

**May 2024**

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# **City Girl Creatives**

**Annual Report**

**Produced by  
city girl network**

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# Our Vision



Photography by Victoria Dawe

Pippa Moyle

CEO City Girl Network

The City Girl Creatives is a multi-disciplinary collaborative ecosystem of women, non-binary and trans femmes creatives, operating in all parts of the creative economy. This includes working in the arts (photography, videography, music, theatre, art etc.) and the creative sector (marketing, events, design, PR, tech development etc.).

This impactful network strives to empower gender equity across all creative work, hosting networking and training events, highlighting opportunities, and carrying out research to influence change.

Since November 2023, we have been conducting an ethnographic study into the current financial, societal and environmental situation for women, non-binary and trans femmes in the creative economy. In this report, we have outlined our findings and presented how the City Girl Creatives intends to contribute to the changes we wish to see.

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## Our Driving Principles

1. Eliminate the gender pay gap within the creative economy
2. Inspire creative collaboration for green, sustainable growth
3. Change workplace culture to create a more representative and diverse creative economy

# Executive Summary

For our first annual report, we adopted a mixed-method approach, surveying 556 people, reaching 165 people across three events in Brighton, Bristol and Manchester, interviewing 35 people, social listening and utilising existing research. Our intention was to gain a data-driven understanding of how the City Girl Creatives can facilitate change and futureproof creative careers.

We broke down the different types of working practices into three categories: employees, freelancers and entrepreneurs. Whilst each category faces slightly different challenges, we found a common trend to be that lack of confidence, connections and financial literacy are leading factors holding back gender equity in the creative economy.



Photography by Tamara Breeze

## 71% ↙

Full-time employees want to go freelance

## 479,000 ↙

Extrapolated to the UK creative economy, that's 479K full-time employees wanting to go freelance

## £2.3bn ↙

Of costs to train and replace the 71% of employees leaving the traditional workforce

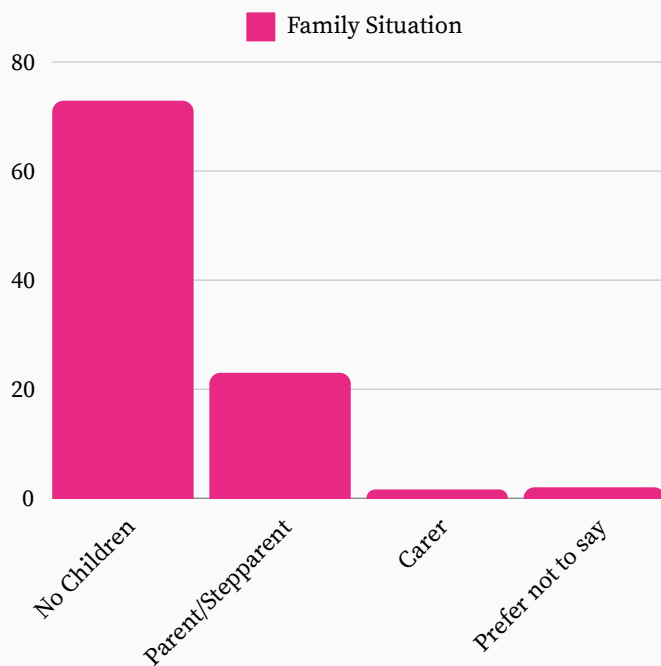
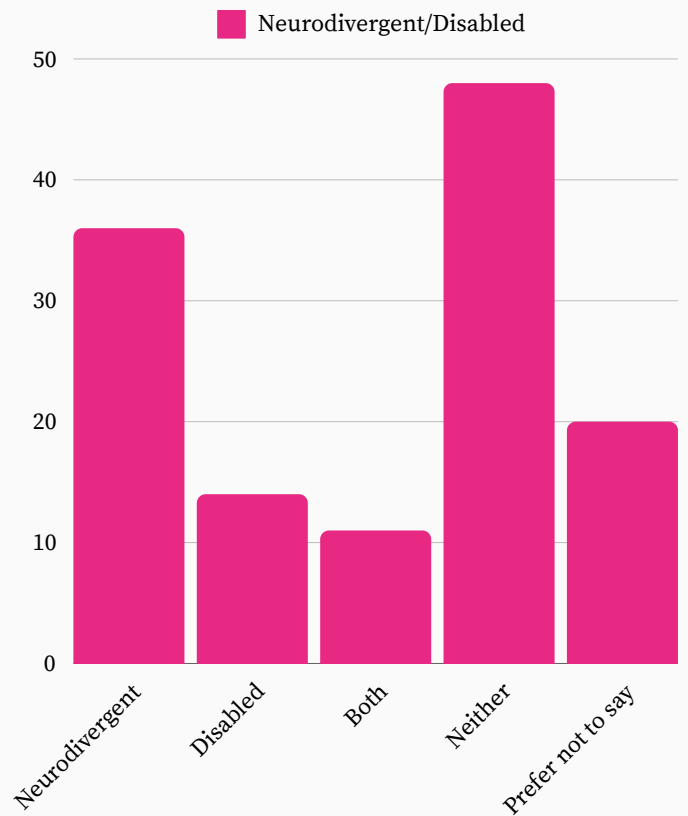
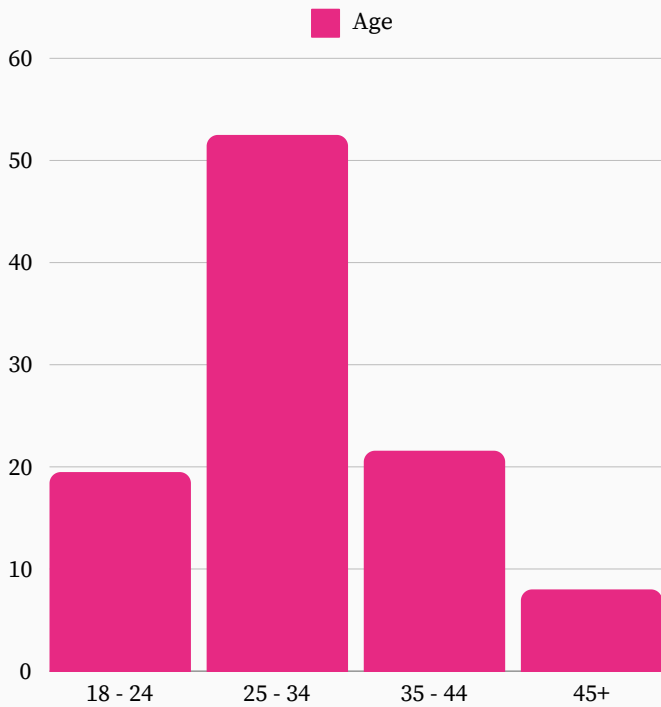
## 70% ↙

Freelancers and business owners don't have funding access to invest in equipment and growth

## 1 in 3 ↙

Freelancers earn less than £20,999 a year

# Demographics



Our report focuses on marginalised genders that identify with femininity, namely women (92%), non-binary femmes (4.5%) and trans femmes (3.5%).

We reached a nationwide UK audience, with a leading number participating in Bristol and Cardiff.

19.5% of our respondents were non-white, which is reflective of latest nationwide census results (18%).

**We reached creatives from multiple sectors, including: Advertising, Architecture, Arts and Crafts, Beauty, Broadcasting, Content Creators, Design, Events, Fashion, Film, Gaming, Marketing, Media, Music, Performing Arts, PR, Photography, Publishing, Research & Development, Software and Video**



**There are many barriers but a lot of it stems from being a male dominated industry, with managers who say things like**

**“Does your boyfriend pay half your bills?”**

**when asking for a pay rise.**

# How they work

## Employees

For the purpose of this report, we categorise “employees” as those who are PAYE employed by one company. This includes 49.1% of participants, with tech being the highest sector at 70%.

This option usually allows a structured environment with clearer career paths, job security, healthcare support and professional development opportunities.

**97%** ↙

of employees have faced barriers in their career

**71%** ↙

of employees aspire to freelance or pursue entrepreneurship

A staggering 71% of employees aspire to freelance or pursue entrepreneurship. When extrapolated across the entire creative sector, with 2.3 million employees (2021), **479,000 women** are looking to leave full time employment. This would **cost employers £2.3bn** in recruitment costs to replace them (based on an average salary of £29k).

The core reason for this migration away from traditional employment is reflected in our findings that **97% of employees have faced barriers to progression in their career**. For many marginalised genders, there are multiple layers to this, such as racial, socio-economic and disabled discrimination.

Most commonly, **33% of participants viewed masculine workplaces as a major issue** in their place of employment. In particular, a lack of support around women’s health and menstruation making workplaces a less inclusive place to work.

**21% of participants also highlighted misogyny as a serious issue within their workplace**. Numerous participants between the ages of 28 and 32 shared stories of employers asking about future family plans at work parties, with others being advised to share their intention not to have children on social media for employers to see.

**65% of those in tech** are working at companies **without female representation in the leadership team**.



**I honestly feel like my race has impacted my ability to progress, compared to other non-Asian colleagues.**





**I work in a company that has 23 stores across the UK. In which I think about a total of 7 women are employed.**

**We had to really push to get a sanitary bin put in the toilet. I am constantly addressed as “my dear” or other similar terms and never taken as seriously as all my other colleagues who are male.**

**I tried explaining to my manager the importance of female representation in any workplace but especially an already male-dominated industry.**

**He said he understood but then went on to just hire more men.**



# Freelancers

For the purpose of this report, we categorise “freelancers” as those who operate as a sole trader. This includes 34% of participants, with photography being the highest sector (35%).

This option was traditionally for those working as a visual, audio and performance creator (photographers, musicians, illustrators, actors etc.). However, there has been a sharp increase over the last 10 years in creatives switching to a freelance income. A number of employees have also taken to doing freelance work on the side to subsidise their income.

**1 in 3** ↙

freelancers earn less than £20,999 a year

**70%** ↙

freelancers and business owners don't have funding access to invest in equipment

Lack of financial support and education were strikingly common issues across all types of freelancers, with **1 in 3** who rely solely on that income declaring that they earn **less than £20,999 a year**, this rises to **80% for those under the age of 34**. Comparatively, only **7% of women in tech earn less than £30,000**.

With the average age of freelance participants as 33, there are serious concerns that a lack of ability to contribute is **storing up a pensions time bomb**. It also highlights the deepening issue of younger generations not having access to the property market or improve their rental living conditions. In the case of rent, with **80% of those under 34 earning less than £1,444 a month**, it's not possible to rent a one-bedroom flat in major UK cities.

**The biggest anxiety and barrier for freelancers is the cost of equipment.** With 70% sharing that they cannot access funding to invest in vital equipment, such as laptops, cameras, audio equipment, editing softwares and other forms of performance technology. Though there are payment schemes and cheaper equipment alternatives available, we found a significant lack of awareness and education around how they can be accessed.

**A lack of representative role models was highest in the film, photography and TV industry at 55%**, comparative to an average of 20% across all sectors. In the same industry, 61% have also highlighted it as a masculine or misogynistic sector that's holding them back.



**My industry feels like a gated community.**

**I am trying to forge a full time career path but it's very difficult to keep motivated when there are no women on set.**



**The rates I'm  
offered now are  
lower than I was  
paid back in 2017.**



**Expats and people of colour, like myself, often receive job offers that are far lower than for other UK citizens**

# Entrepreneurs

For the purpose of this report, we categorise “entrepreneurs” as those who are building their own business. For example, an ‘entrepreneur’ would be building an agency, whereas a ‘freelancer’ would be self-employed for multiple clients. This encompasses creatives building their business as a full time job, and those building a business alongside their full-time job, commonly referred to as ‘side hustles’.

20% of participants identified as a business owner, side hustler and entrepreneur.

**62%** ↙

believe there is a lack of networking opportunities in the creative economy

62% of entrepreneurs cited a significant lack of networking opportunities to find new clients and collaborators. Many cited that the networking opportunities that they have found lack diversity and accessibility by being too male-dominated, not racially diverse, not accessible and too expensive, with the average price of networking events costing £25.

**We also found a strong correlation between entrepreneurs struggling with a lack of confidence (57%) and a lack of funding opportunities (54%).**

Addressing this confidence crisis will most likely increase the amount of venture capital funding given to women, non-binary and trans femme entrepreneurs, which is less than a 2% share of the investments made each year (2022).

“Side hustlers” noted that one of the bigger barriers to stepping into their business full time is a lack of education on financial planning.



**I didn't realise until I was 30 years old that I'm neurodivergent, which exposed the many so-called invisible barriers that I face without knowing.**

**I didn't relate to many other (mostly male) solopreneurs and/or filmmakers, and had a huge amount of limiting beliefs that resulted in a lack of confidence and trust in myself.**

**I have found it extremely difficult to obtain funding. I have been unsuccessful with every funding application submitted in the past three years.**

# Confidence and lack of connections are the biggest barriers to progression in every role

This was closely followed by a **lack of financial literacy and funding opportunities.**

We have found a universal connection between a fundamental lack of financial literacy in relation to pay, a lack of confidence and lack of opportunities to build connections. Together, they have built a significant barrier for all women to progress financially and professionally in the creative economy.

This is worsened by experiences of racial discrimination, the motherhood penalty, entrenched class disparity and ableist working cultures.

**68%**

Lack of Confidence

**57%**

Lack of networking opportunities

**53%**

Lack of funding opportunities

From our survey results

A common theme in our qualitative data was a core lack of knowledge and skills in pricing services, negotiating more pay and investing in equipment. The majority of participants at events had little to no pension plan, with many opting out of their companies pension scheme, citing the need to have the money now.

Not only is this reflective of the global gender financial literacy gap and upcoming pension crisis, it indicates the need for accessible investment and training to sustain the creative economy.





# **I was assumed to be the “tea lady”**

**on many occasions and not listened to  
or appreciated as much as male  
counterparts**



**There's a huge misrepresentation of working-class women in this industry.**

**My accent and background hold me back.**

## Conclusion

# The Future is Change

The creative economy predominantly functions within archaic parameters – patriarchal structures, misogynistic culture, economic disparities, racial discrimination, classism, neurotypical and ableist environments.

As a direct result, the desirable career path for marginalised genders has shifted from progression within traditional employment to becoming a multi-hyphenate freelancer and entrepreneur. Yet, as demonstrated by our findings, the alternative is riddled with economic uncertainty and a lack of access to growth opportunities.

Systemic change is needed. Fast.

Creative tools are rapidly evolving, encompassing more skills and taking on more roles. AI, software, algorithms, cameras, musical instruments; all being built to create, innovate and build a better society. We need to build the infrastructure to do the same for creative minds.

Our focus over the next year will be placed on three pillars: expanding creative connections, growing confidence and providing valuable financial resources.



Photography by Charlotte Hickmott



**Graduating during covid and the limited options at the moment have left me without much of a network and being told I don't have enough experience.**

# How the **City Girl Creatives** can help power change








- ♥ Run quarterly in-person networking events in our City Girl Network communities across the UK
- ♥ Produce a monthly newsletter to all City Girl Creatives highlighting opportunities for work, funding and skills development
- ♥ Grow our LinkedIn Community for all City Girl Creatives to connect online
- ♥ Host regular in-person and online training sessions, prioritising skills development and financial literacy
- ♥ Build partnerships with like-minded organisations who support marginalised genders within the creative economy
- ♥ Continue with annual reporting in order to provide vital data to influence change
- ♥ Utilise our data and network to campaign for change
- ♥ Collaborate with leading organisations to provide funding opportunities for freelancers and entrepreneurs



# Our Objectives for 2024/25



Photography by Charlotte Hickmott

-  **Increase Networking Platforms:** Host a series of networking events both online and offline, aiming for a 200% increase from the previous year and develop at least 15 community partnerships to provide more networking opportunities.
-  **Enhance Financial and Business Acumen:** Deliver comprehensive business and financial literacy programmes through expert-led sessions.
-  **Develop Leadership and Confidence:** Work with experts and partners to create opportunities and workshops for confidence and leadership growth
-  **Support Entrepreneurial Growth:** Provide targeted business advice and funding guidance through expert-led workshops, available both in person and online.
-  **Promote Sustainable Creative Practices:** Create a manifesto for sustainable practices within the creative industries

**We will produce a mid-year progress update and a comprehensive annual report assessing the effectiveness of these initiatives. Use these reports to refine strategies and maintain transparency with all stakeholders, ensuring the reports detail measurable impacts and areas for improvement.**

**The City Girl Creatives launch was powered by MPB, the largest global platform to buy, sell and trade used photo and video kit.**

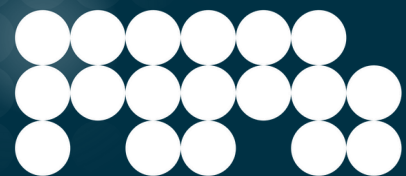


## **About MPB**

**We are the simple, safe and circular way to trade, upgrade and get paid for kit. Circularity is at the centre of MPB. We promote sustainability, diversity and inclusion in everything we do.**

**We prioritise inclusive recruitment and support employees with extensive training and development.**

**We promote inclusive visual storytelling and an inclusive circular economy. Our business model is circular. All packaging is plastic free. Our cloud-based platform uses renewable electricity.**



**mpb.com**





**Sophie Collins**  
CMO, MPB



**"MPB are supporting City Girl Creative's Annual Report as part of our commitment to promoting gender equality in the creative industries. We are dedicated to opening up opportunities, giving more people a voice, and creating a more sustainable future.**

**We continuously strive towards gender balance at MPB. Our pay gap leans towards women, our exec team is 57% female and our senior leadership is 50% female, as we recognise that having an inclusive and diverse workforce means we unleash creativity, and empower our people to drive innovation and excellence in their work.**

**It's important that the conversation around gender equality and representation continues, and as the findings of City Girl Creative's Annual Report show, there is still a lot of work and collaboration required to drive meaningful change."**

Read more on [MPB's Impact Report](#)



[mpb.com](http://mpb.com)



# Get involved



Photography by Chloe Imbach

## Join for free

[citygirlnetwork.com/citygirlcreatives](https://citygirlnetwork.com/citygirlcreatives)

## Partner with us

[partnerships@citygirlnetwork.com](mailto:partnerships@citygirlnetwork.com)

## Currently based in...

**Bath**  
**Birmingham**  
**Brighton**  
**Bristol**  
**Cardiff**  
**Chester**

**Edinburgh**  
**Glasgow**  
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**Manchester**

**Milton Keynes**  
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