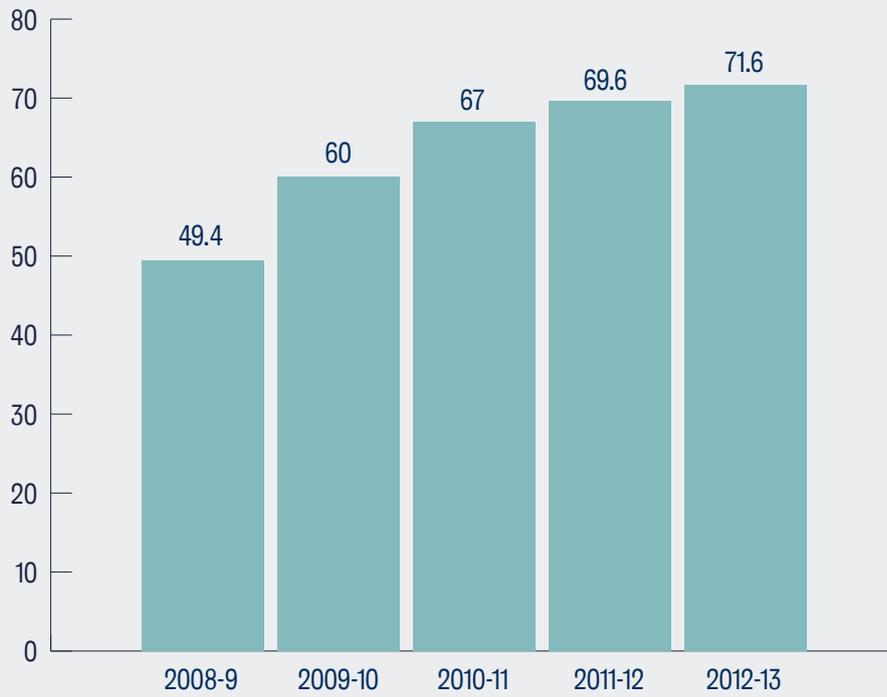
Looking at trends, this group of pupils as a whole has seen a relatively rapid increase in basic GCSE achievement over the last five years (see Figures 1 and 2).

The following analyses highlight variations in pupil achievement across key groups of interest.

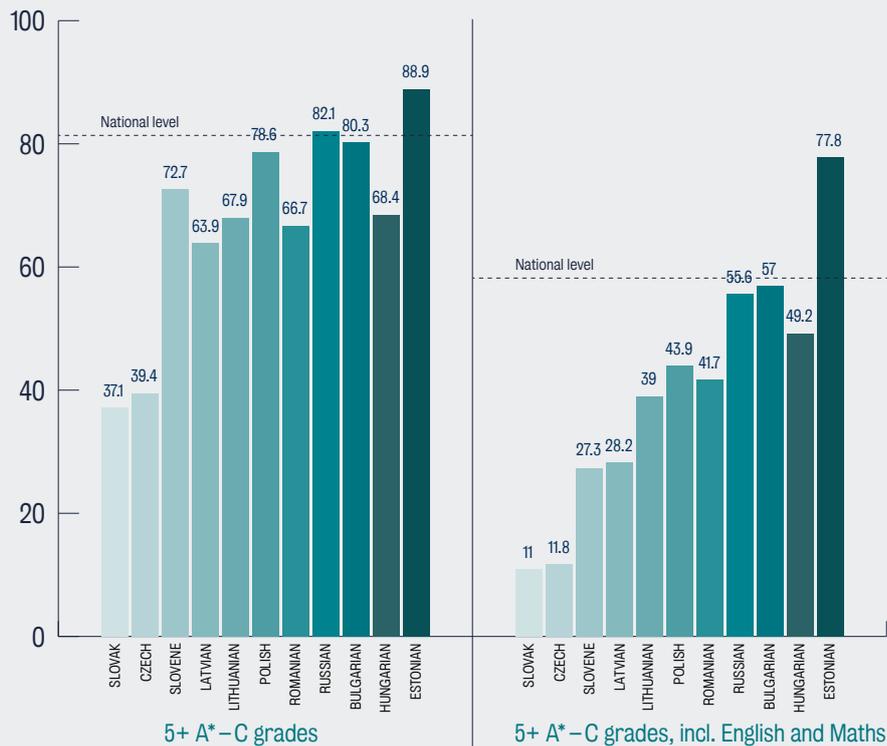
**FIGURE 1** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING 5 OR MORE A\*- C GRADES AT GCSE OR EQUIVALENT INCLUDING ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS GCSEs, 2008-9 TO 2012-13



**FIGURE 2** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING 5 OR MORE A\*– C GRADES AT GCSE OR EQUIVALENT, 2008-9 TO 2012-13



**FIGURE 3** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING 5 OR MORE GCSEs AT GRADE A\*– C OR EQUIVALENT, AND 5 OR MORE GCSEs AT GRADE A\*– C OR EQUIVALENT INCLUDING ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS, 2012-13, BY LANGUAGE GROUPS



### Language and Ethnicity

Our analyses of the data show statistically significant differences in attainment by the first language spoken by pupils (5+ A\*-C grades:  $\chi^2$  (10, N = 6741) = 580.527,  $p = .000$ ; 5+ A\*-C grades, incl. English and maths GCSEs:  $\chi^2$  (10, N = 6741) = 398.711,  $p = .000$ ). Figure 3 shows that pupils whose first language is Estonian had the highest achievement, but care should be taken in making comparisons due to the very small number of pupils from this group. Pupils from all other language groups performed below the national level. Pupils whose first language is recorded as being Czech and Slovak have the highest attainment gap: only 11 per cent of Slovak speakers and 11.8 per cent of Czech speakers achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent including English and mathematics in 2012-13.

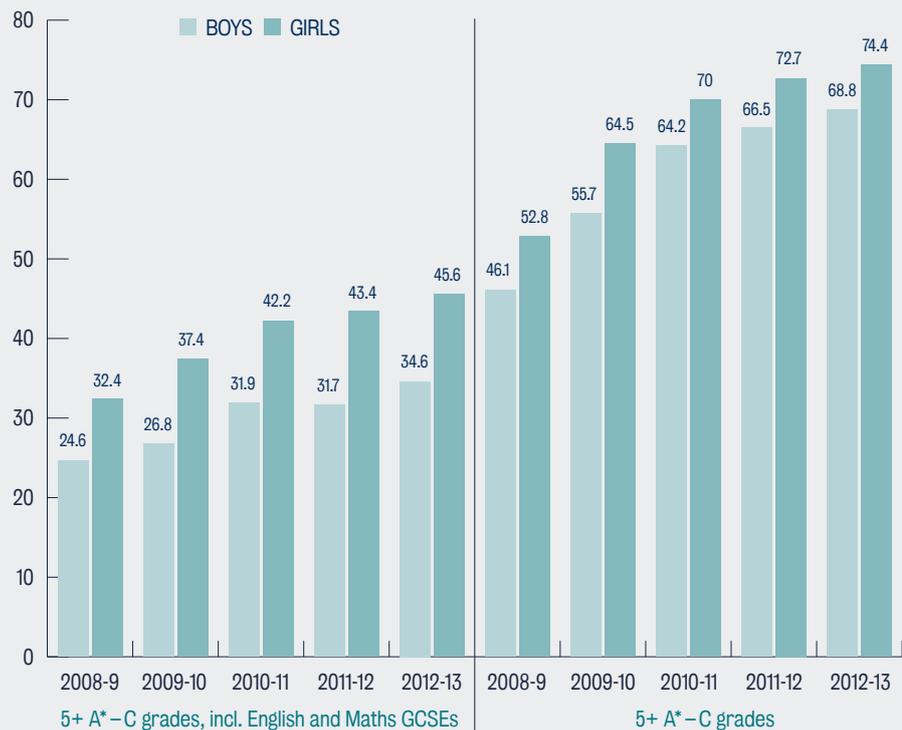
Anecdotal evidence suggests that a large proportion of Slovak and Czech pupils in England belong to the most disadvantaged and persecuted Roma migrant community, which could tentatively explain why pupils

whose language is recorded as being Slovak and Czech underperform dramatically. However, it is not possible to make definite conclusions based on our analyses due to the inconsistency in ethnic codes across the database and potential unwillingness of people of Roma ethnicity to identify themselves as Roma due to the widespread discrimination (Reynolds, 2008). For example, in the 2011-12 academic year, our Key Stage 4 exam database recorded 237 Roma pupils, a substantial proportion of them being Czech (32.9 per cent) and Slovak (41.4 per cent) speakers. In the academic year 2012-13, out of the 316 recorded Roma students, only a small proportion were identified as White Roma whose first language is Slovak (6.6 per cent) or Czech (1.9 per cent).

### Gender

Figure 4 shows differences between Eastern European girls and boys achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent including English and mathematics, and 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent since 2008-9

**FIGURE 4** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING 5 OR MORE GCSEs AT GRADE A\*– C OR EQUIVALENT INCLUDING ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS GCSEs, AND 5 OR MORE GCSEs AT GRADE A\*– C OR EQUIVALENT BY GENDER, 2008-9, 2012-13



(differences are statistically significant in each year).

Like in other ethnic groups, girls outperform boys at GCSE. Looking at the gap between the percentage of girls and boys achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent *including* English and mathematics GCSEs, 45.6 per cent of girls achieved this indicator in 2012-13 compared to 34.6 per cent of boys. In line with the national trends, the gender gap has widened since 2008-9 by 3.2 percentage points to 11.0 percentage points (comparable to the national gap of 10.1 percentage points).

In contrast, the gap between the percentage of girls and boys achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent has decreased to 5.6 percentage points, which is smaller than the national gap of 6.9 percentage points in 2012-13. However, while nationally this gap has steadily decreased, the gender attainment gap has fluctuated over the five years within the Eastern European group.

### *Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility*

According to the national statistics, pupils known to be eligible for FSM perform less well as a group in all the main indicators at Key Stage 4, compared to all other pupils (DfE, 2014a). For Eastern European pupils as a group, there are also differences in attainment between pupils eligible for FSM and those known not to be eligible for FSM. For example, the attainment gap between pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent including English and mathematics in the academic year 20012-13 is 3.4 percentage points – 37 per cent of those known to be eligible for FSM achieved this indicator compared to 40.4 per cent of all other pupils. While in 2012-13 the differences are not statistically significant, they are statistically significant

in the previous years; hence, socio-economic status has an effect on school achievement. However, as Table 2 shows, the attainment gaps in the Eastern European group in most academic years are smaller compared with the national gaps.

It is notable that FSM eligible pupils in some language groups outperform pupils with no recorded FSM eligibility (although differences between the groups are not statistically significant). In 2012-13, a slightly higher proportion of the FSM eligible pupils whose first language is Russian, Latvian, Bulgarian, Czech and Slovak achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent *including* English and mathematics, compared to their non-FSM eligible peers within the same language groups. This was also the case for speakers of Russian, Romanian and Latvian in 2011-12. These findings suggest that Eastern European families' trajectories and experiences may place them outside of the traditional British categories of social class, which also applies to other minority ethnic groups (Archer and Francis, 2006). Due to better awareness of what benefits may be on offer, those families who had lived in England for a longer period of time could be more likely than new migrants to draw on state services such as free school meals. Thus, the acquired language proficiency, not social class, could also be an explanation of differences in attainment within the Eastern European group. As Table 3 shows, the more recently arrived pupils substantially underperform in GCSE examinations.

### *Mobility*

The recent nature of migration from East European countries suggests that a significant minority of migrant pupils join secondary school with no or limited English skills. Mobility indicator is taken here as a proxy for limited English proficiency.

		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent incl. <b>English and mathematics</b>	National FSM gap	27.6	27.4	26.3	26.7
	Eastern European pupils	1.5	7.2	10.7	3.4
5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent	National FSM gap	20.3	18.4	16.5	16.0
	Eastern European pupils	4.0	8.3	18.3	0.7

**TABLE 2** FSM ATTAINMENT GAPS 2009-10 TO 2012-13\*

\*Pupils known not to be eligible for FSM minus pupils eligible for FSM.

**TABLE 3** MOBILITY ATTAINMENT GAPS 2009-10 TO 2012-13\*

\*All Eastern European language speakers minus those who joined school in previous 2 years.

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent <b>incl. English and mathematics</b>	33.6	26.5	27.8	31.1
5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent	34.2	38.7	41.9	40.6

Table 3 shows that those Eastern European pupils whose entry date is within the previous two academic years (Years 10 and 11) record a striking attainment gap in GCSEs compared to other pupils (all differences are statistically significant).

**1.2.2 ATTAINMENT – ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE**

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was first introduced for the academic year 2009-10. Achieving the English Baccalaureate requires 5 A\*-C grades in GCSE maths, English, two science subjects, a foreign language, and either history or geography. There has been a national increase in all major groups of pupils in the EBacc entries and achievement. However, ethnic and social inequalities are generally more pronounced when looking at those

who achieved the English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2014a).

While Eastern European pupils (as a group) have seen an increase in English Baccalaureate entries/achievement from the previous year, they are below the national level for the EBacc entries in 2012-13, with 24.4 per cent entering compared to the national average of 35.5 per cent. Likewise, 16 per cent of these pupils achieved the EBacc in 2012-13, compared to 23 per cent nationally.

*Language*

Our analyses of the data show statistically significant differences in attainment by the first language spoken by pupils (in 2012-13 academic year:  $\chi^2 (10, N = 6741) = 206.758, p = .000$ ; in 2011-12 academic year:  $\chi^2 (10, N = 5818) = 145.362, p = .000$ ).

**FIGURE 5** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING THE ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE BY LANGUAGE GROUPS



Figure 5 shows that all major language groups (except for pupils whose first language is recorded as being Slovak) have had an increase in the English Bacallaureate achievement in 2012-13. Pupils whose first language is Hungarian have seen the largest increase of 9.5 percentage points since 2011-12. Pupils whose first language is Czech and Latvian have seen the smallest increase. Pupils whose first language is Russian are above the national level for English Bacallaureate achievement with 26.1 per cent achieving all subject areas of EBacc in 2012-13 compared to the national average of 23 per cent.

### Gender

Figure 6 shows that there are more Eastern European girls achieving the English Bacallaureate compared to Eastern

European boys, with 19 per cent of girls achieving the English Bacallaureate compared to only 13 per cent of boys. In line with national trends, this gap has widened by 3.3 percentage points in 2012-13.

### Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility

Figure 6 shows that a higher percentage of pupils not eligible for FSM achieved the English Bacallaureate compared with pupils eligible for FSM. The attainment gap is 3.2 percentage points – 16.3 per cent of pupils not eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years compared to 13.1 per cent of disadvantaged pupils. The gap has decreased by 1.7 percentage points since 2011-12, and is much narrower than the national gap of 17.8 percentage points in the academic year 2012-13.

**FIGURE 6** PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS SPEAKING LANGUAGES OF EASTERN EUROPE AS THEIR MOTHER TONGUE ACHIEVING THE ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE BY KEY GROUPS, 2011-12 AND 2012-13



*Mobility*

Figure 6 shows that a much lower percentage of Eastern European pupils who joined school in the previous two academic years (Years 10 and 11) achieved the English Baccalaureate compared to pupils who had been in school in England for longer. The attainment gap is 16.1 percentage points, with 2.3 per cent of new arrivals achieving the English Baccalaureate compared to 18.4 per cent of other pupils. The gap has increased by 5.9 percentage points since 2011-12.

**1.2.3 SUMMARY OF KEY STAGE 4 ATTAINMENT**

Analysis of the attainment data of pupils whose first language is recorded as being Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian (Romania), Slovak, Slovenian, and Russian indicate:

<p><b>Pupils have seen an improvement over the last five years in the main key stage 4 indicators</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in pupils achieving 5+ A*-C GCSE passes or equivalent including English &amp; maths (5ACEM) from 28.4 per cent in 2008-9 to 40.1 per cent in 2012-13.</li> <li>• Increase in pupils achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs or equivalent (5AC) from 49.4 per cent in 2008-9 to 71.6 per cent in 2012-13.</li> <li>• Increase in pupils entered for and achieving the EBacc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Almost all key groups still achieve below the national level at GCSE and EBacc</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All languages groups (but Estonian) achieve below the national level in 5ACEM.</li> <li>• All languages groups achieve better in 5AC (with no English &amp; maths), with Estonian and Russian groups achieving above the national level.</li> <li>• Russian speakers are the only language group achieving above the national level in EBacc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pupils whose first language is Slovak and Czech are the lowest performing group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The percentage of pupils whose first language is Slovak achieving 5ACEM is 48.2 percentage points below the national average in 2012-13, closely followed by Czech speakers.</li> <li>• Slovak speakers have had no increase in the EBacc achievement in 2012-13.</li> <li>• A significant number of these pupils may be from a disadvantaged Roma background.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Girls outperform boys in all attainment indicators</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A consistently higher proportion of girls achieve 5AC and 5ACEM over the last 5 years.</li> <li>• Girls have had an increase in the EBacc achievement in 2012-13, with the gap between the groups widening by 3.3 percentage points</li> </ul>
<p><b>The FSM attainment gap compared to national average is narrower</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2012-13, the gap for the proportion of Eastern European pupils eligible for FSM achieving 5ACEM and other Eastern European pupils is 3.2 percentage points, compared with the national gap for FSM/non-FSM pupils of 26.9 percentage points.</li> </ul>
<p><b>English proficiency is a significant factor in attainment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although all pupils have English as an additional language, those whose school entry date is within the previous 2 years underperform considerably.</li> <li>• Comparing the percentage achieving 5ACEM in 2012-12, pupils whose entry date is within the previous 2 years (13.6 per cent) performed worse as a group than pupils whose entry date is earlier (44.7 per cent).</li> </ul>



## Methodology

### 2.1 FOCUS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The empirical study that the rest of the report draws on focuses on the educational experiences of Eastern European immigrant students and seeks to shed light on the understanding of how these experiences are influenced by social identities, teachers' expectations and parental engagement with their children's schools and learning. This research addresses the following questions:

- What are the educational identities and aspirations of Eastern European students?
- How do teachers construct Eastern European students and how do these constructions impact on students' identities and schooling experiences?
- How do Eastern European parents view their children's education in England?
- How do Eastern European students negotiate their racialised identities within the context of English schools?

### 2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative research was conducted between June 2013 and June 2014 in two comprehensive secondary schools in London and two in the East of England. The choice of geographic locations was informed by research and statistical evidence that suggests that London is the place of residence for the majority of the migrant population from the EU accession countries. The East of England has the second fastest growing population in England, with the highest after London proportion of migrants

born in East European countries that joined the EU in 2004 (Hawkins, 2014).

The schools represented a range of sizes and were located in urban settings. All four have the above average numbers of students receiving free school meals and students who speak English as an additional language. Students of Eastern European origins represented a notable size group in each of these multi-ethnic schools. Accordingly, bilingual support staff were employed to contribute to teaching and learning within the schools. Schools also had an assigned language support coordinator.

#### 2.2.1 SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

##### *Students*

A total of 71 students took part in research. There were 36 boys and 35 girls in the sample and their ages ranged from 12 to 18, with the average age of 15 years. All of the participants were first generation migrants; that is, they had migrated to England between 2004 and 2013 from different EU accession countries, although the sample included two students from Ukraine – a non-EU member state.

The location of participants and their profile (see Table 4) to some extent reflect the geographical distribution and demographic profile of particular migrant communities as well as the purposeful selection of participants by teachers. Therefore although generalisations cannot be made to the whole population of 'new' EU migrant students, the data serves as a useful indication of potential patterns and relationships.

**TABLE 4** STUDENT INTERVIEWEES BY NATIONALITY, LOCATION AND GENDER

\*This includes 3 female participants from the Roma community.

Nationality	London	East Anglia
Bulgarian	1	0
Ukrainian	2	0
Slovak	0	4*
Latvian	0	5
Romanian	7	0
Lithuanian	11	8
Polish	21	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>12</b>

---

**This empirical study focuses on the educational experiences of Eastern European migrant students. We seek to understand how students' experiences are influenced by social identities, teachers' expectations and parental engagement with their children's education.**

---

The overwhelming majority of students came from 'working class' families, in which parents did not hold higher education degrees and were doing what could roughly be classified as manual work. This is in line with available data that characterises Eastern European migrants as concentrated in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 of these students. The interviews lasted up to 30 minutes and focused on individual experiences of schooling, learning approaches, aspirations and any barriers to achieving them. 14 same-sex group discussions (with 3-6 participants each) were conducted with a total of 57 students, some of whom took part in individual interviews while others did not. The group discussions lasted up to 45 minutes and the researcher facilitated the discussion by asking students a series of open-ended questions about their views of how Eastern European migrants are perceived in and out of school, and how this affects their education and identity. Students were encouraged to choose their own pseudonyms.

### *Parents*

Due to the limited access, parents (12 mothers, 3 fathers, 1 aunt) of only 12 participating students were interviewed about their views on education. They represented the following nationalities: Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Furthermore, a Hungarian mother whose daughter was attending a different secondary school took part in research. None of these parents belonged to the Roma community. Most respondents were in their late thirties and were working in construction, cleaning, restaurant sectors, and at factories. The exception was two mothers who held professional jobs – an EAL teaching assistant at a secondary school and a freelance journalist undertaking

work for her country of origin. One of the mothers was not working at the time of the research. The analysis of parental interviews should be read in light of the fact that children of these parents were doing well in school and most parents self-selected into the study by providing contact details on the consent form.

### *Teachers*

Fieldwork in schools also included 22 semi-structured interviews with teachers (15 women, 7 men). In each of the locations we interviewed teachers with responsibility for ethnic minority achievement and English as an Additional Language (EAL) and subject teachers or teaching assistants with experience of working with Eastern European students. Five of the EAL staff we interviewed in London schools were originally from East European countries.



## Findings

The findings outline young people's relatively high aspirations and examine the key factors impacting on these students' educational engagement and likelihood of achieving their aspirations. The focus is on how coming from a migrant background, lacking knowledge or understanding about the educational system, speaking English as an additional language and having to negotiate lower academic expectations and subtle racism in England could be associated with educational disadvantages. As a possible factor enabling school performance and success, the findings highlight the interplay between Eastern European parents' positive self-perception in England, trust of English education and high aspirations for the social mobility of children.

### 3.1 STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS: EDUCATION AND CAREER CHOICE

Over half of participants had reached the end of compulsory education or were in sixth-form at the time of research. Four preferred educational routes were identified, with well over half of students planning to go to university.

#### 1 Taking A-levels in a sixth form and continuing into higher education

This group included 44 students (20 boys and 23 girls), most of whom were at the end of compulsory schooling or in sixth form.

#### 2 Continuing to a further education college at 16 and then into higher education

Some of the eight students who expressed this preference sought more independence and a more 'laidback' environment compared to a 'school-like' sixth form. Younger students seemed to view going to university after college as a good thing to do even if their occupational aspirations were more vocational – a girl aspiring to be a beautician said that at the university 'they're also going to be telling you how to talk to a client'.

#### 3 Taking BTEC courses or A levels in a sixth form and continuing into a college

The four students who voiced this preference were already in their school sixth form. Some of these students were planning to retake some of their GCSE exams. One of the four students was planning to eventually go to higher education to train as a primary teacher.

#### 4 Continuing to a further education college for vocational education and training at 16

The 15 students (7 girls and 8 boys) who expressed this preference aspired to more vocational jobs such as a plumber, a receptionist, a car mechanic, a construction worker, a beautician, and, more vaguely, to careers in business.

Table 5 sets out the occupational aspirations of students, ranked according to the number of choices (in brackets). It shows that the majority of young people aspired

**TABLE 5** EASTERN EUROPEAN STUDENTS' OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Girls	Boys
Psychology (7)	ICT (11)
Arts/Humanities/Creative (6)	Business (6)
Hair/beauty (4)	Construction (5)
Teaching (3)	Engineering (3)
Law (2)	Media/Music (3)
Architecture (2)	Financial (2)
Receptionist (2)	International relations/Politics (1)
Medicine (1)	Police (1)
Journalism (1)	Sports (1)
Veterinary (1)	Plumbing (1)
Business (1)	Car mechanic (1)
Cooking (1)	
Tourism (1)	

to professional and technical careers, with clear gendered patterns. Among girls, jobs in psychology and the arts were the most popular aspirations. A significant minority of girls aspired to vocational careers in the beauty sector, cooking, tourism, and office administration. Three girls were unsure about what they wanted to do, while planning to continue into higher education. Careers in ‘technical’ fields such as ICT, construction and engineering featured prominently in boys’ choices. Jobs in business also emerged as popular aspirations among boys. The least popular aspirations were to manual trades, such as plumber and mechanic.

### 3.1.1 WHAT SHAPES STUDENTS’ ASPIRATIONS?

Previous research has suggested that there may be a strong ethnic/racial dimension to the types of careers minority ethnic families and students prefer as a result of the perceived career-related opportunities and barriers (Archer and Francis, 2006; Fouad and Byars-Winston, 2005), although it is necessary to consider other aspects of identity such as class and gender (Archer et al., 2010).

#### *Likelihood of getting a job – Eastern European boys*

One discourse that remained remarkably consistent across all interviews was Eastern European students finding it, as one Lithuanian boy put it, ‘mission impossible’ to get a job in their home countries due to high rates of unemployment. In contrast, both boys and girls expected to find work in England, although the reasons for pursuing exact jobs were different.

Boys’ preferences for ‘technical’ careers noted in Table 5 were underpinned by the belief that ICT and engineering qualifications will lead to a range of possible high in-demand jobs. To avoid the risk of unemployment, as Polish boys explain in the following extracts, the majority of their friends focused on promising subjects:

‘That’s why most of us are studying engineering because there will always be somewhere to go with that.’

**Jeremy, 16, Polish boy, London**

## Boys aspired to careers in business and ‘technical’ fields. These aspirations were influenced by concerns about unemployment in their country of origin and perceptions of Eastern European migrants in the English labour market.

‘I think ICT [...] is a good step to take, because in the future everything is going to be computerised, and you’re going to need some skill in IT.’ **Piotr, 17, Polish boy, East Anglia**

Many boys expressed a strong preference for more ‘practical’ subjects in school, in contrast to subjects they labelled as ‘useless’, such as Religious Education or Citizenship Education, which they also viewed as ‘difficult’ – saying they were put off by ‘a lot of writing’. The practical element that boys value in lessons was invariably described in terms of being relevant for future life and achieving their occupational aspirations – ‘it’s going to help you in your future’ (Jack, 17).

‘Probably, for myself, it would be construction and engineering. They’re my preferred ones because we have a workshop and some practical things which I know how they will apply to my life.’ **Steve, 17, Polish boy, London**

Business studies, being the second most popular choice among boys, was seen as a course offering a range of skills for securing a job in future. As John from Lithuania (age 16) said, ‘This course will give you a lot of job opportunities’. Hence discourses associated with unemployment in the country of origin and perhaps the situation of Eastern European migrants in the English labour market affected subject and career preferences of the majority of boys. As we discuss in sections 3.3 and 3.4, being an EAL learner and experiencing discriminatory, culturally-grounded stereotypes are also related to aspirations.

#### *Personal interests and aptitude – Eastern European girls*

Girls were more likely than boys to explicitly draw upon their own personal

interest and talents in discussing aspirations. Those girls who considered more stereotypically feminine jobs in the beauty sector explained their choices by their own interest and competencies: 'I really like styling hair and I like make-up as well' (Magda, 16) or 'I enjoy doing make-up' (Jelena, 14).

A significant proportion of girls identified psychology as a preferred course for university study. This choice reflected their interest in the subject gained through watching documentaries and taking a class in psychology at school, as well as a general liking for 'giving advice to people' (Victoria, 16). Other girls articulated reasons for choosing psychology in line with discourses of femininity around altruism and care for others. One such girl explained that she hoped to work in a school to help migrant children like her:

'I was thinking of educational psychologist. I just thought, like, the position I was in myself or other children with learning difficulties.' **Kinga, 18, Polish girl, East Anglia**

Whilst prioritising their interests, girls were not immune to the general discourse operating in the Eastern European migrant community. In the following extract, Monika (age 14) challenges her sister's focus on art on the grounds of the uncertain 'market value' of such career pathway:

**Anastasia:** If not, then obviously an artist or something, 'cause I really love art.

**Monika:** Will you, like, get a lot of money for that?

**Anastasia:** What, for being an artist? You can, depending on how good you are.

**Monika:** You are not going to get any money.

**Anastasia:** I've already got an A\* in Art, so I just want ... your point isn't valid. [Laughter]

Two of the higher achieving girls – Iveta from Latvia (age 14) and Mimi from Bulgaria (age 14) – were torn between their talents in drama and music and concerns about whether competitive careers in acting and singing were attainable. For example, Iveta explained that although she wanted to be an actress, she aimed to go to Cambridge 'to become a lawyer, just in case, too'. Mimi, being good in maths, considered as a precaution taking engineering in a sixth form college, because 'in the future I can get a good job with engineering' whilst, she said, 'maybe it's going to be hard to be a singer, like, here in the UK'.

### 3.1.2 STUDENTS ON PARENTAL SUPPORT AND ASPIRATIONS

The role of parents in educational performance is well established, with parental class and education, as well as their expectations, affecting educational advancement (Vincent and Ball, 2006). It might be argued that students in our study face certain risks in terms of achieving their aspirations. We found that while strongly emphasising the importance of education, Eastern European migrant parents had little understanding of the British education system and limited ability to provide practical support or advice. Kinga (age 18) reports, 'I've been learning in English for eight years, and they [parents] still don't understand the whole, sort of, structure of the system'.

Parents provided some direction, mainly limited to encouraging their children to achieve, and, in most cases, to go to university, but reportedly not extending to the subject of study or career choice. The main message from parents with regards to career choice was to allow children to choose what they enjoyed the most, as their priority was to keep children happy. Parents in most cases were supportive of their children's choices.

'[My Mum] was fine with my choice, with my decision. She said, 'If you're going to be happy, then –' **Justyna, 18, Polish girl, East Anglia**

'No, they didn't tell me what to choose and they told me to do what I like to do, so, something maybe to do with sports or maths.' **Chin Chang, 16, Lithuanian boy, London**

---

**Girls were more likely than boys to draw upon their own personal interest and talents in discussing aspirations, mostly considering stereotypically feminine jobs in psychology, arts and the beauty sector.**

---

The prevalence among Eastern European parents to ‘never do anything you don’t want to do’ and to make choices around ‘what you love’ is a typical pattern of parenting practiced by working-class families. This type of childrearing has been described by Lareau (2003) as ‘the accomplishment of natural growth’, whereby it is believed that children will thrive with food, shelter and love. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, display more active intervention into educational choices of their children. The parenting style has an impact on future outcomes and may be reproducing and reinforcing socio-economic (dis)advantages.

Five students described differences of opinion between themselves and their parents concerning the jobs that they hoped to pursue. In all of these cases, students aspired to jobs considered as ‘unknown’ (in the country of origin) or ‘unsafe’ (no steady flow of income). These included, for example, a music producer, a forensic psychologist/criminologist, a graphic designer, a computer game maker. The father of Mati (age 16) ‘wasn’t really quite happy’ when he was told about his son’s plan to go to a music college, telling that ‘he’d like [him] to do something more important than music’, like, as Mati speculates, ‘go to university’. Although the other four students intended to go to university, at least one parent of each student worried about the viability of the chosen career and/or whether it offered stable salaries (e.g. ‘she just said I’m not going to make a living out of it [music]’ – Egle, 16).

‘But my dad wants me to get a job in accounting or something, just go on the computer and do it, not games, but something that’s easy and that I can get money with.’ **Cristian, 14, Romanian boy, London**

Despite the earlier assertions about parents’ non-involvement in their choices, it may be argued that many students’ aspirations for higher education and career choices are strongly shaped by the subtle power of the Eastern European migrant ‘habitus’, comprising of meritocratic discourses, perceptions about the opportunity structure in England vis-à-vis the country of origin and strategies for attaining success. As evident in section 3.2, valuing education,

and particularly stressing the significance of English education, and encouraging children to go to university to attain social mobility were common practices among Eastern European parents we interviewed.

### 3.2 PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF AND RESPONSES TO SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND

Most parents were found to articulate a very positive view of English education and children’s schools. This section focuses on parents’ explicit constructions of education in instrumental terms as a route for children to achieve social mobility in England. Although stated much less explicitly, parents also viewed getting English education as a significant cultural and social resource that would allow their children to escape the ‘immigrant’ label.

---

**Most parents expressed very positive views of the English education system and felt that it would help their children to become more socially mobile.**

---

#### 3.2.1 POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF STATUS IN ENGLAND

The way migrant and minority ethnic communities look at their situation has been suggested to influence their attitudes and behaviours, including in education (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). Our data indicates that Eastern European parents, who have moved to England because they believe that the move will result in more economic well-being and better overall opportunities, have a positive comparative frame of reference both with their situation in England and the situation in the country of origin.

For most parents, experiences of racism and ethnic prejudice were not part of their everyday life in England. They claimed they had not encountered racism in the workplace. Several parents, however, described how high concentrations of fellow nationals at work or working in isolation (e.g. in domestic cleaning) reduced opportunities for social integration and learning English. Sometimes this meant almost no direct contact with UK-born workers. While some reported experiencing subtle forms of discrimination, parents

perceived it as temporary and inevitably linked to their 'foreigner' status and not speaking English, or not speaking it well. Irrespective of their levels of English, they felt employers were satisfied with their work, drawing on the discourse of 'working hard' and doing jobs which British people did not want to perform.

The frame of comparison with 'back home' included constructing England as offering a wealth of opportunities and high chances of achieving educational and occupational aspirations for children. Asked whether it was easier to achieve her daughter's aspirations in Poland or England, Agnieszka was confident that 'it's much easier here, even for me'. In particular, all parents strongly believed that children had more chances to get higher education in England than in their place of origin, citing access to bank loans as an enabling factor. Many discussed unemployment among people with university degrees in their country of origin. One such parent, Juris, exemplified this belief by describing how at a factory he had worked at in England, Latvian young people packed salad to pay off their Latvian university loans. He and the other parents interviewed had little doubt that their children would attain professional careers in England, irrespective of the occupational route they choose.

In reflecting on the schooling of their children, parents generally favoured education in England. As one Slovak mother put it bluntly, 'I think it's better for everything, the English style of education' (Diana). Comparing the British education model with the onerous (also positioned by some as 'rigorous') system 'back home', parents described school in England in positive terms, as less stressful, more enjoyable, more practical, giving students an opportunity to think about what they learn rather than automatically absorb a lot of material.

Perceptions of their children's 'good' standing in school also heightened parents' satisfaction with education. Here is how some of the parents spoke about their children as students:

'To be honest, yes [I am satisfied], because she is in top sets in all subjects.'  
**Olga, Latvia, East Anglia**

'[Teachers] even say that they would like to have more Mimis in their class,

at school. [...] They put her up one level whenever they have an opportunity.'

**Hristina, Bulgaria, London**

'When Cristian came here they found him very prepared, so he is above his colleagues.'  
**Crina, Romania, London**

In other words, it appears that Eastern European parents view the educational capital from 'back home' as a significant resource. Yet, as we discuss further, they aspire to give their children an 'English education'.

### 3.2.2 INSTRUMENTAL RESPONSES TO SCHOOLING

What do migrant parents think are the necessary requirements for their children to succeed in England? Our interviews found that parents pragmatically believe that getting an English education (and especially a higher education degree) will empower their children socially and economically, and provide them with a professional career. For example, a father who brought his son to England at the end of compulsory schooling commented on the prestige associated with English credentials:

'In Poland, you're still, kind of, like, in Eastern Europe somewhere and even if you were educated, it's a, kind of, like, a barrier.'  
**Bogdan, Poland, London**

The purpose of education, as seen by the majority of parents we interviewed, is to attain a skilled and well-paid job.

'They will not have to do manual work; they will be in skilled jobs earning good money.'  
**Gloria, Poland, London**

'We did not study, in order to work at a desk. [...] Now, they should study, so that others can work for them.'  
**Sofia, Bulgaria, London**

Parents were optimistic that 'hard work' and getting good grades in school would remove any material barriers to achieving their children's aspirations. For instance, Gloria, a mother of five children employed as a cleaner, spoke about a lack of motivation as the only foreseeable barrier: 'It's simply a mobilisation; it's simply – 'I want to go to university, I want to have a good job, I want

to earn good money''. Parents Juris and Inese from Latvia concurred, 'If he wants it, he'll do it'. This notion that 'everything is possible' contrasts with results from previous research that has found more ambivalent views among earlier immigrant groups (particularly 'visible' minority ethnic groups) who have been in the UK long enough to experience racism and discrimination, and who, despite expressing high aspirations, tend to link their chances for success to discriminatory policies and practices in schools and in society (Vincent et al., 2012; Archer, 2010; Bhatti, 2006).

### 3.2.3 CULTURAL/LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND SCHOOLING

Students and parents considered cultural and linguistic differences as 'useful' (not harmful for their identity) to overcome. Most parents felt their maintenance of ethnic identity and culture was not a priority for their children. Indeed, one mother said she would prefer that her son did 'not contact with Poland [and Polish] language' to remove language barriers and 'to start to think like English people' (Irena).

To enable their children to capitalise on meritocratic opportunities present in England (and, by extension, worldwide), parents put an extra emphasis on English proficiency, often at the expense of literacy in their native language. A typical comment was 'we leave our language in the second place because we speak it anyway' (Radu). Emerging literature discusses how learning English and 'professing Englishness' is perceived by Eastern European immigrants as a way to escape the 'othering' label and to 'blend in' with the white mainstream majority (Thomas, 2012; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010). Indeed, it was a source of pride for many parents that, as one Hungarian mother put it, their children 'speak very fluently and very nicely in English' and that people who do not know their background think that 'they are [from] an English family, because they have no accent' (Etel).

While these parental discourses seem to indicate an awareness of the 'lesser' status of their home languages (even positioning them as something that may need to be 'hidden' to achieve success), paradoxically many also stated that English schools treated them and their children with respect and did not discriminate against their language. While not expecting any such

---

## To enable their children to capitalise on meritocratic opportunities present in England, parents put an extra emphasis on English proficiency, often at the expense of literacy in their native language.

---

support on arrival, the interviewees were grateful that schools provided free English language classes to children, with teachers or teaching assistants fluent in various Eastern European languages, as well as providing an opportunity to take GSCE and A level exams in Polish/Russian to the benefit of the children.

'It's the best school for my children. If my children had any problems, there are three Polish teachers to help.' **Gloria, Poland, London**

'I am very happy; from day one school has been requesting an interpreter for me and paying for it.' **Zofia, Ukraine, London**

This indicates a tension – while unwittingly pointing out a form of racism, parents do not articulate it as such, preferring to engage in individual actions in addressing wider inequalities related to their migrant position in England.

### 3.2.4 TRUST OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Parents placed a great deal of trust in schools and behaved strongly in conforming to the rules of the schools. Parents would hold their children, rather than the schools or teachers, responsible for the academic performance, although our participants were predominantly satisfied with their children's achievement and viewed their children as 'good students'. Teachers felt that Eastern European parents were satisfied with the education of their children.

Parents were generally happy about their experiences of communication with the school (valuing whatever emails, texts, letters, reports they received). These impersonal forms of communication suited their busy working lives. Many felt no need to come in to school personally. Coming from a different education system, many Eastern European parents might expect that the school would initiate contact if

required, giving precise information about a child's weaknesses and how to improve those (Sale et al., 2010). Teachers we interviewed, however, perceived Eastern European parents as disengaged, but our participants seemed to be unaware of this. When attending parents' evenings, few parents could question teachers due to their limited knowledge of English and the British education system. Inese of Latvia described her and her husband's behaviour at parents' evenings as 'we listen and nod'. Only one 'middle-class' mother expressed dissatisfaction with the communication she received from her daughter's secondary school (although she praised the primary school): 'I really have no idea what's happening in there [secondary school]. I rarely have any feedback from the teachers' (Etel).

Asked about what schools or the government could do to improve the situation for Eastern European children in England, most parents espoused a meritocratic discourse of 'making it' through individual efforts. English schools, as one father put it, 'give everything to those who work hard' (Juris). One Polish mother was flummoxed at the question, replying, 'I don't know. I don't think about this' (Irena). The following extract further highlights the mindset of these migrants and the recurrent belief that adopting dominant values and following the rules will lead to success in the British society:

'They do help me already and I adjust to their rules, so that everything goes well, and that's enough for me [...] After I came to this country and I decided to live here, I accepted their conditions and their rules, their learning style, their lifestyle, so that everything is super.'

**Gloria, Poland, London**

Despite denying prejudice, some responses suggest that parents might feel that they cannot ask much of the UK Government in the current, very tense, anti-immigration climate. For example, a Bulgarian mother

doubted that the government would want to hear any of their suggestions because 'they think of us almost as if we came here to steal the money of the English people' (Sofia). This point interlinks with young people's discussions of racism in section 3.4.

### 3.3 THE IMPACT OF EAL STATUS ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS

Proficiency in English, as also noted in section 1.2, is found to play an important role in educational achievement of migrant students (Arnot et al., 2014). This section explores how students' EAL (English as an Additional Language) status within school could become a barrier to their success, as seen in some of the students' concerns interlinked with teachers' articulation of challenges of schooling EAL learners and students of certain ethnic backgrounds.

#### 3.3.1 ENGLISH AS A BARRIER TO SUCCESS

Perhaps due to their own limited English language skills, parents attributed great importance to the English language. They saw learning English as a necessary requirement for success in school and in the job market. Some parents (but only very few in our sample) were concerned that poor English would be a barrier to children's success in England. Most parents, as noted earlier, were satisfied with and even proud of their children's progress in English.

Concerns about English being a barrier to achieving aspirations were more often voiced by students, especially academically-orientated girls. One such girl, Monika from Poland (age 14), thought that if her language did not 'get any better', this might stop her from becoming a vet. Laura from Lithuania (age 16), who wanted to study medicine, worried that she might fail to understand instructions or questions in exam papers. The culturally-specific nature of summative assessment and tests could indeed undermine EAL students' performance. One maths teacher noted that due to the tendency of the exam board 'to set a scene for [students] to answer a question', students having good numerical skills could struggle with lengthy text containing uncommon words:

---

**When attending parents' evenings, few parents felt they could question teachers due to their limited knowledge of English and the British education system.**

---

‘It was something like, ‘John has bought a bar of beeswax’ and the question then went on to talk about the beeswax, but what it wanted to know was the volume. So all our EAL students were stuck on the word ‘beeswax’ – ‘What’s that? What’s beeswax? Can’t do the question – miss it out, move on.’” **Ms Thomas, Maths Teacher, East Anglia**

Given that the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study were fluent in English and attained reasonably well, it might be that students’ anxieties and low self-esteem reflected wider public discourses about immigrants, as reflected by media discussions of EAL students overburdening schools and ‘dragging down’ results.

### 3.3.2 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS’ SUPPORT AND PREJUDICE

Wider academic literature has discussed the negative role that teachers’ biased attitudes might play in shaping minority ethnic students’ aspirations and achievements (Archer and Francis, 2007; Archer, 2008; Archer et al., 2010). Prejudice was perceived by some of our participants in teachers’ expectations of performance. In particular, individuals from two schools raised the issue of discouraging treatment of EAL learners. For example, one boy (who was a good student and had achieved a ‘B’ grade pass in Maths GCSE despite a predicted ‘D’) described his understanding of teachers’ lower expectations of himself in the following way:

‘I wouldn’t say [teachers have] high [expectations of me], but, like, normal, like, even low, because they don’t expect me to get as much because, as I said, I’m foreign and I came not long ago here, so as well they’re thinking that, yeah, my English is this and that and [...] it’s really often here that if you don’t speak English, they think you don’t have that much knowledge.’ **Czeslaw, 16, Polish boy, East Anglia**

This resonated strongly with the experiences of Justyna who remembered a lack of encouragement. She had wanted to study A-level Science, but felt her secondary-school teachers were more of a hindrance than a help, telling her that this subject



required ‘high English’. As a result, she decided against choosing the subject that interested her most.

The other two Polish girls who had achieved, as one of them put it, ‘the highest results [at GCSEs] from everyone, even the English people’ recalled treatment which was based on ethnic stereotypes:

**Kasia:** I remember when we had a GCSE results day, Kinga and I went together and we received envelopes and we passed every single GCSE, and the teacher who gave us the envelope and who was next to us was so surprised, because we’re Polish.

**Kinga:** She’s like ‘oh, you’ve actually passed your GCSEs’.

When asked about whether there is anything positive about being a Polish student in the school, Kasia noted that it was ‘priceless’ to see ‘the surprise on the teachers’ and students’ face when you



©ISTOCK.COM/JEFF MITCHELL

'I think it depends on the subject. Some [teachers] do just think that we're not able to get there. In some subjects, like engineering or construction, I think they're more likely to give us a chance; they trust more in us. But in science and maths, there are a bit less expectations.'

**Steve, 17, Polish boy, London**

There was other evidence in the data of students encountering bias towards their academic ability based on their lack of English. Having sufficiently mastered English, participants felt that teachers started treating them 'like a normal person' and 'gave a higher level to do' (Max, 13, Polish boy, London). Teachers, as explored further, found it difficult to make judgements about the academic ability of migrant students when their proficiency in English was limited.

While the above views were expressed by a significant minority of participants, the majority of young people refuted any suggestions that teachers held stereotypes of migrant students.

'No, they don't pre-judge you because that would just be racist, to be honest. They judge us equally.'

**Jelena, 14, Romanian girl, London**

In contrast, teachers were seen as helpful and supportive. When asked in individual interviews about people who were most supportive of their education in England, 26 of the 38 students named teachers. Furthermore, seven students said that only some teachers were encouraging, but, in general, teachers would not say 'no' if asked to help.

### 3.3.3 TEACHERS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ATTAINMENT

The main problem of Eastern European students that was consistently highlighted across teacher interviews was English language. Whilst it is logical that teachers' work with migrant students focuses on the acquisition of fluency in English, there is a concern about the extent to which teachers think it is possible for EAL students to achieve the desired competency in English. Success in subjects such as English and humanities were seen as particularly beyond the realms of possibility. The factors teachers felt were hindering migrant students' success

pass and actually achieved something'. As national attainment statistics in section 1.2 show, Eastern European students as a group (and particularly girls) have seen rapid rises in attainment.

We observed a trend of Eastern European boys focusing on 'practical' GCSEs or BTECs and thinking about technical careers or higher education qualifications in ICT, Design & Technology, Engineering, Construction, etc. Although the boys in question liked these subjects, it could also be that teachers were 'channelling' them into this field due to the preconceptions of EAL students' disadvantaged position, leading them to assume that these students are more likely to succeed in more vocational areas. As one teacher commented, 'the boys will do better in practical subjects, something that they know that they can earn cash with' (Mr Kelly).

in these subjects were identified as their EAL status and missing the 'right' sort of cultural background. Ms Anderson, for instance, reflected on how a lack of tacit cultural knowledge acquired at a young age from growing up in England places Eastern European students in a disadvantaged position within the education system.

'It's harder to do well in English, where you need the cultural understanding, as well as the language understanding [...] I mean, things like possibly history, where if it's very much based on kind of a cultural understanding of how things have always been and what's normal and what's less normal, then that might be difficult, if you haven't got that background of knowledge.' **Ms Anderson, English Teacher, East Anglia**

Subject teachers and teaching assistants widely agreed that Eastern European students had come to England 'well prepared' mathematically. One such teacher described Polish and Lithuanian students as 'really hot on numbers' and as 'outstrip[ing] even the White British population on that' (Ms Thomas). Yet the 'superior' arithmetical ability is not automatically translating into student high performance in maths, with teachers citing English as an obstacle.

'I think the arithmetic ability is there, in the majority of them I can see, but they find ... the problem is understanding the questions.' **Mr Ray, Maths Teacher, London**

'If their level of English is low, they won't get the question right, unless you explain it to them or the teaching assistant explains it to them.' **Mr Rizvi, Maths Teacher, East Anglia**

It is notable that these maths teachers gave examples of Eastern European students commenting on being familiar with most topics because they had studied them previously in their native language. For example, Mr Rizvi said 'whether it's Year 7 or Year 10 or 11' he came across students announcing their pre-existing knowledge – 'We learnt this in Year 4 in Lithuania', or, 'We learnt this in Year 4 in Poland'. The students we interviewed often felt maths was 'easier' than in the country of origin (see also Tereshchenko and Archer, 2014). This raises a question about whether more

could be done to support these students to ensure they capitalise on substantive mathematics subject knowledge. One Polish EAL classroom teaching assistant argued that in addition to language support, students required help with working out the differences in mathematical concepts, and adapting to teaching methods and styles, as these can differ around the world:

'They think, 'Oh gosh, I can't do it.' I've asked them why. 'It's so complicated.' I say, 'No, it's not.' 'Oh Miss, is it that easy?' I say, 'Yes'. 'It can't be that easy, it's for primary school.' I say, 'Yes, it's that easy.' **Ms Kubal, EAL TA, East Anglia**

Over half of mainstream subject teachers interviewed described Eastern European students' attitude to learning as 'keen' and 'positive', yet stressing that this applies to children of the non-Roma community. In the schools where the Romany students (mainly from Slovakia and Czech Republic) were present, they were invariably spoken about in deficit terms as 'not familiar with concept of secondary school', 'academically not bright in [their] own language', 'a bit lethargic', 'not necessarily interested', 'see school as just somewhere to mess around', 'don't abide by the rules' and the like.

Teachers of modern languages found it much easier to integrate Eastern European students into their classroom and spoke highly of their linguistic ability. This was attributed to the fact that fluency in English was not key to accessing, for example, the French curriculum. Unlike in other mainstream subjects, EAL students begin foreign languages on an equal footing with peers for whom English is their first language. According to Ms Martin, the positive experience of 'do[ing] better in French than in English' increases students' interest and engagement with the subject and leads to good results in exams.

There was also a contrast to the way teachers of Eastern European origin talked about the needs of students when compared to the British teachers. Eastern European

---

**Teachers feel that Eastern European students arrive with a good grounding in maths but this does not always translate into high attainment due to English language issues.**

---

## Teachers who come from Eastern European backgrounds are less likely than their British peers to see migrant students' language needs from a deficit perspective.

teachers shared positive views of EAL students. Language needs were seen as real but less problematic.

'All EAL children from European countries or whatever other countries they come from, they are talented, they are gifted, because they are able to learn more than one language [...] we had – I may have said before – a new submission last week; a student coming from Moldavia, speaking Romanian fluently and writing it and speaking Russian fluently and writing it as well, and now is learning English as well. So that's already a very bright student.' **Ms Gabor, EAL Teacher, London**

The interpretation of children's linguistic competencies as multi-lingual, rather than as devoid of English, had implications for teacher expectations for learning for EAL students.

It was common for Eastern European teachers to highlight that most Eastern European students tend to be 'very good students', 'high achievers', 'easy to work with', 'quite driven' and 'very eager for knowledge'. They also praised new students' 'very strong educational background' and acknowledged the fact that they had been used to working independently, taking notes and doing a lot of homework in their countries of origin. They recognised that new arrivals were usually placed in lower sets and it took time for students to work their way up. One such teacher noted that a massive effort and resilience was required of students, as 'they have to learn English in general and for every single subject [...] but at the same time they also have to learn new material and the class is not going to wait for them' (Ms Seim). It is interesting to note that one of the EAL staff claimed that, despite their language needs, large numbers of migrant students 'from that part of Europe' had helped over a period of seven years to improve the position of the school in league tables.

In this sense, teacher responses to the migrant students' language needs were

framed less in terms of a deficit perspective. It was born out in other research that Black and minority ethnic students' access to teachers of similar background could have a positive impact on school engagement (Mirza and Meeto, 2011). Recruitment of minority ethnic teachers is seen as a valuable strategy, due to their ability to recognise and respond to student needs, adapt the curriculum and generally challenge low expectations of minority ethnic achievement.

### 3.4 YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

The experiences of earlier 'white' migrants in the UK would suggest that a shared skin colour, Christian and/or European roots do not exempt Eastern European migrants from racism and discrimination (McDowell, 2008, 2009). In our study, young people discussed a range of racialised ideas about Eastern European migrants that could potentially impact on their life in England, experiences of schooling and interaction with peers and teachers.

#### 3.4.1 THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION DISCOURSES

In the current economic and political environment, including government pronouncements concerning the wish to decrease the number of immigrants, Eastern European migrants appear to be seen as a new 'other' by the British majority and by those minority ethnic groups that could claim a non-immigrant identity. One of the most common reasons for discrimination cited in this study was one's status as an immigrant (see Figure 7). As a result of popular anti-immigration discourses in response to labour market competition in the UK, young people believed that first and foremost East Europeans are seen as 'immigrants' who 'take work' or 'steal jobs'. This negative image (legitimated by mainstream politicians who portray immigration as a problem – Fox et al., 2012) leaves young people with an emotional burden to have to negotiate exclusionary discourses on a daily basis. For instance, young people lived with the idea that 'the English are angry on us' (Steponas, age 14), 'they don't want us here' (Edita, age 17) and 'we are useless for the country' (Alicja, age 16). Another student, Olek

**FIGURE 7** SUMMARY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT BRITISH PEOPLE THINK OF EAST EUROPEANS

come for work  
 distrust carpenters law  
**builders gypsy hooligans**  
 criminals impolite disagree party thieves jobless  
**Romanian hardworking vodka**  
 take jobs poles benefits swear lazy colour skin  
**immigrant steal jobs smoke**  
 violent opportunities bad migrate uneducated  
 fight **racist jobs Polish drink** build  
 heavy edge drinkers stupid  
 aggressive

(age 14), exemplified the recourse to racism by a Black student at school who called his Polish friend ‘an immigrant’ and challenged him about ‘why is he here and these kinds of questions’. Interestingly, this boy stated that while other students ‘can say something bad about the Polish, we can’t say anything back to them’ – a fear likely linked to the existing tendency of branding Polish people as ‘racist’ (Figure 7 alludes to this discussion).

### 3.4.2 CULTURAL RACISM(S)

Many young people in our study pointed out British people’s lack of knowledge of, or interest in, history and culture of their countries of origin. Hence stereotypes about Eastern European ‘cultures’ centre on narrow and selective representations fuelled by tabloid media that promotes a culturalist discourse as a basis of exclusion (Fox et al., 2012).

Young people believed that the following moral deficiencies and uncivilised behaviour, indiscriminately ascribed to Eastern European migrants, constitute them as inferior: ‘all they do is drink and smoke 24/7’, ‘always drink’, ‘every single Saturday or Friday they’re always drunk’, ‘lazy and

### Fuelled by the tabloid media, common stereotypes about Eastern European ‘cultures’ focus on unrepresentative, narrow and negative tropes.

in some way heavy drinkers’, ‘party all the time’, ‘want to fight’, ‘really aggressive’, ‘violent’, ‘abuse benefits’, ‘jobless’, ‘do things on the edge of law’ and so on.

‘I don’t know, they just think if someone is from Lithuania or Poland, they are hooligans; they drink vodka in the park or something. They start to beat up some guys, or something.’ **Marcin, 16, Polish boy, East Anglia**

While this reputation is disproportionately linked to Eastern European men, some girls in our sample described being subjected to similar framing:

‘Yeah, some people come up to you and ask you for cigarettes because they think, just because you’re Lithuanian that you smoke, but it’s not true.’ **Kristina, 16, Lithuanian girl, London**

Asked whether these experiences of girls in London apply to girls in the East of England, Samantha (age 16) from Lithuania concurred, 'They expect us to be like that'.

'Positive' stereotypes, which many students evoked, positioned Eastern European migrants as 'hardworking'. However, this seemingly positive and socially acceptable stereotype assumes that Eastern European migrants are 'good for work' in undesirable and difficult jobs. As Alicja (age 16) commented, 'British people won't do the kind of work that Polish people would do'. Most commonly, students spoke of being homogenised as 'builders', who work hard but are characterised as 'harsh', 'uneducated', 'swear a lot' and so on. Indeed, some teachers expressed this stereotype about boys' occupational aspirations. Students themselves were annoyed by a gendered expectation within school of the Polish boys to become builders:

**Lola:** No, maybe not different but they have these stereotypes, like, usually of boys, not us –

**Charlie:** Oh, they're going to be builders.

**Lola:** They're going to be builders, yeah.

**Charlie:** All builders [laughter].

In a different school, a group of Polish boys recalled a lesson about 'why is my plumber Polish?' that singled them out and exposed them to bullying:

'Like, obviously my friends after were like, 'Oh you're going to become a plumber.' But in like a joke way, so I didn't take it too seriously.' **Pawel, 16, Polish boy, London**

This exemplifies how schools might reinforce stereotypes and add to the dissemination of racialised public discourses while trying to challenge them.

### 3.4.3 ROMA STUDENTS

Our group discussion with three Slovak girls, identified as Roma, revealed that these students could have unique experiences due to their ethnic origin. Unlike the majority population in East European countries, Roma suffer from widespread prejudice and discrimination. Their motivations for migration to the UK are linked in literature to 'escaping persecution' (Cook et al., 2010).

The three girls we interviewed complained about Slovak people being generally racist and particularly racist towards 'gypsies'. They reported an 'improvement' in their economic situation and status in England. British people were perceived as more tolerant.

'[I]n England, there's more foreign people. So they will get along with them, so it's better to take them as an equal. And, yeah, they take us as an equal too. We are humans.' **Ella, 16, Slovak Roma girl, East Anglia**

However, Roma students experience multiple risk factors in England that could hinder their educational success and chances for mobility. As noted in earlier sections, Roma students speaking Eastern European languages underachieve at Key Stage 4 at the end of compulsory schooling. This is underpinned by teachers' view of Roma Czechs and Slovaks as particularly low-attaining, problematic students, who were classified as those children who are 'unlikely to contribute to a school's image and performance' in examinations league-table (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 169). These students also tend to be from the large and more economically-disadvantaged families. Racial tensions between the majority Slovaks and Roma Slovaks persist in England, undermining the hope of Roma parents for a better and safer environment for children. While denying racism at her school, Lilly described other Roma students' experiences of severe exclusion:

'[I]f they have Roma people and Slovakian people in the same class, they start to bully each other. Basically, even the teachers do that as well. Because, the ones that are Roma, they put them behind in a class, like at the end of the class, they don't really talk to them; they don't really get them involved as well, so they can't get a good education.' **Lilly, 14, Slovak Roma girl, East Anglia**

Reflective of a prevalent stigma of the Roma in Britain, every student from Romania in our study resented the ordinary practice of conflating Romanians with Roma, and to link both to 'stealing' and 'being not interested in getting an education'. A Slovakian mother we interviewed argued that, being taken for a Roma, she experienced difficulties in

enrolling her son into the school of her choice.

Finally, while our Roma participants described some degree of parental support and expectations for children to continue education after the age of 16, the three girls were among the minority of Eastern European students who had no intention to continue into higher education, aspired to vocational careers, or had competing aspirations. As Lilly put it, 'I would really want to be a receptionist, or an artist, like, doing art'. Moreover, the girls placed an emphasis on getting work experience rather than educational qualifications for obtaining desired jobs.

---

**Roma suffer from widespread prejudice and discrimination, and experience multiple risk factors in England that could hinder their educational success and chances for mobility.**

---



## Conclusions

The increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of the UK attracts much public attention and debate among politicians, public service providers and educationalists. According to the latest government figures, more than a quarter of children in English schools are from minority ethnic origins (DfE, 2014b). This represents a continuous upwards trend that shows no sign of declining.

This report focused on one minority ethnic group – Eastern European migrant pupils, who currently represent the fastest growing group in English schools. The aim of the research was to (i) build up a picture of the patterns of attainment of these pupils by drawing on data from the Annual School Census, and (ii) conduct empirical research with students, teachers and parents to extend an understanding of Eastern European pupils' experiences of schooling and what may enable, or prevent, their success in England. Below we bring together some of the findings which our research revealed, and outline recommendations relating to research, policy and practice.

average gap. In some Eastern European language groups, pupils taking free school meals exceed the attainment of those who are not taking free school meals.

- Our findings illuminate a distinct pattern of attainment within the Eastern European language groups. Two language groups – Slovak and Czech speakers – have particularly low attainment. Estonian speakers are the top achieving Eastern European group, although they are very small in number. Russian and Bulgarian speakers are relatively high achieving groups, with Russian speakers performing above the national level in English Baccalaureate.
- A significant number of pupils from underachieving groups of Slovak and Czech speakers may be from a Roma ethnic background. The factors which hinder Eastern European students' educational success and chances for mobility are amplified in the case of Roma students who face multiple inequalities, including racism from other Eastern European migrants and prejudice from teachers in school. Roma families also tend to have lower levels of cultural capital.

## Collecting better student level data would enable a more accurate picture of student numbers, geographic spread and attainment, facilitating understanding of Eastern European students' needs and outcomes.

### 4.1 DIFFERENCES IN ACHIEVEMENT ARE FOUND AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS OF EASTERN EUROPEAN PUPILS

- Pupils who speak Eastern European languages as their mother tongue have seen a steady improvement of their Key Stage 4 results over the last five years, but, as a group, Eastern European pupils still attain below the national average.
- Differences in attainment are found by pupils' language, ethnic group, gender, socio-economic status. In line with national trends, girls tend to outperform boys and pupils taking free school meals (FSM) perform less well than their non-FSM counterparts. However, the attainment gaps between FSM/non-FSM pupils among Eastern European pupil groups are much smaller than the national

### Recommendations

- The government should consider collecting more accurate student level data via the Annual School Census regarding the country of origin for students and their ethnicity. While many languages correspond to particular ethnic groups, there are others ('international' ones, like Russian in our sample) for which knowing a pupil's language does not tell us about their country of origin or ethnicity. There are some examples of useful language/region separation in the current database – for instance, distinguishing between Romanian speakers in Romania and Moldova. More systematically structured data would enable a more accurate picture of student numbers, geographic spread and attainment, facilitating better understanding of Eastern European students' needs and outcomes and facilitating analysis of gender, language, ethnicity and socio-economic circumstances of new migrant pupils' attainment.

- More research needs to be done to provide greater insight into which pupils may be in need of particular support. Findings indicate that Roma students from Eastern European countries are at danger of underperforming and require targeted interventions.
- The NPD analysis conducted in this report has highlighted attainment patterns among Eastern European pupils. The findings raise several areas for further research: (i) why is the attainment gap between FSM/non-FSM pupils so much smaller among Eastern European pupils compared to white majority pupils? (ii) what causes the significant attainment gaps between different linguistic groups and whether language (as a marker of previous circumstances and experiences) has explanatory power in attainment?

#### 4.2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IS KEY FOR EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

- Attainment data show that pupils in all Eastern European language groups perform significantly better in the attainment indicator 5 A\*-C GCSEs which does not include English and mathematics, than in the attainment indicator 5 A\*-C GCSEs *including* English and mathematics.
- Attainment data show that those pupils whose school entry date is within the previous two academic years (Years 10 and 11) record a striking attainment gap in GCSEs and English Baccalaureate compared to pupils whose entry date is earlier. Hence, newly arrived learners are unlikely to reach an appropriate level of English for passing GCSEs.
- Teachers highlight English language as the main problem of Eastern European students, pointing out how English hinders the performance of these students not only in subjects such as English and humanities but notably in mathematics.
- Students feel that their status as an EAL learner could be a barrier to achieving success, with some stating that teachers hold lower academic expectations of EAL students like them and perhaps unwittingly ‘channel’

them into particular subject areas due to their perception of the EAL students’ disadvantaged position.

#### *Recommendations*

- The government might consider providing EAL support funding that continues beyond the early stages to enable schools to continue to close attainment gaps and to build on the progress secured for minority ethnic pupils under the previous government’s funding arrangements (NASUWT, 2012). There is evidence that it takes a minimum of 5 years for bilingual pupils to reach fluency in English (NALDIC, 2012; Demie, 2013).
- Employ more bilingual EAL support staff to facilitate educational engagement of migrant students and offer opportunities for migrant children to continue learning the home language(s) for recognised national examinations. Bilingual staff can also be vital for improving home-school links with migrant parents.
- Help raise students’ academic confidence by supporting awareness of mainstream teachers about issues such as students’ prior educational history and curriculum in the country of origin. Bilingual teaching staff can be a significant resource in this respect too.

#### 4.3 EASTERN EUROPEAN MIGRANT FAMILIES HAVE A STRONG IMPACT ON ASPIRATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATION

- Eastern European parents we interviewed share similar perceptions about the opportunity structure and what is necessary to succeed in England. They see England as a place of opportunities and pragmatically believe in individual efforts to take advantage of the existing opportunities. They tend to see the barriers to achieving aspirations as

---

**EAL support needs to continue beyond the early stages – there is evidence that it takes a minimum of 5 years for bilingual pupils to reach fluency in English.**

---

## Careers professionals need to be adequately prepared and supported to ensure minority ethnic pupils are not inadvertently channelled into stereotypical pathways on the basis of gender, ethnicity and/or social class.

linked to not working hard enough rather than socio-economic inequalities or discrimination. They emphasise the importance of learning English and getting English education, often at the expense of literacy in their native language. These views underpin parents' positive engagement with education in England, trust of teachers and schools.

- Well over half of the students we interviewed state that it is their intention to go to university, and describe being strongly encouraged to do so by their parents.
- Boys in our study were most likely to express aspirations for careers in business and technical fields such as ICT, engineering and construction. Their choices appear to be shaped by their (and their parents') ideas about the 'market value' of different careers, that is, likelihood of securing a job.
- The girls we interviewed were most likely to aspire to stereotypically feminine careers in the arts/humanities, psychology, and beauty sector. They are more likely than boys to ground their aspirations in personal interests and aptitudes. However, their career aspiration discourses are also to a certain degree influenced by the family/community perceptions and the broader economic and social context in which their experiences are shaped.

### *Recommendations*

- Careers education in secondary schools needs to support young people so that they do not automatically fall into stereotypical career decisions. Careers professionals also need to be adequately prepared and supported to ensure young people are not inadvertently channelled into stereotypical pathways on the basis of gender, ethnicity and/or social class.

- More support is needed to help migrant parents to better understand and navigate the education system in England (including but not limited to language support, to ensure that parents' motivations and aspirations are accounted for).

### 4.4 RACISM IS AN ISSUE FOR EASTERN EUROPEAN STUDENTS

- Young people, irrespective of their specific national backgrounds, report a set of detrimental cultural stereotypes applied to Eastern Europeans in England, e.g. as being heavy drinkers and smokers, jobless, aggressive and so on.
- Although they also report a seemingly positive stereotype of Eastern European migrants as being 'hard workers', this stereotype can also have negative consequences, e.g. associating Eastern European young people as predominantly destined for working-class jobs such as being a builder. Some students suggest that teachers may be influenced by this stereotype in their expectations of their career pathways.
- Eastern European students' ability to 'belong' in Britain is undermined by widespread public anti-immigration discourses. Students from Eastern Europe are acutely aware of being seen as a new 'Other' in English schools, both by the white majority and more established minority ethnic groups.
- Parents feel that their home languages are accorded a 'lesser' status in British society and many desire to escape the 'immigrant' label by acquiring an English accent and getting English education and professional jobs for their children. These adaptive strategies can be interpreted as showing how Eastern European groups have to adapt to various forms of racism within society.

### *Recommendations*

- Policy-makers need to encourage more balanced and informed media coverage of EU migration.
- Educators need to ensure that in-service and pre-service teacher training

programmes, regardless of subject area, need to prepare teachers to understand and address new forms of non-colour based racism and encourage them to reflect on issues of social justice and the consequences of making stereotypical assumptions in teaching practice.

- Ways need to be found to provide a space and a means for Eastern European young people to exchange their experiences in a supportive and meaningful way; for example, by engaging students in creative uses of technology and digital media within cultural school framework or lessons such as media studies (de Block et al., 2005). Runnymede Trust's toolkits are a useful resource for such programmes [www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/publications/publications-by-category/education-and-young-people.html](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/publications/publications-by-category/education-and-young-people.html).

---

**Teachers need to be prepared to understand and address new forms of non-colour based racism.**

---

## References

- Allen, W. & Blinder, S. (2013). *Migration in the news: Portrayals of immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in national British newspapers, 2010 to 2012*. Migration Observatory report, COMPAS, University of Oxford.
- Archer, L. & Francis, B. (2006). Challenging classes? Exploring the role of social class within the identities and achievement of British Chinese pupils. *Sociology*, 40(1), 29-49.
- Archer, L. & Francis, B. (2007). *Understanding minority ethnic achievement: The role of race, class, gender and 'success'*. London: Routledge.
- Archer, L. (2008). The impossibility of minority ethnic educational 'success'? An examination of the discourses of teachers and pupils in British secondary schools. *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(1), 89-107.
- Archer, L. (2010). 'We raised it with the Head': the educational practices of minority ethnic, middle class families. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(4), 449-469.
- Archer, L., Hollingworth, S. & Mendick, H. (2010). *Urban youth and schooling*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Arnot, M., Schneider, C., Evans, M., Liu, Y., Welply, O. & Davies-Tut, D. (2014). *School approaches to the education of EAL students: Language development, social integration and achievement*. Cambridge, Bell Educational Trust Ltd.
- Bhatti, G. (2006). Ogbu and the debate on educational achievement: an exploration of the links between education, migration, identity and belonging. *Intercultural Education*, 17(2), 133-146.
- Blinder, S., Ruhs, M. & Vargas-Silva, C. (2011). *Thinking behind the numbers: Understanding public opinion on immigration in Britain*. Migration Observatory Report, COMPAS, University of Oxford.
- Ciupijus, Z. (2011). Mobile Central Eastern Europeans in Britain: Successful European Union citizens and disadvantaged labour migrants? *Work, Employment and Society*, 25(3), 540-550.
- Cook, J., Dwyer, P. & Waite, L. (2010). The experiences of Accession 8 migrants in England: Motivations, work and agency. *International Migration*, 49(2), 54-79.
- Demie, F. (2013). English as an additional language pupils: How long does it take to acquire English fluency? *Language and Education*, 27(1), 59-69.
- DfE (Department for Education) (2014a). *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics in England, 2012-13*. SFR 05/2014. London, Department for Education.
- DfE (Department for Education) (2014b). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2014*. SFR 15/2014. London, Department for Education.
- de Block, L., Buckingham, D. & Banaji, S. (2005). *Children in communication about migration (CHICAM)*. Final report. Institute of Education, University of London.
- Erel, U. (2011). Migrant mothers as citizens. *Citizenship Studies*, 15(6-7), 695-709.
- Fouad, N. & Byars-Winston, A. (2005). Cultural context of career choice: Meta-analysis of race/ethnicity differences. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53(3), 223-233.
- Fox, J.E., Morosanu, L. & Szilassy, E. (2012). The racialization of the new European migration to the UK. *Sociology*, 46(4), 680-695.
- Francis, B. (2013). *Promoting social mobility: What the government can and should be doing*. Association of School and College Leaders.
- Geay, C., McNally, S. & Telhaj, S. (2012). *Non-native speakers of English in the classroom: What are the effects on pupil performance?* Centre for the Economics of Education, LSE.
- Gewirtz, S. (2002). *The managerial school: Post-welfarism and social justice in education*. London: Routledge.
- Hawkins, O. (2014). *Migration statistics*. Library of House of Commons, Social and General Statistics.

- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Lopez Rodriguez, M. (2010). Migration and a quest for 'normalcy'. Polish migrant mothers and the capitalization of meritocratic opportunities in the UK. *Social Identities*, 16(3), 339-358.
- Lymperopoulou, K. & Parameshwaran, L. (2014). *How are ethnic inequalities in education changing?* The Dynamics of Diversity: evidence from the 2011 Census Briefing. Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, University of Manchester.
- McDowell, L. (2008). On the significance of being white: European migrant workers in the British economy in the 1940s and 2000s. In C. Dwyer & C. Bressey (Eds.), *New geographies of race and racism*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 51-64.
- McDowell, L. (2009). Old and new European economic migrants: Whiteness and managed migration policies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(1), 19-36.
- Mirza H.S. & Meeto, V. (2011). *Respecting difference: Good practice in issues of race, faith and culture*. London: Institute of Education.
- NALDIC (2012). *NALDIC Response to School funding reform: Next steps towards a fairer system*. [www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Advocacy/Documents/naldicresponsestofundingreform130512.pdf](http://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Advocacy/Documents/naldicresponsestofundingreform130512.pdf).
- NASUWT (2012). *Ethnic minority achievement*. Research report. Birmingham.
- Ogbu, J. & Simons, H. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 29(2), 155-188.
- Reynolds, G. (2008). *The impacts and experiences of migrant children in UK secondary schools*. Working Paper No. 47. University of Sussex.
- Rienzo, C. (2013). *Characteristics and outcomes of migrants in the UK labour market*. Migration Observatory Briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford.
- Sales, R., Ryan, L., Lopez-Rodriguez, M. & D'Angelo, A. (2008). *Polish pupils in London schools: Opportunities and challenges*. Social Policy Research Centre, Middlesex University.
- Sumption, M. & Somerville, W. (2010). *The UK's new Europeans: Progress and challenges five years after accession*. Policy Report, Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Tereshchenko, A. & Archer, L. (2014). Identity projects in complementary and mainstream schools: The views of Albanian and Bulgarian students in England. *Research Papers in Education* (iFirst).
- Thomas, E. (2012). Beyond the culture of exclusion: Using Critical Race Theory to examine the perceptions of British 'minority ethnic' and Eastern European 'immigrant' young people in English schools. *Intercultural Education*, 23(6), 501-511.
- Valkanova, Y. (2009). Being a Rara Avis: The educational experiences of Bulgarian children in schools in London. In J. Eade & Y. Valkanova (Eds.), *Accession and migration: Changing policy, society and culture in an enlarged Europe*. Farnham: Ashgate, 133-142.
- Vargas-Silva, C. (2014). *Long-term international migration flows to and from the UK*. Migration Observatory Briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford.
- Vincent, C. & Ball, S. (2006). *Middle-class parents and their children*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. & Gillborn, D. (2012). Being strategic, being watchful, being determined: Black middle-class parents and schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 33(3), 337-354.
- White, A. (2011). *Polish families and migration since EU Accession*. Bristol: Policy Press.





DESIGN & PRODUCTION  
Susen Vural Design  
[www.susenvural.com](http://www.susenvural.com)  
Approved by  
[brand@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:brand@kcl.ac.uk)  
December 2014