RISE

CLASS CEILING

A Review of Working Class Participation in the Arts
Across Greater Manchester

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CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been said in recent years about the collapse of social mobility in the arts. Reports have shown that the privately educated are over represented and the creative industries are becoming increasingly elitist. Top selling musicians are six times more likely than the public to have attended private schools, BAFTA nominated actors are five times more likely to have done so[1] and only eight percent of TV and radio workers are from working class backgrounds[2]. Across the country in recording studios, theatres, TV production hubs, art galleries, dance companies and major venues, working class creatives are being squeezed out.

1. A Class Act, November 2024, The Sutton Trust
2. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre report, May 2024

This class crisis has the potential to seriously harm a crucial part of the UK economy and erase people's experiences from our national story. But it also poses a unique threat to Greater Manchester.

For a region famed for its working class culture, it presents an existential threat. Because if the outpouring of talent that has long fertilised Manchester begins to dry up, then the city is at risk of losing its identity.

Imagine our region stripped of the talents of Peter Kay, Sophie Willan, Caroline Aherne and the Gallagher brothers. Think what it would be like without the music of Aitch, Buzzcocks, New Order, The Stone Roses and The Verve. Or if the stories of Lemn Sissay, John Cooper Clarke and Jeanette Winterson were never told.

Without this unique cultural energy, our region would be much greyer, far less vibrant and indistinguishable from anywhere else. It could well become just another bland city.

And it's this spirit of urgency that drives the report before you.

For while our region's creativity has long been the secret ingredient driving Manchester's success, it's a formula that's no longer guaranteed. Over 20-years ago, when Manchester topped Richard Florida's Boho Index and was crowned the most creative place in the UK, urban theorists predicted that economic growth would follow. Florida's theory was that culturally vibrant areas attracted a bigger talent pool of well-qualified, intelligent creative people, which acted as a driving force for economic development. This has indeed come to pass. Over the last decade Manchester has been consistently named the UK's fastest growing city region.

But as the lived experiences of those creatives we engaged with in this report demonstrate, the foundations which supported this growth are crumbling.

In focus groups, one to one interviews and through surveys, we heard multiple stories of poor pay, exploitation and an absence of affordable studio and rehearsal space forcing artists to give up. It all pointed to a collapsing ecosystem that was no longer able to properly nurture working class talent and was instead pushing it further to the margins.

Bit by bit, the rungs that helped a galaxy of working class talent climb to the top in years gone by, have been kicked out of the ladder. Bursaries, grants, affordable space, grassroots venues and a commissioning mindset that championed working class talent are all under threat.

Since the pandemic, the North West has seen the highest number of permanent grassroots music venue closures in the UK[3]. Arts Council core funding has been reduced by nearly £124million since 2011, local government arts and culture cuts have been severe, affordable rehearsal spaces are increasingly scarce and a recent Music Producers Guild survey shows that 50% of recording studios are considering closure within the next 12 months due to rising costs[4].

There are many more gloomy metrics that show the reduction in creative opportunities. But while this report wishes to shine a harsh light on the threats to our region's cultural output, we also wish to highlight the efforts of the unsung heroes seeking to rebuild our cultural foundations and repair the rungs on ladders of opportunity. These speak not just for our region but creatives everywhere, and it's our hope that lessons from this inquiry are replicated throughout the country and that its findings and recommendations, with more research, could form the basis of a national response.

3. North West Suffers Most Music Closures, Arts Professional, August 2024
https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/north-west-suffers-most-music-venue-closures
4. Music Producers Guild News, October 2025
https://mpg.org.uk/news/call-for-recording-studios-to-be-recognised/

Over the last six months we have engaged with hundreds of working class artists from a wide range of creative disciplines. And we've also spoken to countless movers and shakers, leaders and pioneers who are fighting to protect Manchester's creative sector, spread opportunity and ensure it still remains open to people of all backgrounds.

Their work is all the more inspiring given the funding constraints and tough economic conditions they are operating in. (Recent research by the Music Venues Trust, for example, found that over a third of all venue operators are no longer paying themselves at all and many are using a second job to keep the venue open.[5]) Their work is also highly innovative and typical of our region's ambition and can-do attitude.

This attitude has long served our region, innovating where others lag behind. From being the birthplace of female suffrage, the world's first industrial city, inventing the first computer, creating the co-operative movement and introducing Britain's first public lending library, we've long been a region of firsts.

Now, as entrenched inequality and exclusion look set to shape the country's cultural output, we must look to achieve another first – the first local plan to successfully remove the barriers to entry, which hold back working class talent from succeeding in the arts. If successful, then we will no longer have to lean so heavily on cultural nostalgia and will be able to confidently create a bright future where all talent has the opportunity to shine.

The North West has the highest number of permanent grassroots music venues in the UK

Of recording studios are considering closure within the next 12 months

Only eight per cent of TV and radio workers are from working class backgrounds

5. Rise of the Supertour leaves small venues struggling. The Telegraph, December 2025
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2025/12/26/rise-of-the-supertour-leaves-small-venues-struggling/

Britain's creative industries shape how the country sees itself. They set tastes, tell stories and define value. Yet access to these industries remains unequal. Class still decides who gets in, who stays and who leads.

This report focuses on the class ceiling facing working class people in creative work. It draws on lived experience, data and evidence from across the sector. It shows how low pay, unpaid work, informal hiring and closed networks block talent. These barriers are not accidental. They are built into how the system works.

For years, the sector has relied on diversity messaging. The language has improved. The outcomes have not. Entry routes still depend on who you know. Early roles still pay too little to live on. Progression still favours those who can absorb risk. Many people leave before their careers begin.

Class intersects with disability, race, gender, religion and caring duties. The impact compounds. A working-class person faces higher costs, fewer roles and weaker networks. Accent, background and education still shape judgement. These factors affect hiring, pay and promotion.

This report sets out a clear plan for change. It puts class at the centre of inclusion. It calls for published socio-economic data, transparent pay and firm targets. It ends unpaid work and shows how more permanent roles can be created. As a result, more people will be provided security – not just in work, but in life – so they can get a mortgage, raise a family and, in retirement, receive a pension. It replaces informal hiring with open recruitment and structured interviews. It fixes progression by making advancement clear and funded.

The report spreads power beyond London. It backs regional hubs with real authority. It moves decision making closer to communities. It makes inclusion part of daily work, not a side project. It gives communities a voice in shaping pipelines and funding.

One intervention matters most. A living wage for all early roles. This step widens access, reduces early exits and removes exploitation. It levels the gap between large and small organisations. It allows people to stay long enough to build careers. Affordability should not decide who belongs.

The report also looks earlier. It supports arts education, paid work experience and visible pathways. It speaks to families as well as young people. It treats creative work as skilled labour with value.

Change requires choice. The sector can protect structures that exclude the working class, disabled, minority and regional talent. Or it can build a system where talent is recognised, paid and promoted.

This report asks leaders to act. Shift the economics. Shift access. Shift power. The cost of delay is clear. Another generation will leave.

Nazir Afzal OBE and Avis Gilmore
Co-Chairs, Independent Inquiry, Class Ceiling

Class based discrimination is commonplace

51% of respondents to our survey said they had experienced differential treatment, bullying, harassment or bias based on social class or perceived social class.

Working class artists don't see their lived experiences represented in the arts

Only 17.8% of respondents to our survey said they saw their lived experiences widely represented in the art form they practice.

Working class artists struggle with a lack of connections and an understanding of how the industry works

Only 21.9% of respondents to our survey said they personally knew anyone working in the arts when they were growing up. We also gathered qualitative data showing that young people from working class backgrounds had limited knowledge of routes into creative employment. The Government's current campaign of trying to demystify creative jobs for young people is very much needed to begin to address this.[6]

Low pay is a huge barrier preventing working classes from seeking a career in the arts

Less than half of our survey respondents (43.6%) said they earned enough to make a living – and many required second jobs to get by.

The Co-op has committed to leading a campaign to significantly boost creative apprenticeship numbers across Greater Manchester

The number of creative apprenticeships being offered across the country and in Greater Manchester remains critically low. In response to what is fast becoming an emergency, and on the back of this report, the Co-op has pledged to lead a major apprenticeship drive to encourage large employers to donate the apprenticeship levy share in order to increase creative opportunities for young people across our region.

The number of Key Stage 3 pupils doing creative subjects is increasing, but GCSE take-up is stagnant. This has been a problem since 2011

After issuing FOI requests to every school in Greater Manchester delivering education for Key Stage 3 and 5 year students, our sample showed that over the last 10-years the number of young people taking arts GCSEs is broadly stagnant.

There are lots of great initiatives being delivered across Greater Manchester to increase working class participation in the arts – but they need supporting; best practice needs to be shared and scaled up to reach more people

From initiatives to convert empty buildings into affordable studio space, providing access riders to support working class artists, gifting free tickets to school pupils, working class leadership programmes, mentoring schemes and young music promoters establishing fairer payment models, there is no shortage of brilliant work being carried out across our region to break down barriers.

6. New campaign to demystify creative jobs for young people, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, October 2025 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-campaign-to-demystify-creative-jobs-for-young-people

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among the telling conversations we held with those who contributed to this review, one in particular stood out. It was with a headteacher in Bolton who explained to us how state schools had become trapped in a "curriculum strait jacket". Bemoaning the fact that children were pushed towards core subjects and that the arts were seen as having a lower value, he said a better balance needed to be struck because denying kids access to creative subjects meant that "too many kids hate school".

“Exposure is something that kills you,” complained one musician. “It’s not something that pays the bills.”

Even with the removal of the EBacc, a suite of recommended subjects for students to take at GCSE which excluded arts subjects, he said there were still other accountability measures that marginalised creative subjects. He went on to describe a deep sense of alienation among pupils, expressing sadness at how bad behaviour, suspensions and truancy were increasing. “It’s the worst I can remember,” he concluded. “If they were encouraged to do more creative subjects, it would be better for the country.”

Other teachers backed this view. One said we should be ashamed at how few working class children were being exposed to cultural experiences and noted that some children did not understand GCSE questions with a middle class bias as a result. One question, which has now been removed from maths papers following guidance by the regulator, asked pupils to make a calculation on how many theatre seats were being occupied when people sat either in the circle or the stalls. Pupils would have needed to understand that the circle and stalls are different areas of the theatre to answer correctly.

This disaffection was certainly not unique to schools. We found it in conversations with young musicians, writers and freelance art workers. We heard it in the voices of those who had been forced to move from Manchester to London in order to pursue an arts career. And we recognised it in young adults desperately trying to find an apprenticeship to get a foothold in a creative career.

In a region brimming with creative talent, we found a system that was repeatedly failing people of all ages.

And if signs of a systemic breakdown were first evident at school, the hurdles just kept getting higher. For those trying to break into a creative career or make a living out of their art, payment was a massive issue. Low paid jobs, zero hours contracts and short hours characterise the sector. Similarly, artists struggled with late and low payments, and were often pressurised to perform for free. Musicians frequently spoke about being offered “exposure” as a substitute for payment. “Exposure is something that kills you,” complained one musician. “It’s not something that pays the bills.”

It wasn’t just structural unfairness, however, holding back working class talent. They also had to contend with prejudice. We heard from young working class people going to university and being mocked by other students for their accent and lack of wealth. “One student shouted ‘poor!’ in my face,” recounted a young artist. Others spoke of having their voice mimicked and being told they sounded “thick” for having a northern accent. Many spoke of feeling ‘othered’ in the workplace and not fitting in. A good number left to ‘freelance’ as a result.

“I had finally achieved my dream of working for a major national arts organisation but the ‘othering’ I experienced eventually forced me to leave my job and almost leave the arts,” recalled one theatre producer on her time working in London. “Mocking my background, describing the entire north of England as ‘the slums,’ being offered voice training to rid me of my strong accent…I experienced it all and after a while it really affected my confidence, and my happiness.”

Some argued that this prejudice extended to commissioning, suggesting there was a bias against working class content. Certainly, research suggests that the makeup of leadership in the arts is far from diverse. And Ofcom has stated that commissioners should be empowered to achieve greater equality of opportunities. [7]Most of the people we spoke to argued there was still a long way to go to achieve this.

“The pool of people that work in TV are achingly middle class and they simply don’t understand working class culture,” explained one screenwriter. “You can be a fantastic writer, win awards and create lots of original material but they won’t give you the time of day. It’s not a meritocracy; it’s a mirrortocracy. The commissions go to people who are similar to those in charge. They want to see what they think reflects them.”

One TV commissioner, working for a major broadcaster, agreed this was often the case, but added that production companies also had to bear responsibility for shunning working class talent. “A lot of the commissioners are white, middle aged and middle class,” she admitted. “They only consider EDI through the lens of protected characteristics and don’t consider class at all. But it’s not just broadcasters who are failing on this. We used to produce lots of content in house, and we now work with production companies that don’t have to be held to the same standards that we do. So, they use their networks to produce content and it invariably ends up being their mates.”

Other hurdles included a lack of affordable space and the loss of grants, bursaries and other types of funding, particularly that which covers transport costs. All this evidence contributed to the sense of a system chronically failing many of our region’s communities and a vanishing support structure that had benefited others in years gone by.

“When I started out, I was able to access lots of small bursaries and grants,” explained one writer. “I had train tickets and accommodation paid for and I even remember going on school trips to see plays. All this small stuff was so important and I wouldn’t have been able to make a career without it.”

There’s a tendency in reviews of this nature to focus solely on the big structural changes that are needed to begin ambitious transformation. And there are certainly a number of these – most notably around pay, affordability and the need for EDI strategies to firmly recognise class and socioeconomic background. But we should also not lose sight of the smaller things like micro grants, access riders and fostering the conditions that create informal networks and build confidence.

For a region known for its self-assurance and swagger, it might sound somewhat counterintuitive to talk about needing to increase confidence levels. But this was a strong issue among all artists we spoke to from young filmmakers to prize winning playwrights and BAFTA and Emmy winning screenwriters.

“I am made aware all the time that I am an anomaly in my profession,” explained an award winning and acclaimed Manchester-based playwright, whose plays have been translated and staged widely across the world. “The vast majority of playwrights and directors come from much more privileged backgrounds; most went to private school and they are mostly based in London. Some of these people are now close friends but what is interesting and painful to me is that people who have been to a private school don’t realise that they can speak a language that people who didn’t can’t. It’s the language of easy confidence. It’s the language

It’s not a meritocracy; it’s a mirrortocracy. The commissions go to people who are similar to those in charge. They want to see what they think reflects them.

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in TV and Radio, Ofcom 2023 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/diversity-and-equality/reports/2023/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-broadcasting-2022-23?v=330593

People who have been to a private school don't realise that they can speak a language that people who didn't can't. It's the language of easy confidence. It's the language of 'I'm meant to be in this room, I deserve to be in this room and I have things to say that are worth listening to'. If you grow up where I did, that's just not how you feel.

of 'I'm meant to be in this room, I deserve to be in this room and I have things to say that are worth listening to'. If you grow up where I did, that's just not how you feel. And even though now I'm very well read and have worked for a long time and I know how to do my job, the first 20 minutes of a lot of meetings I have are very awkward because I don't have anything in common with them."

A further insight into the confidence challenges facing working class artists trying to break into sectors dominated by those with more privilege came from a BAFTA and Emmy winning screenwriter and producer, who left school at 16 and now writes regularly for Netflix. In many ways it returns to our conversation with the Bolton headteacher and his complaint over how children are denied an understanding of the creative opportunities out there.

"I used to look at jobs in TV and wonder what special skills you would need to be a producer," he said. "It sounded really magical to me and I had no idea what it entailed. It was the equivalent of dreaming to be a space man. It just seemed so far off. But I was lucky in that people helped me and showed me it wasn't that complicated after all. There must be kids like me that want to break into radio, TV and theatre. But unless someone shows them it's possible, how on earth are they going to get in?"

Crediting many of the leading lights of Manchester TV at the time (notably Paul Abbott and Nicola Shindler) for supporting him and giving a "nobody writer" a chance, he says today's culture is too cautious and unadventurous, and it needs to embrace risk taking.

Like many of the successes we spoke to working in the arts, he spoke passionately about wanting to champion others. For policymakers, funders and the leaders of arts and cultural institutions in our region, this is arguably the key challenge of our review: the need to show people it's possible.

We stand on the shoulders of a wealth of research demonstrating that too many working class people think the arts 'are not for me'. Changing this is not going to be easy, but the answer ultimately lies in something that's an essential part of our region's culture: helping people and lifting others up.

From stronger sponsorship and mentoring to more innovative public-private partnerships, a deeper collaboration is needed. With a strong track record of joint working across our region, it's not surprising that we clearly saw there was an appetite to do this.

Whether it was the Co-op committing to campaign to increase creative apprenticeships by getting large employers to donate the apprenticeship levy, Salford University committing to develop a culture Industry leadership programme and qualification aimed at working class creatives or major venues expressing an interest in gifting tickets to working class kids, there was a real thirst to develop partnerships that make a difference.

There is no doubt that the UK is currently overseeing a decline in working class representation and a collapse in social mobility in the arts. Our region is not immune to this – but, as this report shows, Greater Manchester is uniquely placed to lead a fight back and begin smashing the barriers.

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Manchester City Council's Cultural Strategy 2024-2034 sets out a bold ambition to be the UK's most culturally democratic city, engaging a greater number and diversity of people across Greater Manchester. It also recognises that this "is a conversation that needs to continue, so that we have a shared vision of what cultural democracy in Manchester looks like."

It's a conversation that we found many were keen to passionately engage in and share forthright views.

In continuing this discussion, we have identified the following as key barriers holding back working class talent and preventing full participation in the arts across our region.

CLASS BASED DISCRIMINATION

While equalities legislation has done much to protect individuals from discrimination against protected characteristics such as race, sexual orientation or religion, there is nothing in UK law to prevent class discrimination. This means that people can be denied opportunities on account of their accent, postcode or any other indicator of their socio-economic status. Our research shows that creatives have frequently experienced this prejudice and a number of prominent artists have recently spoken out about how classism is the last acceptable prejudice in British society. Comedian Ricky Gervais has noted that the only group you can mock now is the working class[8]. While the acclaimed actor Stephen Graham argues that large parts of Britain are misrepresented by television, which "treats the working class like an art project. It's very condescending".[9]

In our survey, 51 per cent of respondents said they had experienced differential treatment, bullying, harassment or bias based on social class or perceived social class. Many spoke of being mocked for having a distinct northern accent with employers making assumptions about their experiences, background and intelligence.

Others spoke of being bullied for their background, having their predicted grades lowered because of where they lived, being told they were 'thick' because of their accent and struggling to connect with others in senior positions because of a lack of shared social capital and/or similar experiences.

In focus groups, many spoke of feeling excluded in the workplace or at university due to cultural mores that are more familiar to middle and upper-class individuals and key decisions being made by those lacking diversity of perspectives and life experiences. Research by Creative Manchester further supports this by highlighting how many working class creatives feel compelled to go freelance because they cannot fit in and do not feel a sense of belonging in the workplace.

To properly convey some of the lived experiences expressed in our engagement, we have included a sample of representative feedback below.

"As someone who gained scholarship into private academy and then into main professional world of dance. There was a lot of bullying and being excluded."

"I've had my accent mocked; had friends' parents offer me food, assuming my family couldn't feed me; been made fun of for qualifying for free school meals, wearing hand-me-downs and not having a phone. People assumed stereotypes of my family because we grew up in a council home; people in university were shocked I was in higher education given my family's social class."

"Going to an art school, I was consistently treated differently due to my class. One of my first memories of university was walking into the foyer, and another student shouted 'POOR!' in my face. I was laughed at for my accent, I was judged for not wearing designer clothing, I was mocked for not going to a private school. It is almost comical how cliched the experience truly was. My fellow students thought 'the North' was amusing. One student thought universal credit was a game show. Every single thing we did required a lot of money which I simply did not have, and if you brought up the finance gap, you were told you were just not trying hard enough. The other students started our degree with a knowledge of Adobe creative suite which I had never had access to, which made our work very different. I had to teach myself most of the work, just because my school couldn't afford Photoshop. This is ridiculous, especially on a maximum loan. It sets working class students back. Jobs were also allocated based on family connections, which made it so difficult to get a start in the arts when you don't know anyone already in the industry. No, my parent does not run a publishers, or a film studio... this shouldn't be a barrier, but amazingly in 2025, it is. My university gave talks on how to use your family to your advantage, which left me isolated, and quite frankly, angry. I wanted to learn how to make professional connections and how to write a CV, not how to approach a great uncle. The class gap in the arts is staggering, but it has made me even more determined to keep going."

"In my 20s, I wanted to work in art galleries in London and came up against bias... I found in interviews people would mimic my accent. I could tell I wasn't dressed right. In one interview the feedback was to be 'less myself'. In another it was clear that they wanted someone with an Oxbridge background. I now work in academia, which has its class problems and barriers, but the arts was ten times worse."

"My predicted grades at A Level were based on where I lived. Despite getting A, A and B grades at GCSE, my A level predicted grades were C and D. My history teacher explicitly told me this was because where I was from."*

"I worked in London for a quango and they all thought I was thick because I had an accent. My boss told me in supervision."

"I work at a public art gallery part time as a visitor assistant. Most of the office staff and management (curators/leaning team, middle and higher management) are middle class or upper middle class. They often make assumptions about my knowledge and education. I am often talked down to as are many of my visitor team colleagues, who are, for the most part, from a similar background to myself."

"I'm a classical pianist. I find only peers with parents in the sector or money to pay get opportunities for concertos, recording or even the bigger recitals with concert clubs. Until I was eight, I was on free school meals and we were on tax credits until I was 14. I have no connections to help me and I get ignored or told people with connections are ahead of me."

"I worked hard to get into university and chose architecture to study because of my talent in art. When I then began struggling to connect with the tutors and the course, I started to see vast differences in our upbringings and it felt like a clash of classes. That struggle to connect also meant that the tutors couldn't connect with my art, my work or my motivations for both and as such I lost all connection to the course and ultimately didn't graduate."

The LSE, TUC and the Co-op are among those calling for a change in the law to address class based discrimination. They wish to see socioeconomic background become the tenth protected characteristic under the 2010 Equalities Act.

AFFORDABLE SPACE

"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us" – Sir Winston Churchill, Member of Parliament for Manchester North West (1906 – 1908) and Oldham (1900 – 1906)

There is an emerging body of research highlighting the need to support affordable space to prevent working class artists from being denied

My university gave talks on how to use your family to your advantage, which left me isolated, and quite frankly, angry. I wanted to learn how to make professional connections and how to write a CV, not how to approach a great uncle.

8. The Times: Ricky Gervais: the only group you can mock now is the working class
https://www.thetimes.com/culture/comedy/article/ricky-gervais-this-cultural-life-working-class-9nl77cwp6
9. The Guardian: Stephen Graham: the working class mixed race kid who cares deeply about the work
https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/mar/28/stephen-graham-working-class-mixed-race-kid-cares-deeply-about-work

We currently have a waiting list of over 300 artists who are desperate for affordable space.

opportunities to engage in the arts. In 2014, a study commissioned by the Mayor of London[10] highlighted how gentrification and rising rents were set to result in as many as 3,500 artists in the capital losing their places of work in the next five years. This grim prophecy has become a reality and according to London's Affordable Artists Studio Network, the average studio space has more than halved since 2020. A survey carried out in 2023 by the London studio charity Acme found that nearly one in three artists doubted they would be able to continue working professionally in five years' time.[11]

In Manchester a similar crisis is brewing. Across the region, many arts venues, mills and rehearsal spaces have been converted to flats and housing. This is creating a lack of affordable space for artists, driven by rising demand, property development and changing land use, which is pricing creatives out. There is emerging best practice to tackle this in some cities across the world – notably Toronto where they have created a Community Land Trust and collaborated with private developers and non-profit organisations to prioritise affordable arts studios by leasing co-owned spaces below market rate. In Manchester efforts have been introduced to try and address this – but more affordable space is sorely needed.

Investment by Manchester City Council and HOME's funders, donors and supporters has helped create an artist development hub on three arches on Whitworth Street West, which is helping provide artists and creative freelancers with free space. There is also good work in Rochdale, through Rochdale Creates, which is repurposing vacant buildings into studios. Similarly, the Royal Exchange Theatre offers some free rehearsal space. But these projects tend to have waiting lists and as John Macaulay from GRIT Studios, a Community Interest Company that regenerates spaces for artists, across Greater Manchester explains, there is a growing number of artists at risk of being pushed out of the region.

"We currently have a waiting list of over 300 artists who are desperate for affordable space," he says. "It's been gradually increasing and some just can't afford to stay here anymore. It's really important that we retain our creative talent and don't lose it to other areas."

FEWER THAN 1% OF ALL NEW APPRENTICESHIP STARTS ARE IN THE CREATIVE SECTOR

When Co-op Live advertised five apprenticeships last year offering young people the chance to kickstart their career at Manchester's newest and the UK's largest indoor music arena, the response they received reflected the huge desire among young people to get a foothold in the sector. In total they received 2,304 applications – around 460 per role – and they targeted people living within a 10-mile radius of the arena, covering wards with some of the highest unemployment rates in Manchester.

The fact that this is one of relatively few examples of creative apprenticeships being offered in Greater Manchester is a sad indictment of the fact that only 0.5% of all new apprenticeship starts are in the creative sector. This persistent underrepresentation of creative apprenticeships not only threatens to derail the sector's future growth but will also continue to ensure that stark inequalities in the workforce continue.

10. Artists' Workplace Study. Mayor of London 2014
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/artists_workspace_study_september2014_reva_web.pdf
11. 'My studio costs half my income': can British art survive soaring rents and property developers?, Guardian 2024
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/jun/24/studio-costs-half-income-can-british-art-survive-soaring-rents-property-developers

It was also highlighted as a significant barrier preventing working class kids from getting a foothold in the sector.

"Trying to find an arts/creative apprenticeship is almost impossible," one young person told us in a focus group. "It's so hard to get a break and if you don't know anyone you just feel you're banging your head against a wall."

It is baffling that a sector worth more than the aerospace, automative, life sciences and oil and gas sectors combined continues to consistently record among the lowest number of apprenticeship starts compared to other major UK industries.

In all engagement activities, we heard a constant drumbeat of feedback around the need for apprenticeships. "You have to give people hope," one person noted. "Let young people at school see that a career is possible right on their doorstep. At the BBC, ITV, theatres and art centres such as Home. Don't make them move away. Offer internships, apprenticeships. Make sure we are building a future for young people!"

YOUNG PEOPLE NOT BEING EXPOSED TO ARTS AND CULTURE

We hosted several focus groups with young artists and musicians, and asked all participants if their creative passions had been ignited at school. On every occasion, participants told us that they had found their way into the arts outside of school. Many were particularly dismissive of the creative subjects on offer at school. "At school I was offered the chance to play the recorder or glockenspiel in music and it was rubbish," one young person told us. "I borrowed a guitar from a mate and got into music that way."

This 'creativity crisis' in schools is years in the making, as there has been a steep reduction in arts provision over the last decade.

We sent an FOI request to every school in Greater Manchester delivering education for Key Stage 3 and 5 year students, asking for figures on students studying arts GCSEs over the last 10-years. Findings showed that the number of students taking creative subjects has grown considerably since 2019 in KS3 but when there is choice introduced, and students have to pick GCSEs, take up is broadly stagnant. This has been a problem for a decade and the performative arts, drama and music figures are largely reflective of the national trend.[12]

Much of this goes back to the government's creation of a new EBacc in 2011, which prioritised a core group of subjects. Arts and culture were not considered part of these core GCSE subjects and this consequently saw a 42% decline in GCSE arts entries between 2010 and 2024. This had a knock on impact in a reduction of drama, music and art teachers, significantly reducing the number of portfolio options available to creatives who often used part time teaching roles to supplement wider creative professional careers.

In November 2025, a new government accepted proposals to scrap this EBacc and begin to reintroduce arts subjects back into the curriculum. Pressure on secondary schools to fit the curriculum into a school term has also given less flexibility for extra-curricular visits to arts and cultural institutions. Similar pressure on primary education is now impacting on opportunities for younger children. Furthermore, the cost of hiring buses has increased 25%-40% due to rising costs for fuel, wages, insurance, parts and in some cities clean air policies.

Coupled with budget challenges for schools, this means that many can no longer afford to hire transport for classes to visit the local art gallery, museum or theatre. These costs can be passed on to parents but as they rise, a two tier system of access to arts provision through schools may emerge. In an effort to avoid this, some schools are simply no longer providing these extra-curricular excursions.

We are now at a point where too many kids hate school and they are just not enjoying learning. It's the reason why there is so much truancy in school, exclusions, suspensions and bad behaviour. It's the worst I can remember. If these kids were encouraged to do more creative subjects, it would be better for the country.

For children accessing cultural provision outside of education, this is very much reliant on family cultural habits. Both time and financial pressures on working class families mean that carving out space for culture may not be a priority. If your household doesn't have access to a car, or disposable income to spend on tickets and transport, it is unlikely that these children will be able to access these opportunities.

Furthermore, despite many museums and galleries being free to enter, research shows that young working class people frequently find them remote or intimidating spaces and do not use them. If you do not form the habitual confidence of walking into a gallery or museum and knowing you belong there, it is extremely unlikely your children will form these habits themselves. This 'not for the likes of us' approach is also translated across other parts of society including access to sports facilities and engagement with political processes such as voting. This often means that working class children are simply unaware of the professional opportunities in the arts and culture sector, as they were not brought up as consumers of creativity and heritage.

To further explore this theme and understand more about the challenges within schools, we spoke to teachers and heads at a number of schools and found they too shared a keen frustration at the decline in people taking arts subjects at GCSE and A level over the last 10-years. Despite the current government's removal of the EBacc, a suite of recommended subjects to take at GCSE which excluded all arts subjects, many still felt that it was an uphill battle to ensure the arts were properly valued.

Among the other contributory issues they highlighted, which devalued the arts in schools, were funding cuts, teacher shortages and performance measures such as Progress 8, which weights league tables towards traditional academic areas.

"Over the last decade I've seen fewer pupils able to take creative subjects and it's going to take a long time to reverse this," explained one headteacher at a school in Bolton. "The removal of the EBacc is a good thing but it's not something that schools are talking about and parents don't know about it either. The arts have been systematically devalued for a long time and we've still got Progress 8. As long as we're constantly driving kids to do triple science and ignoring the creative subjects, we are letting pupils down. There are lots of kids who really value creative subjects and the fact that schools are in a curriculum strain jacket means some people just aren't able to get the best out of their education."

He went on to argue that a better balance needed to be struck between creative subjects and analytical and fact based learning. "We are now at a point where too many kids hate school and they are just not enjoying learning. It's the reason why there is so much truancy in school, exclusions, suspensions and bad behaviour. It's the worst I can remember. If these kids were encouraged to do more creative subjects, it would be better for the country."

12. Decline in GCSE subjects slows, Arts Professional, as some subjects see growth in uptake 2025
https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/decline-in-gcse-arts-entries-slows-as-some-subjects-see-growth-in-uptake

He contrasted his experiences working in a state school in North Manchester to that of a private school in North London, where he said he'd observed kids "doing loads of creative stuff" in their own theatre. They do masterclasses and workshops with industry specialists, he added, and get students work experience placements on Les Misérables Concert production. "When you look at what these schools offer, you can see why the people who go there dominate the arts," he said." They have a massive head start."

Another teacher we spoke to added that the creativity crisis in schools was underpinned by the fact that too many working class children were simply not being exposed to cultural experiences. "Going to the theatre or seeing live music should be a normal part of childhood," she said. "But for some kids it's an alien experience and this is deeply worrying." The Cultural Learning Alliance, a charity which champions a right to arts and culture for every child, has confirmed this, with their research identifying an "arts entitlement gap".[13] This relates to GCSE entries in arts subjects in the most deprived areas compared to the most affluent. It also notes that independent school pupils have privileged access to after school arts and music activities, while students eligible for free school meals are far less likely to access such activities. It concludes by calling for a minimum four hour arts entitlement within the school week and "an emphasis on a rounded learning experience for the personal development and wellbeing of 'the whole child'." [14]

LOW PAY AND SHORT TERM OR ON DEMAND ROLES

The fact that less than half of our survey respondents (43.6%) said they earned enough to make a living, with many noting that they required second jobs to get by, should sound alarm bells across the sector. In all art forms, we found low pay was a critical problem and many people working on the sector were subsidised by their partners or parents. In Greater Manchester, as is the case across the rest of the country, this means working class creatives face a huge structural disadvantage, which is fast making the sector a 'playground for the privileged'. Unpaid internships, hidden costs for training, such as auditions, financial instability and few permanent roles only compound the issue.

In interviews, survey responses and focus groups, this was an issue that came up repeatedly. A measure of the feedback we received is included below.

"Pay is a major issue (which in turn relates to funding). Without better funding and better pay, low wages will continue to proliferate and people coming into the sector will either accept low-pay for the love of the work, or will depend on secondary sources of income (bank of mum and dad). Dependence on other sources of income makes it difficult for people from lower socioeconomic groups to join and stay in the arts."

"The wages need looking at. I worked in the arts for years and the wages are incredibly low, with year on year well below average pay increases. They remain low with hardly any movement. There are people with high stress, high responsibility positions being paid the real living wage with virtually no chance to improve that much compared to other industries. If you've not got the safety net of inheritance coming to you at some point (parents' or grandparents' houses potentially being passed down to you) or a large family home meaning you can comfortably live with your parents into adulthood and maintain any sort of privacy, then you're going to have to make some tough decisions in order to have any financial security as you age. I know so many talented working class people who left the arts (across all of the practises/arts admin/technical) to work in accounting, tech etc because they couldn't afford to stay. What's happened is that there is no longer much difference between the entry level wage (real wage at many places) and management roles (below Director/executive level). This leads to a difference of maybe 5K before tax/NI/student loan between an entry level role with no responsibility (or need for experience) and a management role with high expectations of experience and responsibility. It's patchy from organisation to organisation - a management role in one place could pay the same wage as an entry level job at a local authority venue. Within those local authority venues there isn't much difference in pay for the high experience roles either, though things are better and at least the pay increases keep up better with inflation. The people I know who stayed, though not all, either have family wealth or a high earning, non-arts working spouse."

"Fundamentally jobs just need to pay more and rent needs to come down. You need to live in the city to have a good shot at a creative career but no one can afford to live there and jobs don't pay enough to cover rent."

"We need to pay artists, and creative professionals in organisations fairly but competitively when compared to other industries. The main concern with working class guardians discouraging young people from a creative career is 'will you be able to make money?' and 'how will you live on X wage?'. People are discouraged from taking the arts seriously generally, let alone as a potential profession. We're not seen as a 'safe' choice. It's our responsibility to showcase that creative careers are viable full-time or part time careers financially and be proud about it."

"I do not think that junior levels in the arts are paid enough to thrive. Although I am paid at the real living wage before tax and national insurance, after that is deducted, I am below it. I am barely earning enough to do more than pay for rent, bills and food and cannot afford a car or to save for future plans."

This is not a problem unique to Greater Manchester, though. An Arts Pay survey from 2025[15] found that

If you've not got the safety net of inheritance coming to you at some point (parents' or grandparents' houses potentially being passed down to you) or a large family home meaning you can comfortably live with your parents into adulthood and maintain any sort of privacy, then you're going to have to make some tough decisions in order to have any financial security as you age.

70% of full time workers report excessive hours, 67% have undertaken unpaid work and nearly half experience financial stress. It also noted that routes into the arts continue to privilege the resourced and connected. Unpaid work and family connections remain common gateways while 58% of working class respondents said they faced entry barriers.

A further problem highlighted among some freelancers who were only getting temporary work was the threat of losing benefit payments. Their Universal Credit will fluctuate from month to month depending on how much an artist is paid for freelance work. But if they are paid in a lump sum (e.g. a grant) this could result in the loss of Universal Credit. There is emerging best practice (see case studies) of arts organisations working to develop alternative payment structures to help artists maintain regular benefits payments.

Late payments was also highlighted as a problem blighting the sector with the most egregious recent example relating to Manchester Pride going into liquidation. One of the largest Pride events in the UK and Europe, it went bust in 2025 owing artists, suppliers and venues £1.3million. Over 180

13. Report Card 2025, Cultural Learning Alliance https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CLA-2025-Report-Card_AW.pdf
14. Ibid

15. Arts Pay 2025: https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arts-pay-2025-final-report-published

companies and individuals were owed amounts ranging from £30 to £330,329 with performers telling local media that they had to sign 60-day payment terms, which were criticised by the Equity Union.

However, the biggest problem remains the precarious nature of employment in the sector.

The vast majority of jobs on offer are freelance, fixed term and reliant on reputation and professional networks. This covers a broad spectrum of roles ranging from a sound engineer, gallery technician, event producer, stage manager or performer. These roles are needed when an institution commissions a piece of work be it an exhibition, concert, theatre production or other. For example, a gig venue or concert hall will have a pool of technicians and as the shows are confirmed, they will first allocate any PAYE hours to in house staff, and then offer out additional hours to a list of freelance technicians. To get on this list, you often need to have been recommended by another trusted technician and therefore have the professional networks in place as well as the skills to deliver.

Further, if you are lucky enough to secure PAYE work in the creative sector, a significant part of the business model of your chosen organisation will come from grants. Grants usually come in one of two forms, project based and organisation based. For project based grants, these are to deliver specific artistic activities. They are time limited and often come with clear new roles which are for the duration of the project - often between 3-18 months. Therefore, while these roles are secure, they are short term and unreliable to base a mortgage or a firm family financial security net. For core funded grants these usually come from government supervised lottery and DCMS funders such as Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council of Wales etc. However, even these funds are for a fixed term with a requirement to reapply every 3-5 years. This means many roles in organisations who are fortunate enough to be in receipt of core funding often have fixed timescales attached to contracts.

Because of the nature of grant funded programmes, often roles are part time and increasingly large numbers of vacancies are advertised at 0.6 or 0.8 FTE roles at regional living wage or above. But in reality, these roles often require far more of a time commitment to deliver the project which pushes the employee into low paid underemployment. “Right across the creative sector, the single largest philanthropic group are the employees themselves who work longer hours than contracted for less pay than similarly skilled counterparts in the private and public sectors,” explained one arts manager. This is often referred to by those in the sector as a ‘happiness tax’. For the privilege of working in a field which might also be your hobby, employees accept pro rata lower wages for hours worked.

With this in mind, for people considering entering the sector without the privilege of the middle class safety net, there is little to attract new people to the industry. The work is low paid, insecure, unsociable and unreliable – and, as one producer noted, “there’s a queue of middle class graduates desperate to live off these creative industry crumbs, each with a ready-made network of contacts across the sector.”

Despite these obvious barriers, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has developed a Greater Manchester Employment Charter to raise standards relating to pay, good jobs and opportunities for people to progress. It has three tiers – advocates, supporters and members. Odd Arts, the People’s History Museum and Co-op Live are among some of the region’s arts and heritage businesses to sign-up, but there is still a distinct lack of alignment with this charter from the arts sector. This is largely due to the reasons highlighted above and the precarious nature of the jobs the sector offers.

EXPLOITATION OF GRASSROOTS MUSICIANS

The recent move, following last year's Music in the City report, to launch a Manchester Grassroots Venue Network will undoubtedly be a positive move to help share best practice and strengthen collaboration between venues, the Council and other partners. But while there is a buoyant grassroots music scene across the region, we identified a number of problems notably around the exploitation of musicians.

The scourge of 'pay to play', which requires artists to buy advance tickets to their own shows and then re-sell them to fans, removing all financial risk to the promoter and venue, has been widely condemned. The Music Venues Trust and the Association of Independent Promoters are among those criticising the practice, as they want artists performing at grassroots venues to keep more of what they earn under fairer conditions. In most venues this practice is no longer accepted. However, a good number of young musicians in focus groups warned that 'pay to play' had morphed into something else, which was not dissimilar and equally exploitative.

Several spoke of pressures being put on bands to sell tickets and being told that unless they sold a certain amount, they would not get any payment for their gig. And even when they crossed that threshold, they still only received a small fraction of the ticket price. For example, one artist sold dozens of tickets for £7 each and received £1 per ticket back in payment. Most musicians we spoke to do not see any distinction between this model and 'pay to play'. As one explained:

"People call it 'pay to play' because there is no payment to the band unless they get a certain number of people to buy tickets. An example would be that a promoter gets four bands to play on a night. They supply the venue and the sound engineer but that's basically it. They generally do no promotion for the event and rely on the bands to promote and sell tickets. Often the cut for the band per ticket is very low. A recent example from some friends of mine that did a gig with a local promoter was that the tickets were £7 once they sold 15 tickets and they got £1 per ticket sold. Essentially the bands are paying the promoter £6 per audience member for them to play the gig. That's why it's known as 'pay to play'. If the band work really hard and get 100 people through the doors to watch them, they get £100 between them, the promoter walks away with £600. Bands are under pressure to get people down to these gigs so the promoter makes money. A student told me only today that their gig this coming Saturday was cancelled due to poor ticket sales (the bands playing had only sold 106 tickets in total). I understand why they have pulled the event, but this is really hard on the bands trying to get out and play original music at gigs. Part of the problem is the costs venues have to cover to stay open, that drives the cost of tickets as the promoters need to charge more to cover the costs of hiring the venue and paying for the sound engineer. Venue hire charges are also going up as venues struggle to stay open. This obviously has a trickledown effect on the musicians and means they are working for pennies a lot of the time."

There is considerable resentment among musicians at this model, with some pointing out that it's the job of the promoter to promote the show, not the artist. Others add that because of constant pressure to sell tickets, they end up falling out with friends and family. "When you keep asking your family to buy tickets, they end up turning against you. It's an awful situation to be in," one complained.

Other exploitative practices associated with this model include promoters telling bands that if they sell 120 tickets or more for a show for several gigs, and accept a low commission, they will be guaranteed a slot at an event like the Why Not Festival or Kendal Calling.

"This is very tempting for young, up and coming musicians," explained one artist, "and the band will end up working their socks off to shift tickets, earning hardly any return, and then they will be given a slot in a tent on an introductory stage in a field somewhere with 80 people watching. It's not worth it."

We also heard several accounts of bands being paid as little as £5 for a gig, although some of these venues have subsequently closed. "It's really demoralising when you can't even buy a pint with your fee," a musician noted.

In 2023 the Musicians Union and the charity Help Musicians completed the first musicians' census, which gathered feedback from 6,000 working musicians across the UK[16]. It found that nearly half earn less than £14,000 a year and that financial barriers such as the cost of equipment and transport were holding them back. A similar view was echoed by many musicians we spoke to.

"We're earning exactly the same as we were 10-years ago," explained one. "It doesn't feel like the industry is making any progress at all. We're just treading water."

LACK OF WORKING CLASS LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

In countless interviews, working class representation continually came up as an important issue – both as a source of inspiration and frustration for people working in the arts. When, at the end of a focus group that we hosted for young musicians at Factory, we asked the participants where would they most like to see change, there was a pause for a few seconds before several people spoke up in unison.

"Representation," they said. "We'd like to see people do well who look and sound like us. People who we can relate to, like Oasis. When we look at most of the new bands coming out today, we don't relate to any of them. Their lives are a million miles away from ours."

This was a powerful theme that many people warmed to in the course of our engagement activities. And the fact that only 17.8% of respondents to our survey said they saw their lived experiences widely represented in the art form they practice spoke volumes.

Typical examples of feedback we received on this subject included:

"I grew up in Longsight and I have never seen myself represented on screen in a way that felt genuine and written from the perspective of someone actually from a working class background."

"I am one of very few orchestral musicians of colour performing professionally. I did not see anyone who represented my identity within an orchestra when I was growing up."

"Even when I do see working class lives portrayed in TV and film, I see mostly stereotypes and I'm often

"I am one of very few orchestral musicians of colour performing professionally. I did not see anyone who represented my identity within an orchestra when I was growing up."

16. Nearly half of UK working musicians earn less than £14,000, new census finds, Guardian 2023
https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/sep/11/nearly-half-of-working-uk-musicians-earn-less-than-14000-new-census-finds

discouraged to find that those parts are often played by middle / upper class actors."

Similarly, many working class creatives noted that as well as not seeing their lives widely represented in mainstream arts, they also felt they were chronically underrepresented in the workplace. Interestingly, Dave Moutrey, the Director of Culture and Creative Industries for Manchester City Council, and one of the sector's few working class leaders, publicly stated a few years ago that the arts have "become colonised by the middle class".[17]

Representational challenges at a leadership level were also evident across the region and research carried out by Creative Manchester in 2025 found there was "a decline in diversity the higher up the workforce you go" across our region's cultural sector.[18] It highlighted that in areas such as production teams and technical roles such as lighting were not especially diverse and that even when organisations did report more representation in relation to class, this was not always reflected in executive teams or at Board level. A number of reasons were cited as being barriers to recruiting working class leaders, including pay and skills, but the report also noted that a practice of hiring staff that 'fit in', "creates a culture of risk aversion within recruitment practices – which reproduces the dominant white and middle class somatic norms of the sector."[19]

LACK OF DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION AMONG COMMISSIONERS

A wide range of research shows there are fewer working class people in commissioning and leadership roles across the arts and this was recognised as a huge source of frustration for artists trying to get their work commissioned.

"The pool of people that work in TV are achingly middle class and they simply don't understand working class culture," explained one screenwriter. "You can be a fantastic writer, win awards and create lots of original material but they won't give you the time of day. It's not a meritocracy; it's a mirrortocracy. The commissions go to people who are similar to those in charge. They want to see what they think reflects them."

Others spoke powerfully of commissioners demonstrating a tin ear to people's financial circumstances and expressing impatience at their inability to get to London at the drop of a hat.

"I had a call from a commissioner asking me to come to London the next day," explained one writer. "But I didn't have the money for the train so I asked if I could come the following week (when I got some money). He became really exasperated and said I wasn't trying hard enough and questioned whether I really wanted the opportunity. He had no idea how hard I was trying and, of course, I desperately wanted it. It was intensely frustrating."

An actor added: "All auditions are held in London, so for a performer living outside of London that's at least £80-100 on a train, £100-200 on a hotel, if I can't find a friend to stay with and around £100 on food. Auditions can also run over a couple of days. So, you're looking at around £150-300 a day, plus an £80 train on top."

We also reached out to a number of commissioners and one TV commissioner, who worked for a major broadcaster, acknowledged that they struggled with middle class bias, but added that production companies also had to bear responsibility. "A lot of the commissioners are white, middle aged and middle class," she admitted. "They only consider EDI through the lens of protected characteristics and don't consider class at all. But it's not just broadcasters who are failing on this. We used to produce lots of content in house, and we now work with production companies that don't have to be held to the same standards that we do. So, they use their networks to produce content and it invariably ends up being their mates."

17. Have the Arts Been 'Colonised' by the Middle Class, Manchester Mill 2024 https://manchestermill.co.uk/have-the-arts-been-colonised-by-the/
18. Workforce Challenges, Diversity and Cultural Leadership, Hannah Curran-Troop, Creative Manchester 2025
19. Ibid

But if this mindset was blamed as a barrier stopping talent getting noticed, others noted that there were other ways to get noticed, notably through social media, which was seen as the best means of helping working class artists bypass traditional gatekeepers.

"I think social media has allowed a generation of people from working class backgrounds that don't have contacts within the creative industries to forge their own path without the barriers of gatekeeping."

One example that was cited in a focus group of a working class creative achieving success through this route is Salford University alumni Charley Marlowe, who amassed a large following through her TikTok videos and subsequently was recruited as a narrator on the BBC Three show, I Kissed a Girl, and as a BBC Radio 1 presenter.

THE CAPITAL BARRIER

Our engagement with senior figures in arts and heritage saw several point out how traditional routes into the sector were heavily weighted against the working class and favoured those with financial support from parents. As one noted:

"Getting a job in the museums or galleries sector usually requires both an undergraduate and postgraduate degree as well as often plenty of hours of voluntary experience in an institution. Even then it can take many years to secure a job on the bottom rung of a ladder in collections or curation at very low pay. This is a commitment to a career path not for financial reward and often in an insecure sector that requires the financial flexibility early in adulthood to do two degrees and find sufficient time to volunteer during normal working hours. This is out of reach for many working class people who will struggle to fund these qualifications and voluntary hours. Government reintroducing means tested maintenance grants should go some way to opening up this qualification pathway but it won't contribute to the creation of more jobs in an already oversaturated market."

Others added that at every level, volunteering was often the sole pathway in. For example, live event technicians don't necessarily require a qualification, but they do require knowledge of complex technical equipment and significant experience delivering live events. This usually comes through volunteering either in established venues or at small live events, or through practicing at home on kit, which requires a substantial up-front investment. It always involves a professional mentor who is prepared to give their time to teach someone in a live setting. The same up-front investment was also required for young musicians trying to get their music noticed.

"For a musician to be in a position to submit their music to BBC Introducing (a radio platform supporting unsigned, undiscovered and under the radar talent), a concert promoter or similar - they also must first have a high quality recording of this

Getting a job in the museums or galleries sector usually requires both an undergraduate and postgraduate degree as well as often plenty of hours of voluntary experience in an institution. Even then it can take many years to secure a job on the bottom rung of a ladder in collections or curation at very low pay.

music," another explained. "In order to create this recording, money is required for studios, producing, mixing and mastering and session musician fees. Recording a first EP for release on a streaming platform is often in excess of £2k with no hope of financial return due to streaming platform fee structures."

Whether it is paying for multiple degrees, finding time during the working week to volunteer, investing in the first high quality recording or simply buying the kit to begin a career as a technician, many jobs in the cultural sector require capital investment just to get to the first rung of the career ladder. In most cases, it is the bank of mum and dad or financial support from a network of friends and family which provides this initial financial support. For working class aspirational creatives, these routes may not be as easily available.

CLOSED PATHWAYS

Over the past 10 years, a number of other routes into professional roles in arts and culture have also been closed off.

Many Local Authorities had Arts Development Officers whose job was to bring together the voluntary and professional arts sector, support funding applications and create opportunities for creativity to happen across the Borough. These vital roles were often more in tune with the strategic direction of key funders, understood Council priorities and knew the immediate local sector's strengths and weaknesses. They then used this knowledge to create cultural opportunities for local creatives, very often seeing a hyper local pool of freelance arts professionals develop regardless of class background. Throughout austerity, these roles almost entirely disappeared - especially in the poorer LAs.

Prior to the 2011 changes in the curriculum, school and Local Authority Music Service roles were a key part of performer portfolio careers. Most artists have a multifaceted approach to their practice, combining teaching with performing and specific project commissions including private and public works. Changes to the education system combined with Local Authority cuts removed a significant chunk of this portfolio work for many creatives.

Similarly Local Authorities also had culture funds. These were to support local arts groups to thrive and often provided core funding for staff members. In Rochdale, for example, between 2010-2016 this core grant funding pot reduced from c£300k to zero. In the last funding round for this money in 2016, the pot was around £100k and at that time provided grants of c£20k to a number of creative organisations employing at least one person including a dance development company, a community radio station, a youth music group which specialised in supporting young people with challenging backgrounds into music tech careers and more. These small companies have all since stopped with the closure of the Council grants programme.

This is replicated across the country with only a small number of larger Councils still providing core grant funding to arts organisations. Whilst Combined Authorities have begun to step into this space with small core grants pots, they often require their supported organisations to work across multiple Local Authorities to qualify for grant funding.

In addition to Councils and lottery funders, a major income source for arts organisations is Trusts & Foundations. However, this route has also been all but closed off. These organisations are grant making bodies governed by a board of Trustees and giving out grants in line with their Charitable Objectives - very often a bequest left by a wealthy individual to support their priorities. These grants could often be unrestricted and required little more than a letter of submission to Trustees.

However, the combined loss of public funding and the impact of the pandemic has seen several of these major arts investors spend down their funds including The Foyle Foundation and 31 others according to https://the-list.uk/ which tracks this. Of the remaining funders, they are now significantly oversubscribed meaning that often only those organisations employing professional fundraisers have a chance at securing grant funding.

All this means arts organisations have to operate at a larger scale and be far more attuned to the strategic priorities of Councils, CAs, government funders and other grant making bodies. Prior to austerity, many small arts organisations focussed on delivering for their community, now it is a requirement for those in leadership roles to focus far more closely on tying their output to the strategic vision of whoever they are seeking funding from. For an artist building their practice, this is a previously unrequired layer of strategic visioning and one which unless you already understand the local political and cultural landscape, ideally with existing relationships in place, would be near impossible to stumble across. For those without an upbringing across all aspects of society, not just arts but also an understanding of governmental processes and of charity law, setting up a sustainable arts practice in an era without freelance work from schools and Councils is extremely challenging.

PEOPLE BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS - CASE STUDIES

Through the course of our engagement, we came across many dedicated individuals and organisations working extremely hard to break down the barriers identified above and provide opportunities for working class talent to thrive. This section looks to shine a light on emerging best practice and, while there are far too many examples to list here, we hope this summary of change makers will provide useful insights for policy makers and encourage conversations to join up good practice and help scale up their efforts.

CREATING AFFORDABLE SPACE FOR ARTISTS

Founded in Stockport by Sophie and John Macaulay, GRIT Studios is a Community Interest Company that regenerates spaces for creatives to use. They bring old buildings back to life, develop affordable spaces for creatives and are currently working in several boroughs across Greater Manchester supporting a growing community of artists.

“There is a chronic shortage of studio space in Greater Manchester,” explains John Macaulay, “as all the old mills and warehouses where artists used to frequent are now one bedroomed apartments.” Not only do they connect artists into a vibrant community by providing affordable space, they also help build their confidence and help them access commercial opportunities. “Some 62 per cent of our artists have never had a studio before,” he adds. “They worked on their kitchen table, so we are giving them a first step into the world of being self-employed.” Among the creatives they support are heritage craft makers, visual artists, designers and illustrators, jewellers and ceramicists.

As well as providing much-needed space for artists, GRIT also runs arts battles, which help transform urban spaces and breathe new life into neglected areas. They quickly sell out and are known as high energy events where artists create masterpieces in a short period of time for public voting and charity auctions.

“It’s not just about converting empty buildings and giving artists affordable space,” Macaulay, admits. “It’s about regenerating places, giving them new purpose, activating tired spaces. When you bring creatives into an area, you can quickly change the perception of a place.”

SECURING THE FUTURE OF MUSIC VENUES THROUGH COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

In 2023 the Snug in Atherton, Wigan became the first grassroots music venue to be saved by the Music Venue Trust’s innovative #OwnOurVenues campaign. The 100 capacity venue was under threat after the landlord wanted to sell the building, but its future was secured following an intervention by the Music Venue Trust, who acquired the venue with shares bought by the live music community. Female-led, community-owned and proudly working-class, The Snug began life as a tiny vegetarian coffee shop and grew into a nationally recognised hub for live music, culture and local pride. Saved from closure, it now hosts musicians from across Britain and beyond and runs creative programmes for people far from employment.

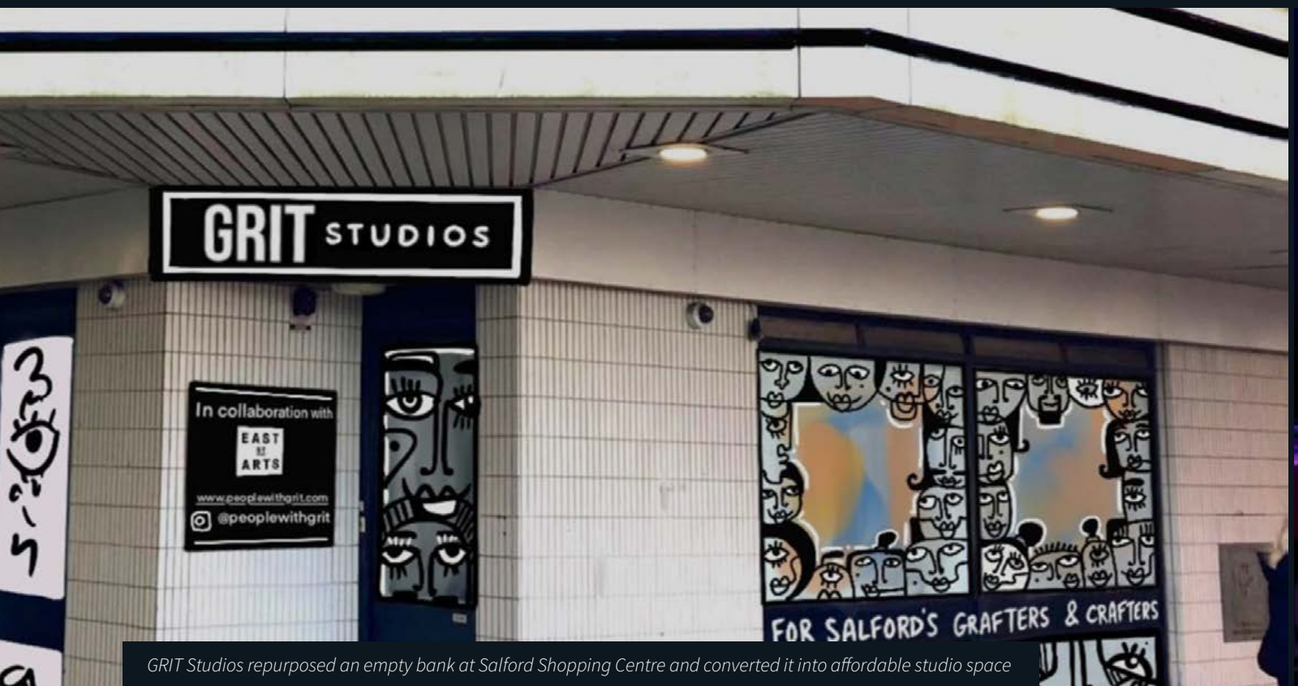
The #OwnOurVenues scheme was made possible by over 1,200 individual investors and the Snug has now been placed into permanent protected status. The operators subsequently signed a ‘cultural lease’, which guarantees them the use of the building as long as they operate as a grassroots music venue.

It’s a scheme that has been billed as “the National Trust for venues” and the Snug’s owner and founder Rachael McEntee said it was a lifeline.

“It would have either become apartments or the [new owners] would bump the rent up and I was struggling to pay as it was,” she told The Times. “One minute I was thinking, ‘that’s it, we’re done’ — the next thing Music Venue Properties had launched this campaign and got music fans to invest.”

She added that family, friends, customers and band members were among the investors and she no longer had to worry about the landlord selling the building.

“People feel really proud, which is lovely. Now I’ve got people coming in and saying, ‘I own a part of this building’. I don’t need to worry about my landlords anymore because they are grassroots music fans.”



GRIT Studios repurposed an empty bank at Salford Shopping Centre and converted it into affordable studio space

Live music at the Snug, Atherton

RICHARD STREET STUDIOS, ROCHDALE

Delivered through Rochdale Development Agency and Rochdale Council, Richard Street Studios is a good example of a local authority bringing an empty building back into use and employing co-operative and community wealth building approaches to plan, develop and deliver the infrastructure the local culture sector needs. After the Council's cultural strategy highlighted a lack of creative workspace, the two partners looked to acquire an empty building to be converted into a studio that would be run by a local creative organisation with a complimentary focus on skills and talent development.

This work highlighted that the best solution for giving agency was to use a property let model - whereby a local organisation would take on the tenancy of the building on a peppercorn rent, using income from studio spaces to cover overheads and as importantly to re-invest in programming using earned income for additional funding bids. In order to facilitate this, an initial start-up grant was included alongside the property-led agreement to enable the studios to mobilise, appoint a studio manager, and run an initial training and development programme.

'Breaking Barriers', came forward as the organisation keen to take on the property let agreement. They are a proud, diverse-led Rochdale-based community interest company (CIC) who whether working locally, nationally or internationally always use their Rochdale roots to inspire and inform their projects. Their vision for the studios was fuelled by the desire to give new creatives the opportunities they wished they'd received - to have somewhere to meet, work, and create with other creatives. Breaking Barriers operation of the studios also supports diverse leadership in our sector – in a borough where the cultural leadership doesn't currently represent its population.

Richard Street Studios has 7 studio spaces accommodating around 18 artists, but has become more than just a building for its resident artists. It is a place to create, rehearse, exhibit and run events, and has become a hub for the development of artists across the borough - with on-site networking events, development programmes, and regular funding advice surgeries to support creatives to grow and flourish.

Richard Street Studios, Rochdale

OPENING DOORS FOR WORKING CLASS COMEDIANS

The traditional comedy circuit is often challenging for working class comics due to rising travel costs, limited opportunities and the fact that most gigs don't pay. Key career stepping stones such as the Edinburgh Fringe Festival have simply become too expensive for people from working class backgrounds and, because of this, there have been increasing warnings that we are in danger of losing working class voices from comedy. The comedian Matt Forde, for example, gave evidence to a UK parliamentary committee last year, where he warned that it was very difficult to make a living in comedy and that "you have got to be prepared to work for years for free". As a result, he said "comedy at that level is becoming more elitist because the only people who can afford to do the initial 10,000 hours are privileged people and the only people who can afford to perform at Edinburgh are privileged people."

Bolton comedian Maura Jackson is now all too aware of these challenges and readily acknowledges that the system has to change if working class comics are to make it in the entertainment industry. Describing Bolton as the funniest place in Manchester, she is understandably proud of the famous comedians it's produced such as Peter Kay, Paddy McGuinness and Sophie Willan.

Persuaded to have a try at stand-up comedy after Covid-19, she initially thought how hard can a five minute set be? But after getting a good audience response and going on to 'beat the gong' and win at a comedy club in Manchester, she was encouraged to try and make a career out of it. Only then did she find out how high the barriers were. "You need stage time so you have to travel everywhere and work for free," she recalls. "You have to do a gazillion five minute slots in front of a handful of people everywhere. I travelled to Nottingham, Newcastle, Birmingham, Sheffield, you name it and didn't get paid a bean. And if you have to do it by public transport, it's a nightmare."

She added that comedy etiquette means you're supposed to stay for the whole evening, which for a single mum paying a babysitter meant it "cost you a fortune". But despite these challenges, she had got the bug and continued to tour across the north, selling out shows, winning a host of awards

Bolton comedian Maura Jackson

including the Queen of Comedy and hosting Bolton Pride on the main stage. However, despite managing to secure better slots and get paid, the unfairness of the model still rankled. So, she decided to launch her own open mic nights in Bolton and pay comedians.

“The model is that everyone gets paid. All the acts and the MC – and they get a two course meal and two drinks as well,” she explains. Several sell-out shows later, she says the model proves that you can offer a fairer deal and remove some of the unnecessary hurdles making it harder for working class comics to go on the circuit.

However, not everyone is supportive. She admits that some people on the circuit did not like the fact she was trying to disrupt their model. “They told me I was naïve and it’s not the way it works,” she explains, “but I told them I was promoting other comedians and I want them to get a better deal.”

Her determination to fight for better rights is not surprising considering her day job – she’s the CEO of Backup Northwest, a social enterprise that helps young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The simple matter of making sure people get properly paid, she insists, will make comedy possible for so many more people and ensure our culture is richer as a result. “This part of the world is incredibly funny,” she adds, “and we’re natural storytellers. Why wouldn’t you want to give all that talent the best possible chance of succeeding?”

MENTORING – AND SUPPORTING THE STARS OF TOMORROW

We found a number of strong initiatives delivering mentoring support and opportunities for working class creatives across the region.

FACTORY SOUNDS

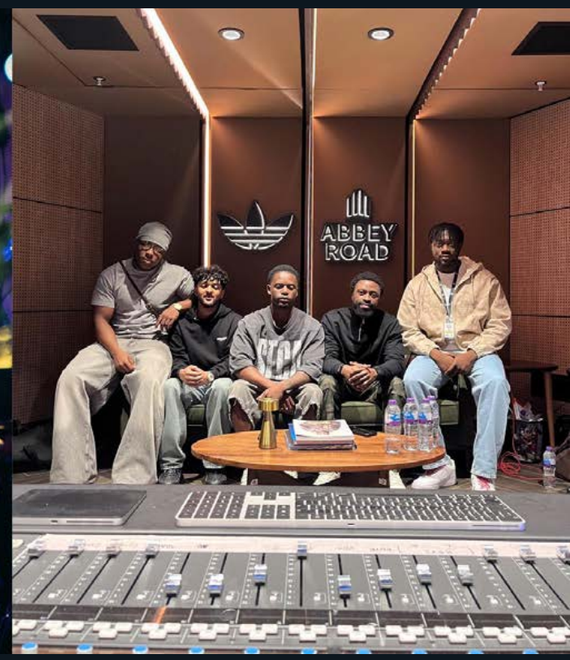
Run by Factory International in Manchester, Factory Sounds is a six month programme which aims to support and raise the profile of emerging and established talent in Greater Manchester. Every year, Factory take on 15 extraordinary people working in music to help support the development of underrepresented people working in the sector. Covering a broad range of disciplines from musician, technician, label, producer or creative, the programme, run in partnership with Adidas Originals, offers a £1,000 grant, studio access and mentoring to help accelerate career progression.

Some of their alumni include Sam Malik from Oldham, Foxglove from Rochdale and the Manchester community based Steam Radio.

ARTS EMERGENCY

Arts Emergency mentors young people in Greater Manchester who are interested in the creative and cultural industries and are taking their first steps out of compulsory education. Describing themselves as “the alternative old boys’ network for young people that need us most”, they have mentors signed up all over the country and run year-long programmes with young people. In Manchester they are currently working with around 200 young people and their mentors include writers, designers, performers, academics and activists. The screenwriter, Ian Kershaw, who has written for Coronation Street, Cold Feet and Shameless among other productions, is one of their Manchester mentors.

One of the most important things that mentors do, explains Neil Griffiths, the co-CEO of Arts Emergency, is to open up their address books. “It’s about connecting people, giving them a foot in the door. It’s about levelling the playing field so that working class kids can find routes to opportunities in the same way that privileged kids can.”



The Factory Sounds partnership with Adidas Originals provides artists with product kit-out, in-store styling sessions and access to the Adidas Originals recording studio.

An Arts Emergency introductory event in Manchester where young people aged 16-18 meet their volunteer mentors for the first time

An event at Manchester’s Contact Theatre, celebrating 10-years of Arts Emergency

TAKING DANCE INTO WORKING CLASS COMMUNITIES

Company Chameleon is a team of 14 based at its own dance studio in Openshaw, East Manchester. Rooted in one of the most deprived wards in Greater Manchester, it creates original dance theatre and tours at home and internationally, as well as working across theatres, outdoor festivals, schools, higher education, care homes, libraries and prisons among other places.

They are the only arts organisation in Openshaw and have a key mission of delivering cultural opportunities to people who might not normally access them. These opportunities extend to touring around the world – in places such as Germany, Italy and France – and supporting local people to go to dance school in London.

They have worked in all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester and their story started when Kevin Edward Turner and Anthony Missen, two working class lads from Manchester, met at Trafford Youth Dance Theatre in the 1990s and bonded over a shared ambition to dance professionally. After training with the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, they went on to set up Company Chameleon in 2007 and have subsequently grown to become a regional powerhouse, staging over 50 indoor and outdoor performances every year.

They have an impressive programme of outreach work and a strong track record of reaching teenagers in working class communities and setting them on a pathway to dance success. On a visit to their studio, we met several young people who had come from a local council estate and were now accomplished dancers, successfully touring the world.

“Where there’s struggle you will see the arts flourishing,” explains Executive Director Leanne Feeley. “These people have incredible talent and passion. They just need the opportunity to shine, but these opportunities still feel very tilted towards more affluent areas.”

Company Chameleon Dance theatre. Credit: Joel Chester Fildes

Feeley clearly wants to see more opportunities but this has been made all the harder by arts cuts and the reduction of performing arts opportunities at the local college.

Missen, who has recently left to move to DanceEast, has spoken passionately about the decline of dance education, the exodus of freelancers from the profession and how it is difficult for artists to afford to make new work. He says the work of Company Chameleon is desperately needed because it continues to give people hope.

“Dance was not something I set out to pursue,” he explains. “It was certainly not for ‘someone like me’, a young working-class boy growing up in inner-city Manchester. An unplanned and unexpected encounter with dance at secondary school, when I was forced to do a class in place of a PE lesson (against my will), set me on the path to where I am today.”

That path has taken him into pupil referral units and prisons, where he says dance reminds us that as much as we are different, we are all the same at a deep and fundamental level.

“My experience in and with dance has made me a whole-hearted believer in its transformative capability. It has immense capacity to positively change lives, as it did mine.”

SUPPORTING WORKING CLASS TALENT INTO EMPLOYMENT IN THE CREATIVE DIGITAL SECTOR

As the founder of SharpFutures, a social enterprise dedicated to helping youngsters develop their creative digital skills, Lee Stanley knows just how liberating the creative arts can be for working class kids. Growing up in Moston, he left school early, worked on markets and didn’t feel especially hopeful about the future – until he started going to the Hacienda in the 1990s. “It was my first taste of freedom,” he recalls. “It was so exhilarating. I met different people from all over the country and it opened my eyes to what was possible.”

Soon he was sitting in a studio in Manchester recording music with other working class kids. He went on to enjoy a career in music and his band supported acts like the Happy Mondays and the Charlatans. In 2012, he went on to co-found the social enterprise, SharpFutures, to help young people from diverse working class backgrounds get the same break he did and discover opportunities in the creative, digital, tech and film industries.

Located at the Sharp Project in East Manchester, a former electronics warehouse that’s become a hub for creative businesses, SharpFutures has helped hundreds of kids build their confidence and get onto a pathway to creative careers. They work with industry providers to deliver courses focussing on skills development and have seen many of their kids go on to find successful work.

“There is an awful lot of talent in Manchester,” admits Stanley, “and we’ve seen kids progress really quickly. We do school tours at the Sharp Project and some kids come to us this way. I remember one guy who was a plumber turning up in his van with his son asking if we could help him. He’s now working for a global film and TV production company. We had another lad who’d had a really tough time. He used to chop onions in a factory and get bullied. He’s now head of futures at an international advertising agency. These kids are smashing it.”

SharpFutures co-founder Lee Stanley

He says Manchester has a generation of incredibly talented post-Covid, digitally native, Gen Zs. “They are smart, hungry and their eyes are wide open,” he says. “They know the social contract is broken and many of them want portfolio careers working with brands to deliver brilliant content for campaigns.”

But despite his obvious pride in the talented kids he says he’s privileged to support, he admits to feeling deeply saddened at the barriers he sees all over the country holding back working class talent. He says schools are not doing enough to raise kids’ aspirations and acknowledges there are parts of the region with very low self-esteem.

“Even now sometimes I just get in the car and have a bit of a cry,” he says. “I see so much potential wasted and it upsets me that we keep telling these kids that they’re shit. We should be building them up.”

OPENING UP THEATRE LEADERSHIP THROUGH FAIR PLAY

In 2025, Manchester-based RTYDS (Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme) launched Fair Play, a new programme designed to tackle the class barriers that stop working class artists from progressing into theatre leadership. The programme was created in response to growing evidence that socio economic inequality is one of the biggest factors shaping who gets to build a sustainable career in the arts — and crucially who gets pushed out.

Its focus on leadership highlights a firm belief that working class artists don't need upskilling, but instead the autonomy and agency required to create real change. They work with artists, organisations and the sector to highlight the specific barriers working class artists face and advocate for their work. And as Stef O'Driscoll, Director and Co-creative lead of Fair Play explains, they are still battling against a deeply ingrained bias.

"On paper, institutions want diverse leaders but in reality, they want you to shapeshift and resculpt into what makes them feel safe," she says. "There often is an inherent mistrust of your accent as it is not associated with power and privilege. It is not associated with safety for your organisation and increasingly artistic decisions are firmly rooted in governance, finance and business. You begin to doubt if people deem you capable. Is this your imposter syndrome? Your confidence wavers."

Fair Play brings together regional theatres, companies and third sector partners to create paid, practical routes into leadership including 18 month Associate Artistic Director residencies in producing theatres outside London, Leadership Pathway Bursaries for mid career artists, and 'Surviving on a Shoestring', a finance equity pilot developed with Turn2us to test fairer ways of paying freelancers who receive benefits.

A key part of the scheme, 'Surviving on a Shoestring' works with theatres' finance, producing

Pictured: Cat Shoobridge & Stef O'Driscoll Co-Creative Leads, Fair Play

and executive teams to trial new payment models that don't penalise artists on Universal Credit. Instead of the industry's standard three instalment system — which often triggers benefit sanctions — organisations co create a finance access rider offering options such as smaller payments, specific payment dates or alternative contracting structures. The aim is simple: to remove the burden on artists to disclose poverty or navigate complex benefits rules, and to place responsibility back on organisations to pay people fairly and sustainably.

More than 160 artists applied for the first round of residencies, demonstrating the scale of demand. The programme is co created by directors with lived experience of class inequity, ensuring the work is shaped by those who understand the barriers first hand. One early participant described Fair Play as "the first leadership pathway that actually reflects the reality of working class artists."

National partner theatres — including Leeds Playhouse, Bristol Old Vic and Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse — have committed to embedding the learning into their long term practice. Fair Play is already being recognised as a vital intervention: a practical, values driven effort to open up leadership and ensure the future of British theatre is shaped by a broader range of voices.

MUSIC PROMOTERS CHAMPIONING FAIRER FEE DISTRIBUTION AND GREATER SUPPORT OF EMERGING ARTISTS

While many grassroots musicians in our focus groups singled out exploitative promoters who gave bands a small percentage of ticket sales, they were also keen to praise promoters who were adopting fairer models, which aimed to help emerging bands and support the entire talent pipeline. One of these was Harrison Lord, a 20-year-old promoter and founder of Venture Concerts.

Based in Failsworth and an electrician by day, in the evening he promotes bands and has impressively built a music company independently without major financial backing. He currently represents over 50 bands. "I got into promotion because I used to be in a band and saw how badly musicians are treated," he explains. "If they can't make any money, they won't be able to record or go on tour. They'll never be able to grow and their music will fizzle out. What I'm trying to do is create a model that gives them a better chance of success. Because the way I look at it is if they succeed, Manchester succeeds."

The model he's pushing seeks to empower musicians by ensuring they keep a majority of the commission from the events they play. "We have an open record label and we give bands 95% commission from tickets so they get virtually all ticket sales (this compares to around 20-30% from other promoters). In return, we ask them to join our record label and we will support their careers with signing on fees, merchandise, advertising, design, touring etc."

By giving a band of working class kids a bigger share, he explains, it means they have the opportunity to grow. "When bands are starting off, you shouldn't really be making money off them," he says. "You should be just helping them to grow."

Lord is too young to indulge in Madchester nostalgia, but he says the city misses Tony Wilson impresario figures who focussed all their energies on building up bands. "There are too many people who just see these kids as a cash cow," he says. "They will get them to sell loads of tickets, make a quick buck off them and then when they can't sell as many next time, they'll drop them."

He's quick to recognise the advantages that kids coming from more affluent backgrounds have in music – "their parents will bankroll a tour" – but remains optimistic about the future of working class music in Manchester.

Harrison Lord pictured outside Band on the Wall in Manchester. Credit: RISE

"This is a really exciting time in that there are loads of kids who want to be in a band. It wasn't like this in the early 2000's, but if you go to any college now, you'll find kids playing music who want to be in a band."

What they lack most, he argues, is support. He says far too many young musicians have little idea how to navigate the music industry and are vulnerable to being preyed upon by unscrupulous promoters. Without support, he warns, talent will be wasted.

"When you start playing gigs and building a following you have a limited amount of time," he says, "and you need every penny you can get. If you don't invest money in doing socials, recording music and touring, you'll never grow – and before you know it, it's over."

Passionate about the Manchester gig scene, he says there are lots of great venues but he'd like to see one change to regulations to support emerging talent. "There are lots of talented 16 year olds playing in bands but only a few venues like Band on the Wall where they can play," he says. "Most other venues say you have to be 18 to play. I'd like to see that change. If they're talented enough then why can't they play?"

USING THE POWER OF MAJOR INSTITUTIONS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Co-op Live is not only the country's largest indoor arena, with a capacity of up to 23,500 people, it is also billed as the UK's first purpose-driven arena, built around values of sustainability, community and social justice. Co-op Live donates at least £1million a year to support communities and empower young people through initiatives that donate directly to young people to help turn their communities into safer, more sustainable and inclusive places to live. It also is increasingly working with local schools to ensure that pupils in some of the most deprived areas in Manchester have access to world class cultural experiences.

At the MTV Europe Music Awards in 2024 they worked with local schools and local groups to ensure that 500 young people were given a free ticket and were part of the event. There were also other work opportunities offered, such as being a 'runner' for a week and Music Week events where youngsters could learn about career opportunities and make industry connections. Feedback from carers and youth group leaders who took the children to the event included[20]:

"For a lot of our young people, they don't often get the opportunity to dress up. So to see some of our young people suited and booted was, yeah, I think I had a cry at one point." **Youth Group Leader**

"They actually thought we were joking when we were offering it [the ticket] to them. They were like, there's no way you guys have got tickets to that. They were so excited and they just didn't believe us until we got there." **Youth Group Leader**

"I was a VIP ticket holder, I felt special. It was really a great experience. And being on the red carpet, that was phenomenal. Like the vibes were great. Everyone was just smiling." **Youth group member, Manchester Young Carers**

Sara Tomkins, Co-op Live Sustainability and Community Director

20. Social Impact Market Research – MTV EMAS, Caledonia Market Research 2025

"Our young people are proud of their city. So, the fact that they have seen something brought to their city like this has given them more hope that greater things will come to Manchester. Because if MTV can come to Manchester, the Mobies and all the others now can do the same. Manchester is a trailblazer in many things and I think the young people believe it now when they keep seeing the various opportunities that are coming to the city." **Youth Group Leader**

The Co-op Live works with a not-for-profit company called The Power of Events to go into schools and reach young people in East Manchester. Through their 'Gigs that Give Back' programme, they also give free tickets to young people driving social change through community programmes across Manchester.

"We gift thousands of tickets every year and we work with a range of charities from Cash for Kids to Concerts for Carers and Tickets for Troops," explains Sara Tomkins, Co-op Live Sustainability and Community Director. She added that there were always 'no shows' at concerts and that a number of their members often couldn't get to some of the events where they had tickets. This covers thousands of tickets and, in these cases, Co-op Live are keen to encourage people to 'gift back' tickets to charities. They are also looking to extend their engagement with local schools and help ensure that children get to see world class cultural experiences.

They have already promised to run the 2026 BRIT Awards in Manchester differently and will be running the BRITS fringe across Manchester in February amplifying local talent and connecting communities ahead of the main awards.

With their commitment to gifting free tickets to young people in deprived communities across Manchester, who otherwise could not afford to access world class cultural events, there is an opportunity to create a network of venues across Manchester that pledge to give un-used tickets to inspire the next generation.

ACCESS RIDERS TO SUPPORT WORKING CLASS ARTISTS' NEEDS

Art with Heart is a Salford-based arts company that designs and delivers performances, workshops and people-led creative projects for community groups, arts organisations and schools across the UK. They pride themselves on grassroots research and development with communities, and make work with a social conscience exploring identity, mental health, social justice and equality. They are especially keen to widen access to arts and raise awareness of creative career opportunities.

"I recall in a spray-painting workshop in a residential care home a young person telling me, 'I didn't know you could do art as a job', she was just excited at the possibility of making a living from doing something you love," explained Creative Director Sarah Emmott.

They work with diverse communities and, as part of the inclusive approach they adopt, use access riders. These are distributed to every creative they work with and given to participants involved in their projects. Typically used across the sector for disabled artists (to detail specific sensory, physical and communication needs), they also include a version to working class artists.

"Although class isn't protected by the Equality Act 2010, we treat it as if it was a protected characteristic," explains Creative Director Rachel Moorhouse. "We provide examples of access requirements to encourage people to ask for what they need to do their best work. This includes things like asking people their preferred payment schedule, not assuming a freelancer has access to a place to work at home and if people will need access to free transport in order to take part. It's changed the way we work for the better."

An Art Battle organised by GRIT Studios

SMALL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKING CLASS ARTISTS

One of the biggest blows to working class artists in recent years has been the loss of small funding pots and micro grants, which cover things like travel, equipment and production costs. While this has resulted in a decline in cultural access, there are still some organisations offering bespoke grants – and a number of artists we spoke to highlighted these as vital lifelines of support.

Among some of those funds included Art with Heart's Working Class Seed Fund, Manchester's Rising Stars Fund, which supports 15-22 year olds by funding vital equipment, training and resources, Manchester College's bursaries and the Manchester based network dedicated to improving social mobility, Common People's working class creative fund, which offers small grants that go towards costs incurred from training, equipment, software and travel to interviews.

Other creative agencies have donated to the Common People fund to help increase diversity across their sector and, as Jame Hillhouse, co-founder of Commercial Break, who partnered with Common People on the fund, noted, an industry-wide collaboration is needed to drive change.

"It's becoming the case that working-class people are not just asking themselves if they can be creative for a living, but if they can afford to be creative for a living," he said. "There are so many insurmountable costs, from travel to training and equipment – and clearly those costs are spiralling. When 'the bank of mum and dad' isn't on hand to help you out, then you're screwed."

Lisa Thompson from Common People added that the fund can make the difference in helping people get into a career they love. As one beneficiary noted:

"I had been struggling to apply for opportunities in screenwriting, as I didn't have the disposable income to pay the application fees. As a result of the Fund helping me ,I've received invaluable feedback from the likes of BAFTA judges and attended Sister Library's Monsoon school, where I learned inspiring and practical skills about storytelling from phenomenal women writers. I now have a writing portfolio that I can pursue a Masters with."

CLASS CONFIDENT ACTIONS

This final example is not from our region but is included due to its relevance. On the back of the playwright James Graham's 2024 McTaggart Lecture at the Edinburgh TV festival, which focussed on "television's problem with the working classes", a strategic plan was created by the TV Foundation encouraging industry leaders to implement changes to widen access. A list of Class Confident Actions were subsequently created to advise the industry. Billed as prompts to help organisations find the right solutions, all the actions are relevant to organisations large and small and relate to all staff whether contracted or freelance. They can be found on the Edinburgh TV Festival website and they include actions to level the playing field, breaking working class stereotypes and supporting career progression. Among the starting questions for employers are, 'Where do you advertise all your roles – are they in places that could reach a wider pool of candidates?'; 'Are you monitoring representation in senior leadership?' and 'Can you work with other productions to join up contracts?'

Establish a framework to prevent discrimination, eliminate systemic barriers and foster an inclusive region where everyone has the opportunity to succeed in the arts

1. **Put class at the centre of arts policy and strategy:** As an overlooked element in the EDI landscape, class needs to be treated as a core inclusion issue. This will require publishing socio-economic data, publishing targets and making pay transparent. Combined, this will expose the filters that block progress.

2. **Tackle class discrimination:** In the same way that Greater Manchester Police broke new ground by being the first police force in the UK to officially recognise alternative sub-cultures as having protected characteristics following the Sophie Lancaster murder, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority should look to unilaterally recognise people from working class backgrounds as having protected characteristics. When arts and cultural institutions are required by law to conduct equality impact assessments, they should ask additional questions to measure how policies, services or decisions impact on working class communities in the region.

3. **Break informal hiring:** To increase fairness, hiring needs to stop depending on networks. All roles should be advertised publicly; panels should be trained to identify class coded bias and structured interviews should be used.

4. **Make inclusion part of daily work:** Culture is strengthened when inclusion is routine. To achieve this, key arts institutions should train every team, not selected groups; reward inclusive leadership and remove norms that punish accents, backgrounds or accessibility needs.

Establish governance and accountability structures to help co-ordinate the city region's efforts to smash the class ceiling.

5. **Create a class champion post that is appointed by the Greater Manchester Mayor:** this role would create an accountable person, would have the Mayor's convening power and would be able to champion class inclusion. They would be a focal point to help deliver the recommendations in this report.

6. **Establish a subgroup of the Freelance Task Force and GM Creative Council that focuses on EDI and Class:** A key observation of this inquiry is that there is significant effort going in to eradicating the class ceiling but it is uncoordinated and large organisations, compared to significantly sized companies in other industries, are relatively small. The convening power of the CA, Mayor and Class Champion will be able to bring key organisations together to co-ordinate resources, spot gaps and form a critical mass to tackle this systemic challenge over a considerable period of time.

Provide more opportunities for young people from working class backgrounds to access high quality cultural experiences and careers in the arts

7. **Apprenticeships** – according to data from the Education Skills Funding Agency, apprenticeships in the creative and design sector account for just 0.5% of total apprenticeships in England, despite creative industry jobs making up circa 5%[20] of total employment. In recognition of the importance of this sector to Greater Manchester, a more ambitious long-term target should be set to achieve 5% of apprenticeships across the region. A drive to significantly increase creative apprenticeship opportunities should be led by the Co-op's campaign to raise £3 million through the levy share to create 200 apprenticeships.

8. **Ensuring young people are exposed to the arts** – Many young people across Greater Manchester lack consistent arts and culture exposure due to reduced school art programmes, a decrease in school trips and cost barriers. Research also shows that there is a growing class divide when it comes to how creative careers are valued and the role creativity plays in boosting the economy. Multiple interventions should be considered to reverse this trend including creative careers advice, working with foundations, trusts and philanthropists to raise funds for school trips and guaranteeing every child an outstanding creative and cultural experience before they leave school, and also working with large performance venues and establishing a GM-wide charity/body to provide free tickets for children in deprived areas to major cultural events.

9. **Young people need a map, not a maze** - Many young people don't know the vast range of roles and opportunities in the arts and this is partly because the creative industries are notoriously fragmented. Entry routes need to be clearer and made accessible by building a single regional portal that contains all entry routes, resources, hubs and paid placements. It should be widely promoted, so everyone is encouraged to sign up and provide data, and it needs to be searchable by role type, borough, qualifications and availability.

20. Creative Industry Job counts

Create an affordable environment for artists to practice, rehearse, create and perform

10 **Empty property/affordable space strategy** – across the country, artists are being forced out of cities because of rising prices and unaffordable studio and rehearsal spaces – and Manchester is no different. A GM-wide property strategy must be established, which builds on best practice such as the community land trust movement pioneered in Toronto. Additional drivers such as meanwhile programmes to activate underused spaces, turning stalled developments into active culture zones and mandating developers to contribute to affordable arts spaces should also be prioritised.

11 **Supporting the growth of grassroots music spaces:** Greater Manchester has suffered from a spate of grassroots music venue closures in recent years and, while important work such as the partnership between Manchester Council and the Music Venue Trust, is helping to support the sector, more tailored interventions are needed to save existing venues and also increase their number. New models such as community ownership, which puts spaces into the hands of those who care about them most, renting them to community tenants via a cultural lease, should be supported and actively encouraged. Local authorities should also look at how the powers granted by High Street Rental Auctions can be used to help convert empty shops into live music venues as one of a number of uses to ensure culture plays a bigger role in high street regeneration.

Phase out exploitative practices in music promotion and support a fairer artist-centric approach to help maintain a thriving grassroots music sector

12 **Supporting good practice in music promotion and driving out rogue promoters** – Artists in major cities across the UK have recently highlighted bad music promoter practice at a grassroots level, which sees artists being forced to take on the burden of promoting their own gig by promoters with a constant threat of having their fees cut, revoked or the set cancelled with refunds refused for fans if they don't sell enough tickets. This has forced a number of bands to quit but there are other, more ethical promoters seeking to support and empower bands, while giving them a bigger share of ticket sales. Working with venues to raise awareness of bad practice, championing fairer models and supporting good promoters will help ensure that grassroots music remains vibrant and accessible.

Establish a fairer wage, paid placements and more permanent roles

13 **Decasualisation of labour** – the lack of permanent roles across the arts sector in Greater Manchester, along with insecure hours and poor pay, means that the only people willing to take up roles already have greater financial stability (i.e. the bank of mum and dad) and that many working class people are excluded. To change this model, organisations of scale in the city need to come together to form an agency and a central employer to create full time roles that are shared across organisations. This agency should seek to directly employ people from diverse and working-class backgrounds.

14 **Pay every young placement, trainee and intern** – You only widen access when people earn enough to stay in the sector. The government is currently gathering evidence on how to strengthen protections for younger workers and action is needed to end unpaid work for young people across the arts sector in Greater Manchester.

15 **Curb low pay and late payments:** Use a real living wage across all early roles, move to long term contracting in funded organisations and embed prompt payment clauses more widely in supplier terms.

Bridging the equity gap for start-ups and helping working class artists develop a global presence

16 Research shows that creative start-ups in the UK are four times more likely to struggle with raising finance. This equity gap is because traditional lenders don't understand creative businesses and deem them too risky. Support is needed to make creative start-ups more 'investment ready', mentoring schemes required that specifically focus on advising entrepreneurs how to navigate the financial ecosystem, strategically beneficial partnerships need to be established with philanthropists across the region and greater access required to angel investor syndicates that understand creative businesses.

17 **Build on successful initiatives to increase the global visibility of working class talent:** The promise of the Mayor of Greater Manchester to launch the UK's first regional music export office by GMCA is exactly the kind of direct investment that could boost early career working class musicians. Similar considerations should be given to growth focus creative industries, which, with relatively small amounts of seed investment, could lift emerging talent to a place of financial stability. For example, if the Music Export Office (once established) can demonstrate its economic and social impact, options for a GM Film Office, GM Gaming Office or support for institutions like BIMM to produce the next wave of technicians could all benefit working class emerging talent.

Track impact and improve transparency

18 **Measure, publish, act:** Collect granular data, audit each year and tie funding and commissioning to measurable inclusion outcomes.

19 **Sort out career progression** – You retain talent when advancement is transparent. To break down barriers to career advancement, there needs to be clear promotion criteria, sponsorship from senior leaders who put real influence behind growth, the publication of diversity data by grade and ring fenced development funds for people with multiple barriers.

Increasing opportunity when decisions happen everywhere

20 **Spread power beyond the capital:** Funding long term creative hubs across all regions, giving regional hubs real commissioning authority and moving leadership roles out of single centres will increase opportunity.

21 **Let communities shape decisions:** Create permanent advisory panels representing working class, regional, minority and disabled creatives. These should be delivered at a macro level through GMCA and by local authorities at a borough level.

METHODOLOGY

This inquiry was carried out between August and December 2025 and saw our team review a wide range of data sources and gather evidence through various engagement activities and freedom of information requests. The inquiry was launched through local and national media and we hosted a microsite containing further details of our aims and supporters. It also invited people to get in touch with us through a secure email address.

During this time, we developed and publicised a survey, which generated 300 responses from creatives across the region. We also carried out multiple one-to-one interviews with artists, focus groups and meetings with key institutions. In addition, we invited people to contact us through a secure email, which received further written submissions. In total, we held over 150 hours of conversations with contributors and, in keeping with best practice, have anonymised all participants.

Greater Manchester is extremely diverse and the representative sample of people we have engaged with during this project reflects the breadth and depth of our region. In the course of our activities, we have engaged with creatives at all levels, from school-leavers, dabblers and teenage artists to mid-careerists and established practitioners through to internationally acclaimed masters of their craft. Our engagement was broadly gender balanced, covered diverse groups, people with disabilities, young and old and touched on all areas of the city region.

The representative sample of voices captured in this report considers intersectionality, and we found some noticeable differences between entry level and early stage artists and those in leadership positions. Further work could consider intersectionality in greater detail to explore unique experiences of privilege and disadvantage other than that caused solely by class. What is clear is that class impacts on all characteristics and is too often a missing piece of the EDI jigsaw.

Many of those we engaged with praised the nature of this work and said they welcomed the opportunity to contribute as they felt their views and needs had long been ignored. We have tried to faithfully capture their frustrations, struggles and hopes for the future.

At the start of 2026, Greater Manchester should be striding confidently into the second quarter of the 21stcentury. After all, over the past decade we have been the fastest growing city region economically, been named the creative capital of the UK and continue to break new ground in attracting major cultural events – this year alone will see the BRIT Awards, never before held outside of London, and the MOBO Awards, Europe's biggest celebration of Black music and culture, held in Manchester for the first time.

And if that gait has more than a hint of swagger, then I guess it comes with being a region famed for a certain attitude that might be summed up as an inherent confidence, defiance and self-assurance. That bold, do-it-yourself mindset is arguably Manchester's 'superpower'; it's the spirit behind much of the great outpouring of creativity that makes us a cultural powerhouse. And it's this spirit that continues to deliver success.

However, as this report cautions, there's no guarantee that this famed formula will work forever. As history reminds us, yesterday's formula for success is often tomorrow's recipe for failure. While the spirit of our region remains as creatively fierce as ever, the lived experiences of artists offer pause for thought. We cannot continue to bank on the Herculean perseverance of a few great talents managing to beat a system that's rigged against them. It's getting harder to beat and it needs overhauling so that everyone has a fair chance.

It is clear from our findings that parts of our region are adapting to a new world, but this needs to happen much faster. There are some organisations already recognising class as a protected characteristic and changing their policies to reflect this. Others need to follow. There are entrepreneurs actively scouring estates across our region to turn creative tech wizards into tomorrow's premium content makers. This wave of Gen Zs needs to be

It's right that Greater Manchester celebrates our successes – and there are many to celebrate. But we should also pay close attention to failings.

nurtured, lifted and properly informed about the creative opportunities out there. There are teachers fighting to firmly embed creativity in school life. They should be championed every step of the way. There are social entrepreneurs, CICs and all manner of changemakers disrupting exploitative models, seeing creative solutions in empty buildings and future leaders on every council estate. Their work needs to become part of wider strategies, championed by leaders and supported by convening powers. There are leading organisations currently having conversations about joining forces with others to create permanent shared roles that begin to end the decasualisation of labour. These conversations should be louder. And some of our most prominent venues are discussing how they can give more tickets away to young people from deprived areas to access live events. These discussions need to be the basis of partnerships forming to ensure everyone has access to world class cultural events.

It's right that Greater Manchester celebrates our successes – and there are many to celebrate. But we should also pay close attention to failings – because these cannot be glossed over. The Covid-19 exodus has seen all sorts of skilled arts professionals, from technicians and producers to lightning experts and set designers, leave and not come back. We spoke to many arts organisations that have all lost jobs in recent years and have seen countless venues disappear too.

It is hard to fully articulate how the cumulation of this opportunity cull has impacted on the mindset of working class artists, many of whom now see dreams and possibilities disappearing out of reach. Perhaps it can be best summed up through the words of a Manchester theatre producer who told us that she'd previously loved talking to pupils at school encouraging them to pursue a career in the arts. But during the last few years she'd decided to turn down requests.

''Throughout my two decades of working in the arts sector I have loved talking to young people about having a career in the arts. But I can no longer in good conscience say to working class kids 'you can have a career like mine'. It just doesn't feel true anymore and that is heartbreaking.''

Turning around this sense of despondency is going to require dramatic solutions. It's going to require us to reject structures that have locked out working-class, disabled, minority and regional talent for too long, structures that are now choking creativity, legitimacy and relevance. In their place, we need to build something better.

An industry where talent is discovered everywhere, nurtured properly, paid fairly and allowed to rise. An industry that looks and sounds like the country it claims to serve. Only then will we get to change who creates the culture that Britain exports to the world.

Building this is going to require enormous determination and many committed hands.

But it's also going to require something else that we've seen plenty of evidence of. It's there in the minds of young people sitting before mentors passionately instilling them with a sense of opportunity. It's there in inner city playgrounds where artistic directors are teaching working class kids a love of dance and giving them a passport to perform around the world. And it's there in the dignity of a proper pay packet that artists are getting for the first time.

That mercurial quality is hope. And it's what all great city regions are built on.

This report was led by the Class Ceiling co-chairs Nazir Afzal OBE and Avis Gilmore, and project managed by RISE directors Matt Baker and John Blundell.

RISE, and the Inquiry's chairs, would like to thank all our supporters, in particular Tom Besford and Jenna Omeltschenko for their help during this project. They have challenged our work, acted as a touchstone throughout, helped us gather data, allowed us to use their networks and much more. It would not have happened without them.

We would also like to thank our sponsors and all artists and organisations, small and large, that have engaged with us throughout this process.

Without our sponsors we would not have had the resources to book space for interviews, get the survey up and running, publish our report, run a launch event and pay people to attend focus groups. Our sponsors and supporters were the Co-op, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the University of Manchester.

We would also like to acknowledge the team at Creative Manchester for all their support to help us hit the ground running. There were too many people to name them all but we would like to thank Dave O'Brien, Hannah Curran-Troop, Anne-Marie Nugnes, Nathalie Perl and John McAuliffe for their time and guidance. Additional thanks goes to Alasdair Perry and Willem Babrovskie for their research.

Above all, we'd like to praise the tireless efforts of those we spoke to who are committed to lifting working class artists and spreading opportunities. They are true heroes of our region and deserve far greater recognition.

APPENDICES

Literature Review and Survey Results

There is a significant body of literature in relation to socioeconomic participation in arts sectors and creative industries in Greater Manchester and much of this is led by a team of people based at the University of Manchester. Their efforts have supported RISE's work in trying to identify solutions to ensure that this sector is representative of Greater Manchester's diverse population.

Recent Trends in Engagement Arts, Culture and Heritage – Creative industries Policy and Evidence Centre (2025)

There is an increasing focus on place based interventions for developing the culture economy, as strategic authorities, such as combined authorities, take root. This report considers recent trends in the UK Workforce and Engagement in England and provides an interactive dashboard for analysing a range of data sources.

The key findings paint a bleak picture. There were only 13 local authorities where 50% of residents had visited an exhibition in the last 12 months and all of them were in London. This was compounded by a significant class difference. For example, comparing (2022/23 and 2023/24) between 'middle class' and 'working class' populations, there has been a 9% increase in the gap for watching live music and a 7% increase in the gap for attending an arts exhibition. More broadly there are stark statistics that show 51% of people from managerial/professional households attending culture activities.

The only boroughs of Greater Manchester that have a higher rate of cultural engagement than the national average are Trafford and Bury. Manchester and Stockport have about average levels of engagement, and the other boroughs have comparatively low levels when compared to the national picture. None have particularly high levels in a northern context when compared to York, High Peak and the Derbyshire Dales.

Within Greater Manchester, there are clearly two things possibly driving these geographic disparities. The first is deprivation. Manchester has national engagement rates but the new residents – relating to the recent development boom – compared to the more stable populations are likely to be significant. Trafford, Stockport and Bury also have more affluent populations.

The second is transport infrastructure. Bury and Trafford were the first areas to get the Metrolink and Stockport famously has an eight-minute train to the city centre with an extensive rail network enabling the population to rapidly get in and out of the urban core. Salford is an obvious outlier in this, and it is likely that the mix of deprivation close to transport nodes is limiting cultural engagement.

Table 1 - Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities and heritage sites (2023/2024)

Geography / Borough	Attendance rate
Blackburn	16.50%
Blackpool	17.50%
Stoke	18.50%
Rochdale	17.50%
Wigan	18.20%
Oldham	18.70%
Salford	18.90%
Bolton	19.30%
Tameside	19.60%
Manchester	21.90%
Stockport	22.40%
Trafford	22.90%
Bury	23.40%
High Peak	28.00%
York	28.60%
Derbyshire Dales	29.00%
National Average	22.60%

Source: Data Dashboard Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

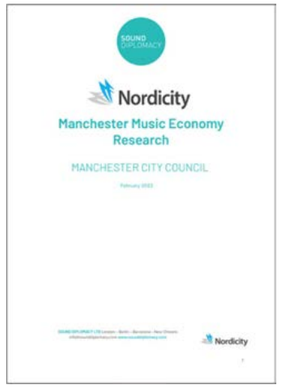
Creative clusters and sparse spaces Discussion Paper (2022)

This paper considers Greater Manchester's creative activity spread, the only significantly sized cultural ecosystem outside of London. It considers the distribution of employment and workplaces across the city.

The report identifies that Salford Quays and the city centre – which includes parts of Manchester and Salford – are nationally significant hotspots with smaller clusters in places like Altrincham and Wilmslow. The more deprived areas of Greater Manchester have relatively little to no creative activity at all. Outside of the core area, creative businesses are small, most employing fewer than five people although they do have relatively high incomes .

There is also reference to the recent £2 cap on bus fares which is assumed will support people accessing cultural opportunities in the wider city region. This is because the geographic access to creative industries is poor in the northern boroughs of Greater Manchester.

Manchester Music Economy Research – Manchester City Council (2022)



Music is one of the biggest cultural exports of the Greater Manchester conurbation when considering the numerous successful bands, such as Oasis, New Order and the Stone Roses. It has several arenas and venues (e.g. Old Trafford and the Co-op Live) that can support audiences for the world's greatest artists and has some of the most vibrant grass roots venues such as Band on the Wall.

This project looked at the needs and opportunities of the Manchester music economy through an extensive methodology of mapping the industry, stakeholder engagement, a survey, a policy review and an Economic Impact Analysis.

The survey found that the skew towards more affluent households was like that of the national average when considering class representation. This does, however, suggest that the problem is worse in Greater Manchester because the population has a significantly higher number of working-class households.

Education levels of survey respondents also highlighted that there is a local skew. It found that 56% of respondents to their survey had a tertiary education and only 14% of respondents had a primary or secondary level education. This is compared to DCMS's statistics that 23% have only a primary or secondary education in this sector. There could be a skew in the data collection method but this also suggests, if the sample is random among the sector, that the workforce is more affluent.

Survey Results

Our Class Ceiling survey was disseminated through multiple media channels and networks. Nazir Afzal was interviewed by the BBC and the link appeared in several newspapers and publications such as the Manchester Evening News and the Guardian. We also utilised several professional networks that RISE had developed while working on other projects in the subregion. In total, we received 300 responses from working class creatives and the results are below.

Table 2 - Do you live and work in Greater Manchester

Live and work	**66.80%**
Live	**12.20%**
Work	**8.00%**
Neither	**13.00%**

Table 3 - Do you currently practice or perform any of the following?

Visual arts (painting, sculpture, photography	**13.2%**
Performing arts (dance, music, theatre, spoken word)	**30%**
Literature	**7.4%**
TV & Film	**10.3%**
Arts admin and technical support	**11.1%**
Digital arts	**5.3%**

Note: For those who selected 'other' see Figure 1

Table 4 – Do you make your main living from this or is it an interest/passion?

Main living	**41.2%**
Interest/passion	**31.4%**
I generate income but still must work outside of the creative industries	**19.6%**
I generate income but still must work and its inside of the creative industries	**7.8%**

Table 5 – Did you qualify for free school meals at any point while you were at school?

Yes	**36.6%**
No	**55.5%**
Prefer not to say	**7.9%**

Figure 1 - 'Other' word cloud

Figure 2 - How would you describe your class?

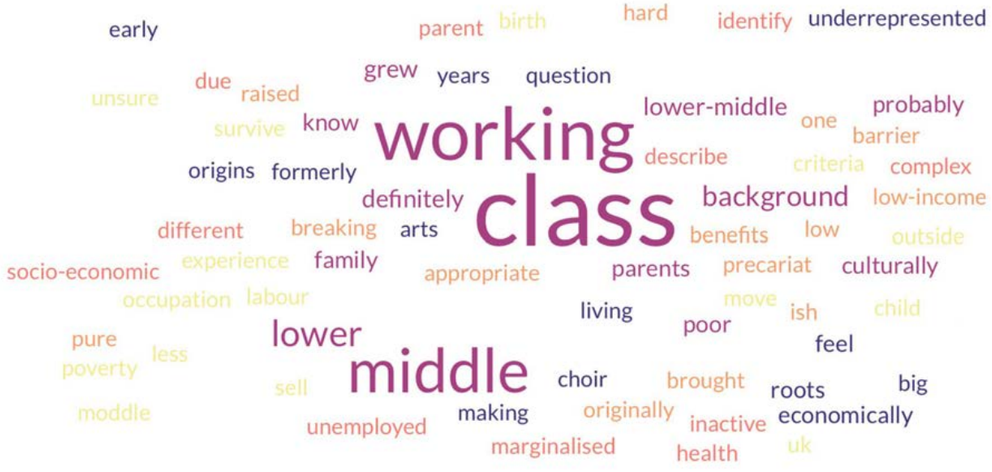


Table 6 – What was the education of your main household earner when you were aged 14?

Modern professional and traditional professional occupations such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil or mechanical engineer	**22.5%**
Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators such as: finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.	**11.1%**
Clerical and intermediate occupations such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.	**9.5%**
Technical and craft occupations such as: motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.	**19.4%**
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter or waitress, bar staff.	**24.5%**
Long-term unemployed (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year)	**7.1%**
Small business owners who employed less than 25 people such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner.	**3.2%**
Other such as: retired, this question does not apply to me, I don't know	**2%**
I prefer not to say	**0.8%**

Table 7 – Do you get paid for your work in the arts?

No - 36%	**Yes - 64%**

Table 8 – Do you work in the creative industries?

Full time	**28.1%**
Part time	**6.7%**
Freelance	**32%**
Zero hours contract	**2%**
None	**31.2%**

Table 9 – If yes, how did you secure your first opportunity in the arts

Through a personal contact	**26.2%**
From volunteering	**15%**
Worked in a back-office role	**4.8%**
Through an unpaid internship/ placement	**10.2%**
Through a paid internship/placement	**3.7%**
Open recruitment/advertised opportunity	**20.3%**

Note: For those who selected 'other' see Figure 3

Table 10 – Do you earn enough to make a living?

Yes

No

I earn some money but I do other paid work to supplement that income

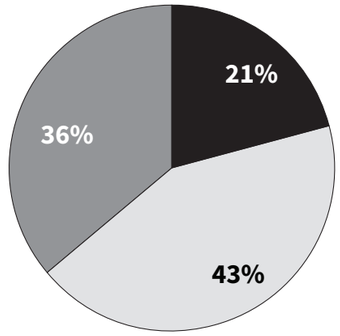


Table 11 – If you practice creative arts for pleasure, would you like to get paid?

Yes	**63%**
No	**15.7%**
Please supply further information if you wish?	**0.5%**

Source: RISE Class Ceiling Inquiry Survey

Figure 3 – 'Other' word cloud

Table 12 – When you were growing up did you personally know anyone who worked in the arts?

Table 14 – Are you paid the real living wager or above?

Table 13 – Do you see your lived experiences widely represented in the art form you practice?

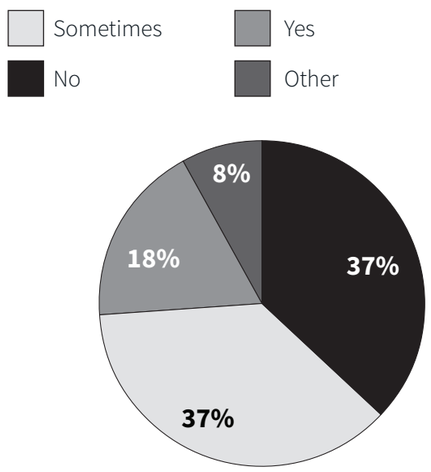


Table 15 – Have you experienced differential treatment, discrimination, bullying, harassment or bias based on social class or perceived social class?

Note: There is an 'other' section not easily depicted.

Source: RISE Class Ceiling Inquiry Survey

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