

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

creative



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Policy@Manchester,
University of Manchester
June 2026

Introduction

- University of Manchester and engaged research
- Creative Manchester research platform

Focus on Creative Industries and the path from research to policy impact

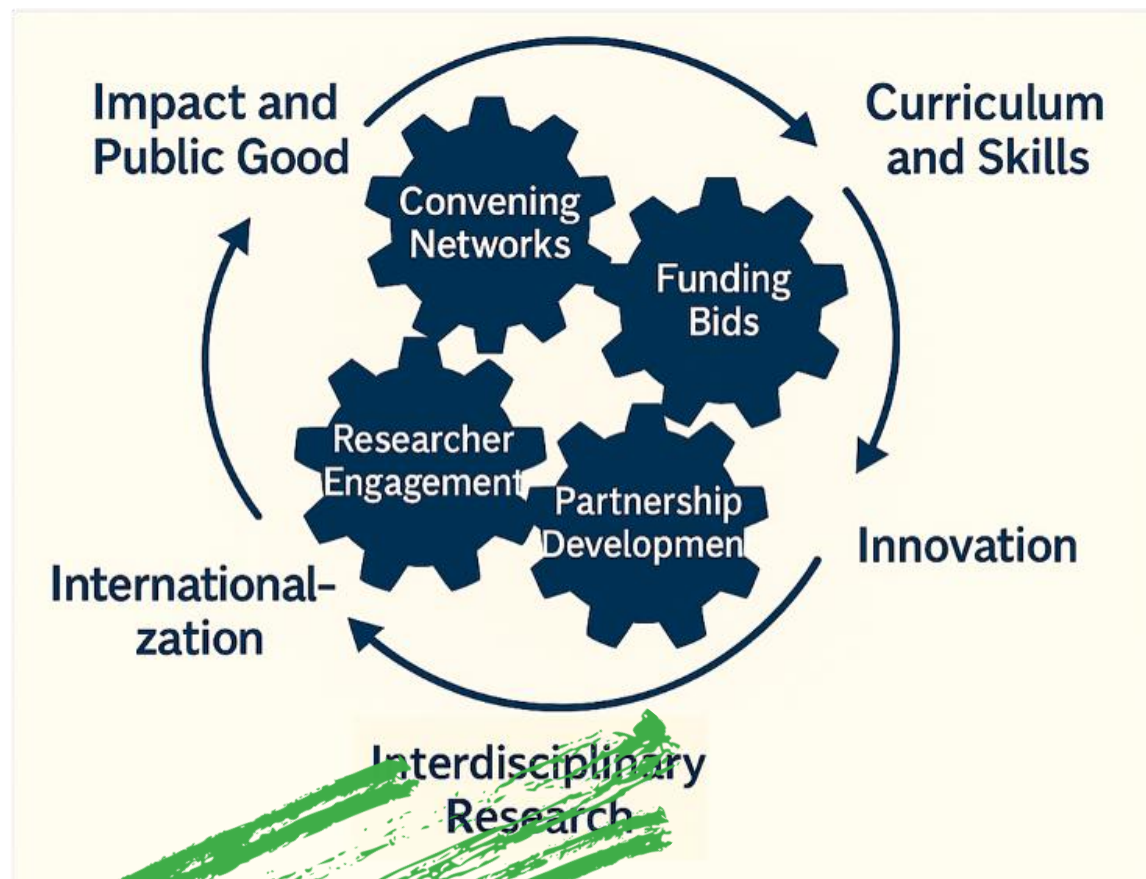
- Policy framework
- Creative Industries Research
- Creativity, Health and Well-being
- Creative Industries leadership and inequalities
- Creative methods and policy

Creative Manchester Introduction

- University of Manchester is ranked in the world Top 40, 44k students and 12k staff
- #1 for Social Impact
 - the original ‘civic’ university
- ‘Social responsibility’
 - pillar for engaged research



An ecosystem approach



Emplaced:

- supporting placemaking and building a flourishing region
- growing influence nationally and internationally

Virtuous Circle:

- Interdisciplinary research
- Sector needs
- Civic impact
- Innovation
- Policy

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Cultural Strategy

- MCC, *Always, Everywhere* (2024)
- ACE, after *Let's Create*: pillars – Excellence, People, Place (2026)

Industrial Strategy

- National 'Modern Industrial Strategy': Creative Industries named as one of eight 'high-growth' sectors, 2025
- GMCA Creative Industries strategy (and 'growth' funding attributed to sector), 2025

Areas of research interest (ARIs):

- GMCA: 'good growth' and 'prevention' 2026
- DCMS: 2026 reset
 - Growth and good jobs in every place.
 - A more socially cohesive country with an inclusive national story. .
 - Richer lives with choices and opportunities for all

Research England: HEIF terms and 'commercial benefit'

UKRI // mission (2026 refresh) to fund research which will:

- advance knowledge
- improve lives
- drive growth

POLICY CONTEXT



Focus: Creative Manchester & Creative and Cultural Industries in GM

Professor Dave O'Brien, *Workforce diversity and inequality* (Policy Evidence Centre)

Dr Leandro Valiati, *Beyond Growth: CCI in the 21st c; learning with the Global South* (ITAU Foundation)

Professor Abi Gilmore, *Place-based impact of culture* (DCMS)

Dr Biyun Zhu, 'Soft power: GM and international context *and* Valuing Culture' (UNESCO UK)

Prof Andy Miles and Prof Michele Lamont, *Recognition through Politics projects* (Leverhulme)

Dr Simon Parry et al, *Organisations of Hope: Locally Unlocking Culture Through Inclusive Access* (AHRC)



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Organisations of Hope

Addressing health inequalities and inequities in Greater Manchester.

Key people: Dr Simon Parry, Dr Angela Whitecross, Julie McCarthy, Hebe Reilly, Dr Luke Munford, Dr Helen Hawley-Hague, Dr Claire Forbes, Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt.

Project Partners: NHS Greater Manchester / Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Cartwheel Arts, 42nd Street, Dementia United, Action Together

Organisations of Hope has helped build a creative health research coalition to address this question:

How can creativity, culture, and heritage address health inequities in Greater Manchester?





The GM Creative Health Place Partnership, led by Julie McCarthy, GMCA

- 3-year implementation plan for Creative Health led by NHS GM, CUB and GMCA
- Delivered in partnership with localities, the VCFSE, the culture sector, health and care providers and higher education
- Funded by Arts Council England (£800k) and additional partnership funding (£800k)
- Focus on addressing health inequalities with 35+ cultural organisations involved
- Research led by UoM, Dr Hannah Waterson

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Diversity and cultural leadership

Dr Hannah Curran-Troop

Exploring the challenges and opportunities
for Manchester's cultural sector



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

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Background to the research

Building on 15 years of academic and policy research which has identified systemic inequalities in creative cultural work

Highlighting how minoritised workers are often systematically excluded from getting *into* and getting *on* in creative work

Exclusions within the sector are also intersectional, with class, race, gender, and mobility often coming together to shape the overall career paths of cultural workers (Dent, 2020).

The research context/problem

- *Always Everywhere, Manchester's Cultural Ambition (2024-2034)* - workforce diversity as a key priority
- Current lack of attention to diversity issues at leadership level - sparks the rationale for this study and partnership between UoM and Manchester City Council
- Despite numerous initiatives, policies and interventions around diversifying the workforce, there are still inequalities in the sector
- This study undertakes a deep dive into the key issues on the ground

Methodological approach

- Quantitative review of the existing data on workforce diversity
- 25 in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders – senior leaders, emerging leaders, and employment support professionals
- Stakeholder Roundtable Discussions –to consolidate the key recruitment and workforce challenges based on the research’s findings and 5 key recommendations

Key findings

Across six interrelated themes:

- ❖ Representational challenges
- ❖ Recruitment challenges
- ❖ Retention and progression challenges
- ❖ Skills gaps
- ❖ The challenge of responding to polarised political environments
- ❖ Broader cultural and structural challenges

Research recommendations/implications

1. Establish a new network of cultural leaders
2. Create a formalised Manchester mentorship scheme
3. Facilitate joined-up coaching provision
4. Mid to High-level training schemes/placements for emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds
5. Joined-up EDI Model – sharing and collaboration around best practice in the city



**ALWAYS
EVERYWHERE**

WORKSTREAMS

**Manchester's
Cultural
Ambition
2024 - 2034**

**Equality and Diversity
Workstream**

**An Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan
for Culture**

Resident and Engagement Programmes

**Workforce Development
Workstream**

Workforce Development Plan

**Study on recruitment & workforce
challenges**

Skills & Training Offer

Good Employment Charter

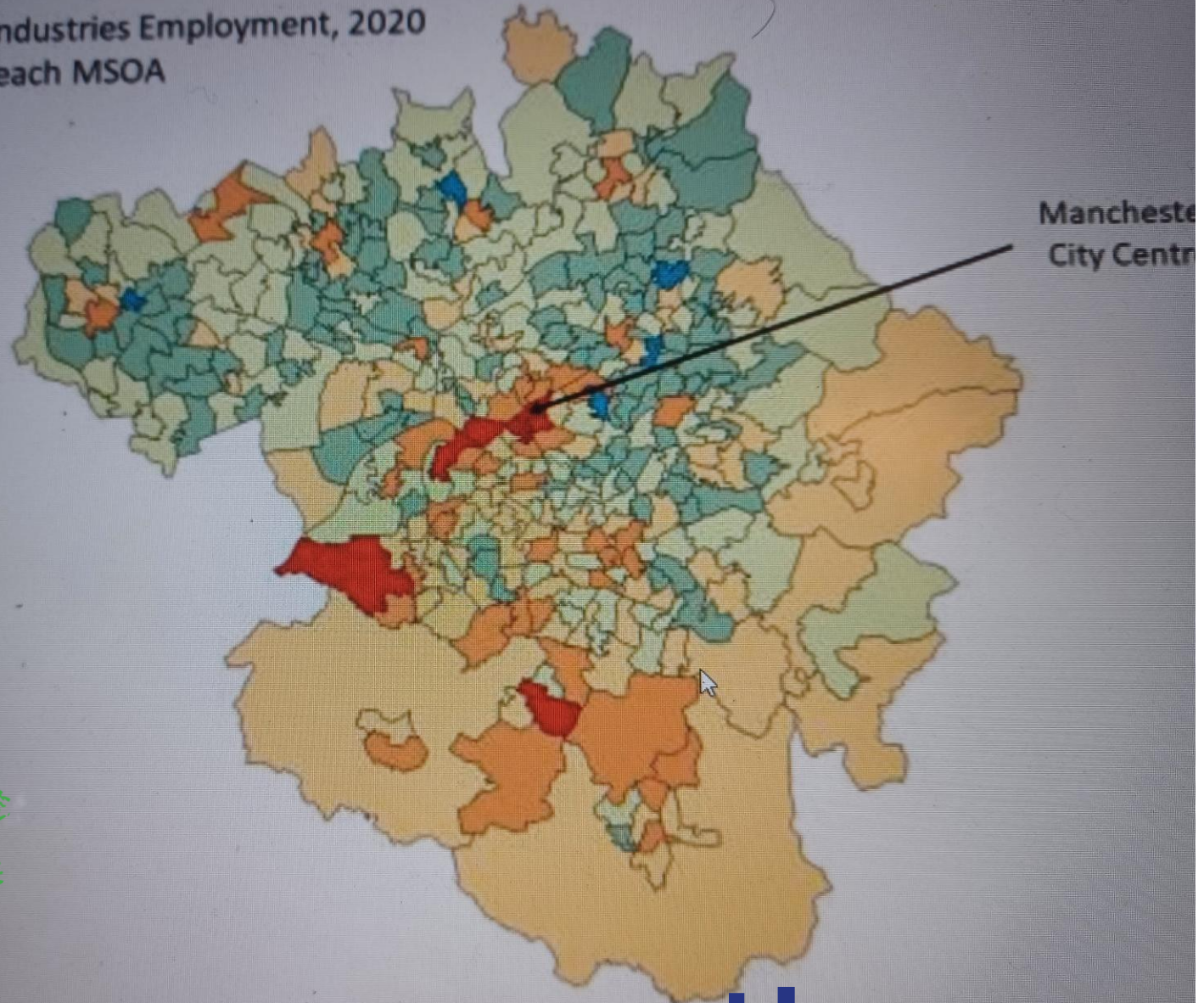
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Research and CCI Policy

Other UoM research maps the CCI ecosystem in Manchester, acknowledging

- Greater Manchester has Europe's largest and fastest growing creative industries (CI) sector outside London, recognised as having 'high concentration and growth' (Creative Industries Sector Deal, 2018; RSA, 2024) albeit with the geographies of these industries unevenly distributed across the region (Tether, 2022): Oxford Road Cultural Corridor and MediaCity UK

Creative Industries Employment, 2020
Percentage in each MSOA



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The RISE logo is positioned at the top right of the dark blue header. It consists of the word "RISE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Above the letter "I" is a small, white, stylized graphic of a person with arms raised, resembling a star or a burst of energy.

CLASS CEILING

A Review of Working Class Participation in the Arts
Across Greater Manchester
January 2026

A large, stylized graphic of a soccer ball is positioned in the center of the page. The ball is dark grey with white lines forming its panels. The letters "IGS" are printed in a large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the ball. The ball is partially obscured by a green brushstroke at the bottom left and a dark grey rectangular area on the right side of the page.

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%)

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



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-

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 senior courses

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

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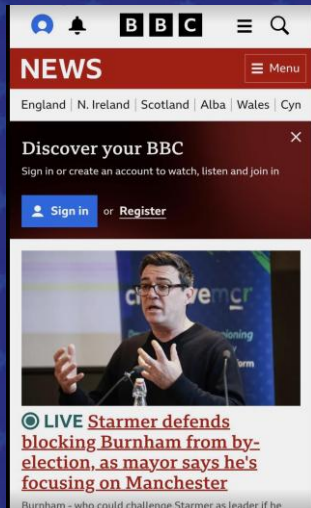


Launch of Class Ceiling report, WAG, Jan 2026

M2035: Research connected to impactful policy



Andrew Melchior and John McGrath, Sister, May 2026



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Dr Constance Smith: 'Theatre-based research methods to examine systems, regulation and resident experience in GM housing, improving knowledge transfer, civic engagement and policy impact'

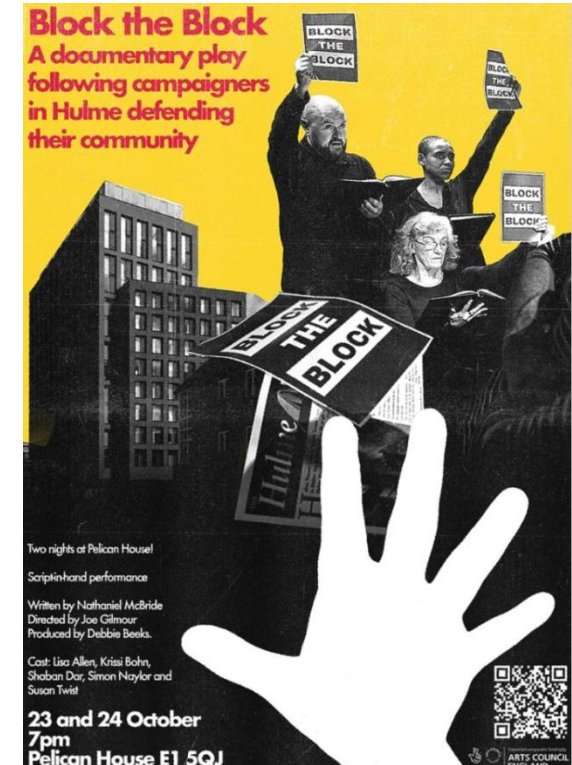
Research café: The cladding crisis - research and performance

SCHEDULE

Wed Apr 26 2023 at 12:00 pm to 01:30 pm

LOCATION

Contact Theatre | Manchester, EN



Building a Secure And Resilient World: Research and Coordination Hub

Community Innovation Practitioner Awards 2025-26

- The AHRC Creative Communities programme examines the role of **culture and devolution** in unlocking cross sector co-creation and place-based innovation across all 4 nations of the UK.
- Building on the work of the [2023-24 cohort](#), the new CIP 2025-26 cohort are engaged in **place-based innovation** in the policy contexts and research ecosystems of the devolved nations and mayoral authorities of the UK, working to galvanise creativity in their regions by engaging cross-sector partners in R&D, with communities as research partners.
- Located across all four UK nations, the CIPs explore the role of communities & partnership in collaborative R&D to develop a new evidence base on how and why culture can address key [UK government missions](#), **growth, regional inequality, belonging and equal opportunity**.

Research, practice and community innovation

- Developing a place-based approach to culture and devolution
- Developing workforce skills
- Developing cultural leaders
- Creative Methods, democracy and devolution
- Cultural Cohesion

Key **UK government missions**,
growth, regional
inequality, belonging and equal opportunity.



Crafting Connections (AHRC-funded CIP),
in collaboration with Cartwheel Arts,
Rochdale Town Hall, May 2026

Create. Act. Share. Scale.