



CULTURE & ACTIVE LIVES GROUP

Pankhurst-Fawcett Report

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Scorecard - 2025

Women's senior representation has improved overall since 2018, while physical inactivity levels have generally worsened over the same period.

47%

Indicator 1: Senior position in Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO)

Women comprise 47% of leadership roles in Greater Manchester's National Portfolio Organisations.

30%

Indicator 2: not physically active 30+ a week

Inactivity (less than 30 mins of exercise per week) levels have increased from 28% in 2018 to 30% in 2025. This means overall the situation has got worse and the gap between men and women has widened.

Women in Cultural Leadership

In 2024/2025, women made up 47% of leadership positions of National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in Greater Manchester, a decrease by 1% from the previous year. This figure dropped last year, likely due to a change in funded organisations but had otherwise seen significant growth over the last decade. This is 1% higher than the national figure and the economy is impacting the sector in a similar way.

It should be noted that NPOs receiving over £250K must meet diversity objectives and reporting requirements. As such, these figures do not necessarily reflect the wider arts and culture workforce, but they do demonstrate what is achievable through targeted funding conditions and accountability frameworks.



It's difficult to compare investment in culture across Greater Manchester boroughs as it is part of multiple separately reported local authority budget lines.

Access to culture as supported by the GMCA culture fund is currently being measured. This shows that residents in Manchester, Salford and Trafford have the highest access to culture; Stockport, Tameside Bolton and Bury residents have 'good' access; Oldham and Rochdale have some areas with reasonable access; and Wigan residents have the least access to culture. These observations consider investment levels and geographical connectivity.

The sector

This is a critical sector for our city-region, contributing £1.4 billion each year to our economy and music alone brings around 800,000 tourists to the city each year, is worth £308 million and supports 6,800 jobs.

Despite its economic and social value, the sector is under significant economic pressure. Public funding is declining, wages are low, career progression uncertain and burnout rates high.

The workforce is fragmented, dominated by SMEs and freelancers making consistent data challenging and coordinated support challenging to provide at scale.

Industry fragmentation

The Arts Council England gender representation figures for NPOs are broadly aligned with figures recently reported in the dance sector and by UK music industry boards by [AWA Dance](#) and Women in CTRL both of which indicate relatively high representation of women in leadership roles. However, it is at odds with the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) figures, which report that women comprise only 34% of managers and directors across the wider creative industries.

This discrepancy highlights the importance of disaggregating data by sub-sector. Some cultural fields appear to be achieving gender parity at leadership level, while others continue to lag significantly behind. Aggregated creative industries data can mask both progress and persistent inequality.

Freelance workforce

Freelancers comprise around 50% of the workforce across the cultural sectors providing essential flexibility but also a precarious workforce, characterised by irregular income, lack of employment protections, limited access to training and exclusion from leadership pipelines. Women are **overrepresented in freelance and short-term roles**, which contributes to long-term pay disparities and career attrition.

Workforce stagnation

As part of Manchester Creatives recent [report](#) into workforce diversity in Manchester's cultural sector, researcher Dr Hannah Curran interviewed representatives of Manchester NPOs. Many reported workforce stagnation, with the small organisation size meaning that recruitment was rare and progression limited.

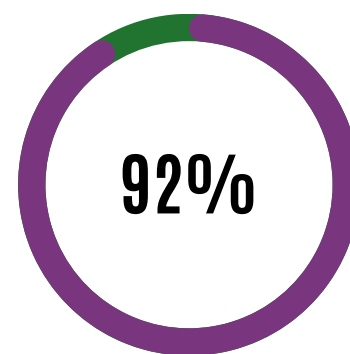
Financial pressures were cited as a factor driving safe 'look-a-like' new recruits, limiting the likelihood of recruiting more diverse applicants and reinforcing existing leadership demographics over time.

Gender pay gap

[Campaign for the Arts](#) and the University of Warwick estimate that across the sector, men are paid 28% more than women. The figures are taken from ONS data, rather than mandatory reporting, as most cultural organisations fall below the reporting threshold of having 250 employees. This suggests that the gender pay gap may be underestimated, particularly given the prevalence of low-paid freelance work and portfolio careers where women are overrepresented and pay transparency is limited. This indicates the need for sector-wide initiatives, including mentoring, coaching and transparent pay structures.

Audience engagement in the Arts

92% of adult [women engaged with the arts between May 2023 and March 2024 in the UK](#), higher than men's engagement at **89%**. This gives women a strong voice to call for change and celebrate success.



More than gender

The most prominent conversation on diversity in the arts is on the lack of working-class representation. Where it exists, leadership data consistently highlights the [lack of ethnically minoritised women and disabled women in leadership positions](#). However, intersectionality remains inadequately addressed in both data collection and policy responses.

Recent analysis by the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre finds that approximately 21% of the UK's arts, culture and heritage workforce identify as disabled, compared with 18% of the workforce overall.

For leadership and representation context, other research indicates that disabled people occupy a much lower share of managerial and senior roles in the cultural sector than they do in the overall workforce. For example, some industry diversity studies show disabled people make up about 7.7% of managers and directors compared with much higher overall workforce rates outside culture.

The class ceiling

[Data shows](#) that lack of working-class representation in workforce and in exhibitions leads to lack of engagement – and the gaps are widening. There has been a 9% increase in the gap between 'middle-class' and 'working-class' people attending a live music performance, and a 7% increase in the gap for 'attending an art exhibition'.

The Sutton Trust states that there are four times as many middle-class than working class younger adults working in the creative industries: lack of relatable narratives, lack of role models and the precarious and low paid nature of the sector need to be addressed to improve diversity and provide creative outputs with meaning to our broad Mancunian community.

Manchester City Council's research shows that local authorities with more people working in arts, culture and heritage have greater rates of engagement arts and culture, showing the importance of role models.

Initiatives in Greater Manchester

GM4Women2028's co-leads Sarah Galligan and Amina Ali launched our Seeing Us campaign in 2025 which audits representation of women, and particularly working-class women in archives, in exhibitions and in Greater Manchester's workforce. A team of volunteers conducted an audit of Lancashire Literature Archives and have since been invited to audit archives and collaborate with teams in other GM arts institutions. The campaign aims to produce a 10-borough-wide celebration of the work of female artists, using cultural visibility to start conversations and leverage change.

The initial audits were done in partnership with a creative writing group run by Amina Ali at Endeavour in Bolton, a charity working with domestic abuse survivors. The women's group received an introduction to the archives by lecturers from the University of Greater Manchester and research and audit training from Sarah Galligan. For all but two of the Endeavour audit team, it was their first time researching in a university environment and they shared that they felt utterly empowered by the activity and inspired to do more.

Manchester's recently launched Cultural strategy puts diversity at the core of its 'Everyone, Everyday, Everywhere' strategy. Rather than solely focusing its £7.5M annual investment in large institutions, it is looking to promote cultural activity throughout the city's communities.

Manchester Creates, a partnership of Manchester City Council and the University of Manchester has recommended the following initiatives, to be undertaken by their strategy team: a new support network of cultural leaders; pan-city Manchester mentorship and coaching schemes; mid-high level training schemes and placements for emerging leaders; shared EDI policies. Many of these recommendations align with those recommended in our 2025 report.

University of Manchester Chancellor Nazir Afsal is pioneering a review of working-class participation in the Greater Manchester Arts scene with the aim of providing a blueprint for action to drive structural equality.

The [GMCA](#) Women and Girls' Equality Panel, facilitated by the Pankhurst Trust and GM4Women2028, continues to highlight the need for increased representation of women and girls in leadership roles, including within the cultural sector.

Active Lives data

Movement matters to all women and girls, but they also face additional barriers to an active life. Everyone across Greater Manchester has a role to play to close the gender activity gap and address the intersectional inequalities within it.

The Active Lives data from Sport England (explored below), highlights the gender based physical activity gap that still exists. Women and girls across Greater Manchester experience complex and interconnected barriers to participating in physical activity. They include transition into adolescence, perceptions of safety, financial insecurity and health issues.

These barriers are varied and change throughout the life course. As children transition into adolescence, the way they take part in physical activity shifts and girls are less likely to move from active play to structured activity meaning they often disengage from physical activity all together. Research from Youth Sport Trust reported that heightened self-consciousness and growing body image concerns during puberty leads girls to withdraw from physical activity.

A lack of safety and perceptions around feeling safe continue to be a barrier for women taking part in physical activity. A study from Manchester University found that 68% of women involved had experienced abuse whilst out running. It is important to also note that these threats to safety are intersectional. Black women, women of colour, disabled women, trans women and women from other marginalised groups experience more and different types of harassment. As women enter the workforce, financial constraints also impact on people's ability to be active, whilst the gender pay gap in the UK is reducing it still exists. With estimates from PWC showing that it is around 11.2%.

Further barriers to physical activity as they age include the menopause which can impact on women's physical and psychological capability to be active.

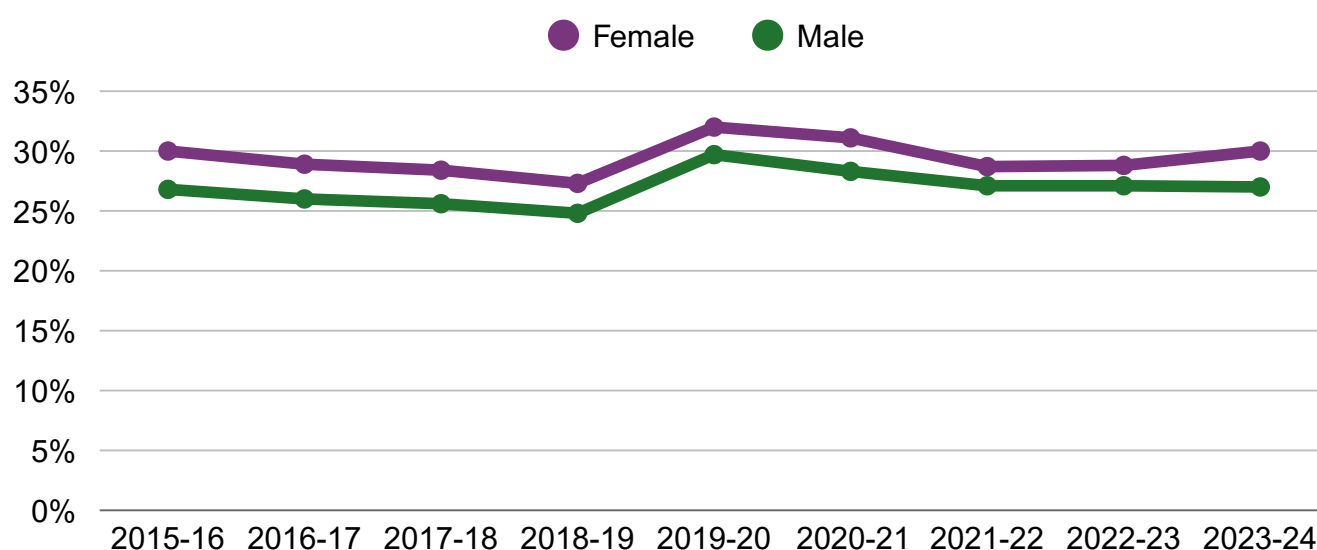


Greater scale and pace of change is possible. If we take a targeted approach, by centring experiences of the most marginalised and inactive women and girls, then we will shift the dial because we will be addressing the myriad of structural, systemic and cultural barriers that hold inactivity in place.

The gap between women's and men's inactivity (less than 30 mins of activity per week) in Greater Manchester has grown due to a slight increase in inactivity amongst women. **Female inactivity has risen to 30%** whilst for males the rate stays at 27%.

With the barriers referenced in mind, the Active Lives data from Sport England highlights the extent of the gender activity gap, showing us that women in GM are more likely to be inactive than men.

Figure 1. GM Inactivity Rate by Gender



Whilst the gap has been decreasing since the pandemic, with women's activity levels reducing at a faster rate than men (3.2% to 2.1%). The gap has risen slightly due to a marginal upwards trend in **women's inactivity levels** in 2022-23 and 2023-24 whilst rates amongst males stabilised.

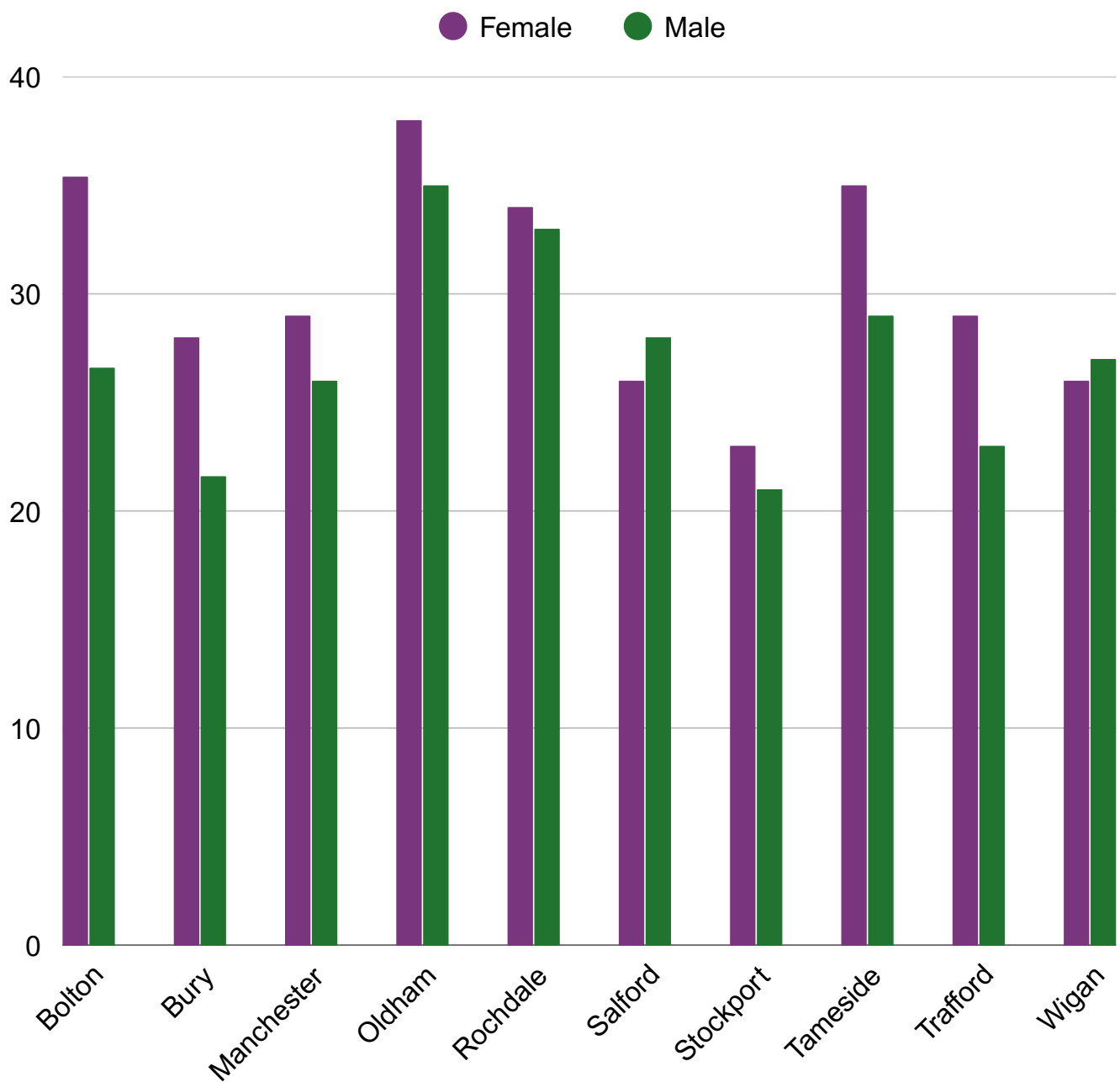
When we look at the data broken down by GM boroughs, we can see that whilst in some areas the gap between male and female inactivity is closing (with women in Wigan and Salford now recording lower levels than men), in other places the gap has got wider.

In Bolton, Bury, Tameside and Trafford the gap has widened. With female inactivity levels in some areas increasing significantly.

Whilst this widening gap requires us to think more strategically about the barriers women face, in many boroughs men's inactivity levels have also increased suggesting more universal causes.

Inactivity levels are higher for disabled women, women of African, Caribbean, South Asian and East Asian heritage and women in lower socio-economic groups.

Figure 2. Inactivity Rate by GM Borough, 2023-24



By comparing female inactivity trends with the picture for the rest of England, it becomes clear that whilst GM has seen a faster rate of recovery from the impact of the pandemic, the gap has widened due to an increase in female inactivity levels in GM.

Despite this slight increase in inactivity, there is lots of important work happening across GM to drive change for women and girls.

People, community groups, clubs, schools and stakeholders from a wide range of sectors from transport to planning and sport to violence reduction are making a huge contribution to supporting women and girls' activity levels already.

Figure 3. Female Inactivity levels, GM vs England



How is Greater Manchester making a difference?

GM Moving (a partner of GM4Women2028) are working with a clear intention to tackle the gender inactivity gap. Teams across GM Moving have developed some clear commitments (below), and they are working closely with partners in Liverpool City Region to make a difference. To further cement the commitment to greater gender equity for women and girls in GM across sport, physical activity and movement, there is ongoing collaborative work with Liverpool City Region to sign up to the IWG Brighton and Helsinki Declaration ([Greater Manchester Moving](#)).

Exploring barriers for women, girls and gender diverse people

There is a strong commitment to developing understandings of the barriers that restrict options for moving more within our communities, from affordability to caring responsibilities and concerns about safety. GM Moving believes that only by truly exploring these barriers can there be targeted action to unlock opportunities. See how this is put into practice: [Right to the Streets Toolkit](#).

Upskill and build capacity

GM Moving are committed to working internally and with partners to ensure that workforces have the necessary skills, data and understanding to unlock opportunities for women, girls and gender diverse people. From GM Moving's safeguarding team to place partnership team, there is work happening to strengthen knowledge, share learning and build confidence so that everyone can play their part in creating safe, inclusive spaces for movement and activity. This has been turned into action through work such as [our shared Menopause commitment](#).

Share data, stories and learnings

Across Greater Manchester, there are growing opportunities to enable women, girls and gender diverse people to move more, and yet there is more to do and learn from each other. [GM Moving](#) is committed to playing their role to ensure that they are sharing our learnings across Greater Manchester and beyond.

Supporting engagement and co-design

Only by including the voices of women, girls and gender diverse people are we able to create tools, resources and opportunities that resonate and are effective. The [Feel Good Your Way campaign](#) was co-designed by members of Bolton Youth Council, aimed at supporting girls with their mental health through physical activity. Directing funding and support to walk more, through our Walking and Wheeling [Fund](#) and [Festival](#). GM Moving is ensuring that they are making funds and support available to support women, girls and gender diverse people to walk and wheel more in a way that feels good for them. See how funding is directly supporting this, in the [Inspirational Women video](#).

Anyone across Greater Manchester can make their own [pledge](#) to highlight what they are doing to commit to tackling the gender inactivity gap.

Culture & Active lives group calls to action 2025

1

Women in culture

Our asks for the sector are to provide intersectional data, provide cross industry mentoring and business support initiatives and for women to use their vast strength as consumers in campaigns and in direct asks where they consume their culture.

2

Active Lives and Women - targeted approach to marginalised sector.

Let's take a targeted approach by centring the experiences of the most marginalised and inactive women and girls. We will shift the dial because we will address the myriad structural, systemic and cultural barriers that hold inactivity in place.