

# Census 2021 Briefing Occupations

**GMCA Research**  
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**Dataset:** Occupation, Geography, Age, Ethnicity

**Datalink:** The data used in this briefing can be found at [Industry and occupation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk). It can also be found at [RM102 - Occupation by age - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk) and [RM104 - Occupation by ethnic group - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk).

**Definitions:** An occupation refers to a type of job categorised by skill level and skill specialisation.

**Census day:** The 2021 census was held in England and Wales on 21 March 2021. Census 2021 was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic so may not show normal population and household patterns due to temporary changes in living circumstances during the pandemic for some households.

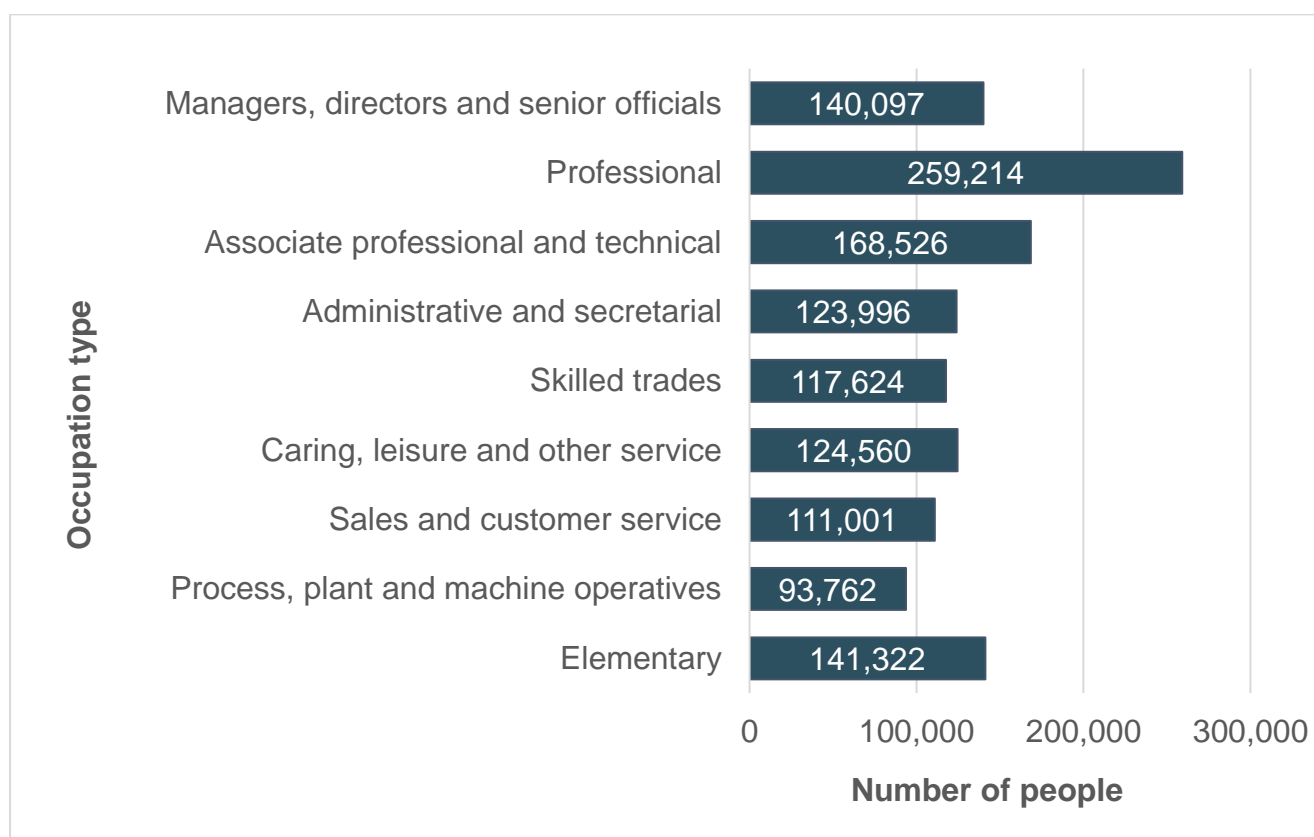
## Key points

- Professional occupations are the most common occupation type in Greater Manchester, and in every GM district, according to the 2021 census. Around 260,000 residents were in a professional occupation, accounting for 20.2% of all jobs in Greater Manchester, in line with the national figure (20.3%).
- Alongside a rise in the proportion of people in professional occupations, there has been a fall in the proportion working in administrative and secretarial occupations, skilled trades, and elementary occupations.
- Occupation types vary by district. For example, in Trafford, 28.8% of occupations are professional, compared to 15.3% in Oldham and 15.1% in Tameside.
- Young people are overrepresented in sales and customer service, and elementary occupations, whilst older workers are overrepresented in skilled trades and process, plant and machine operative occupations.
- Some occupation types are more prevalent amongst certain ethnic groups. For example, residents identifying as Black are much less likely to have a job as a manager, director or senior official, but are more likely to work in a caring, leisure or service occupation.

# Main Findings

Professionals were the most common type of occupation in Greater Manchester in 2021, accounting for 20.3% of all jobs, according to the 2021 census. The least common occupation type was 'process, plant and machine operatives' (definitions in the appendix below). This was the only occupation type that fell below 100,000 in Greater Manchester.

## Number of people (16+) by occupation, Greater Manchester, 2021

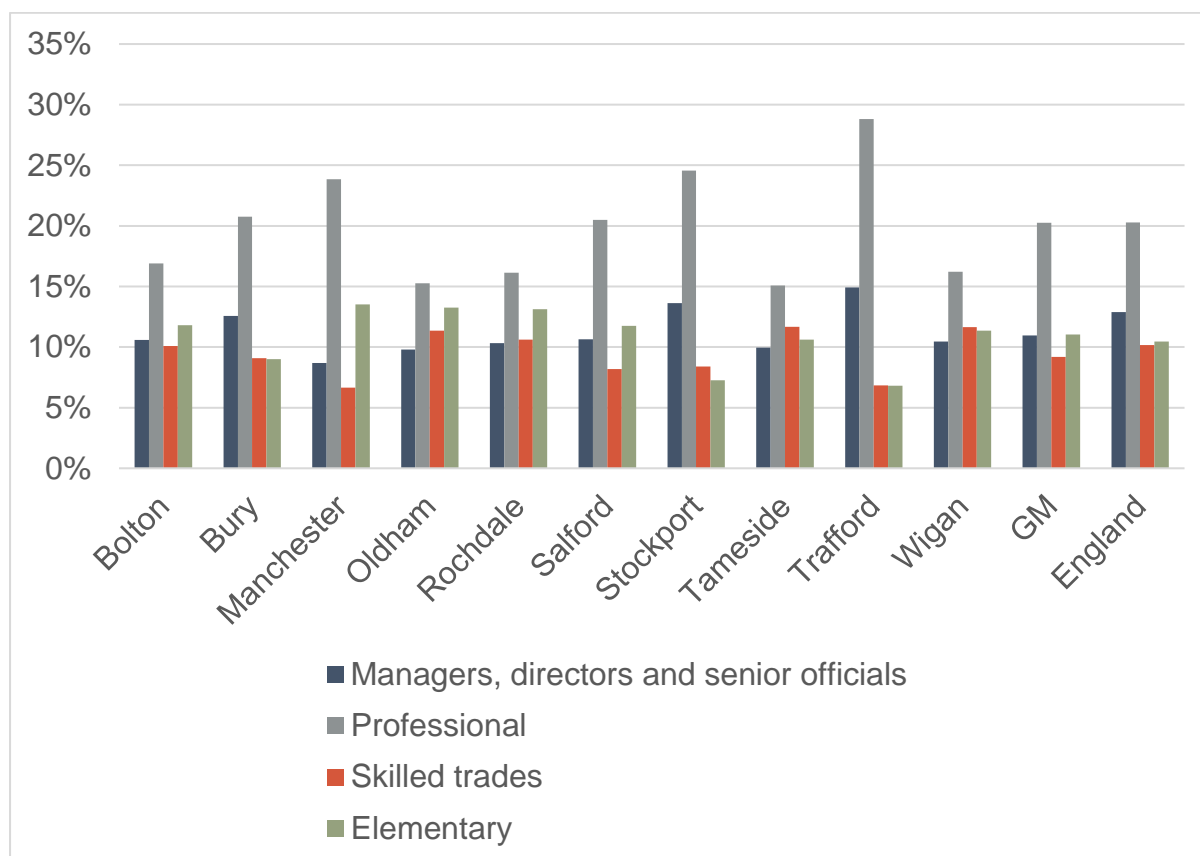


Source: Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by age](#)).

## Occupations by district

In every district of Greater Manchester, professional occupations were the most common, though the proportion differed substantially. In Trafford, well over a quarter of residents undertook professional occupations. The proportion was much lower in districts such as Oldham (15.3%) and Tameside (15.1%).

## Percentage of residents (16+) by occupation (% of total), by district, 2021



Source: Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by age](#)). Note: this chart focuses on four occupations for clarity and removes the other groups of occupations.

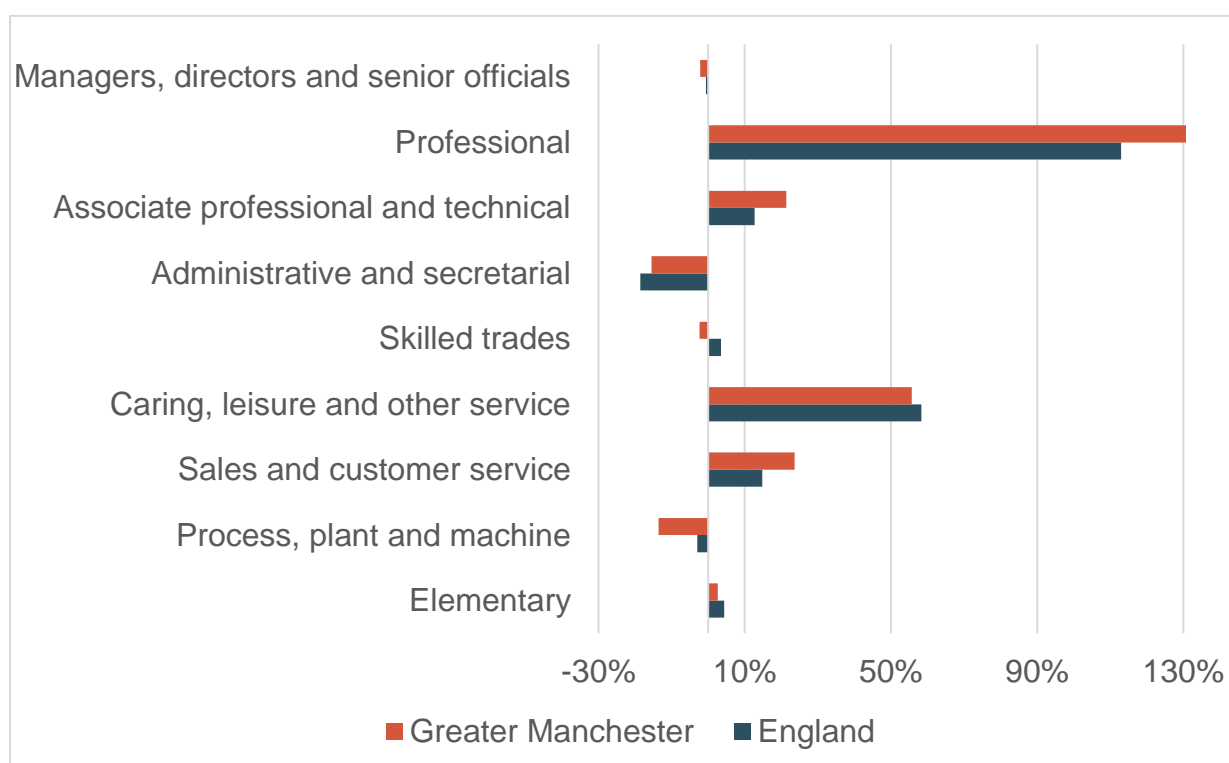
## Occupations over time

Over the last twenty years<sup>1</sup>, the rise of the professional workforce is the most notable trend. The proportion of Greater Manchester residents in a professional occupation rose from 10.4% in 2001 to 20.2% in 2021. Meanwhile, there have been falls in the proportion of residents working in administrative and secretarial occupations and in skilled trades. Elementary jobs have risen very slightly in number since 2001 (from 137,660 to 141,322), but declined as a proportion (12.8% to 11%).

The chart below shows the broad pattern of occupational change over twenty years while the table that follows supplies numbers and proportions. The trends are generally mirrored nationally, although the switch from industrial to service-based employment has been sharper in Greater Manchester.

<sup>1</sup> The 2001 census refers to a slightly different cohort compared to 2011 and 2021; whilst 2001 census covers those aged 16-74, the 2011 and 2021 censuses cover the entire population aged 16+. This does not significantly affect the ability to compare between datasets.

## Percentage change in number of workers by occupation (2001-2021)



Sources: Census 2001 and Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by age](#)).

## Occupations in Greater Manchester, numbers and proportions, 2001-2021

Occupation	2001		2011		2021	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Managers, directors and senior officials	13.3%	143,178	9.5%	115,717	10.9%	140,097
Professional occupations	10.4%	112,233	16.5%	202,432	20.2%	259,214
Associate professional and technical occupations	12.9%	138,877	12.0%	146,373	13.2%	168,526
Administrative and secretarial occupations	13.6%	146,737	12.0%	146,473	9.7%	123,996
Skilled trades occupations	11.2%	120,450	10.6%	129,634	9.2%	117,624
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	7.4%	79,985	9.8%	119,786	9.7%	124,560
Sales and customer service occupations	8.3%	89,784	10.0%	122,012	8.7%	111,001

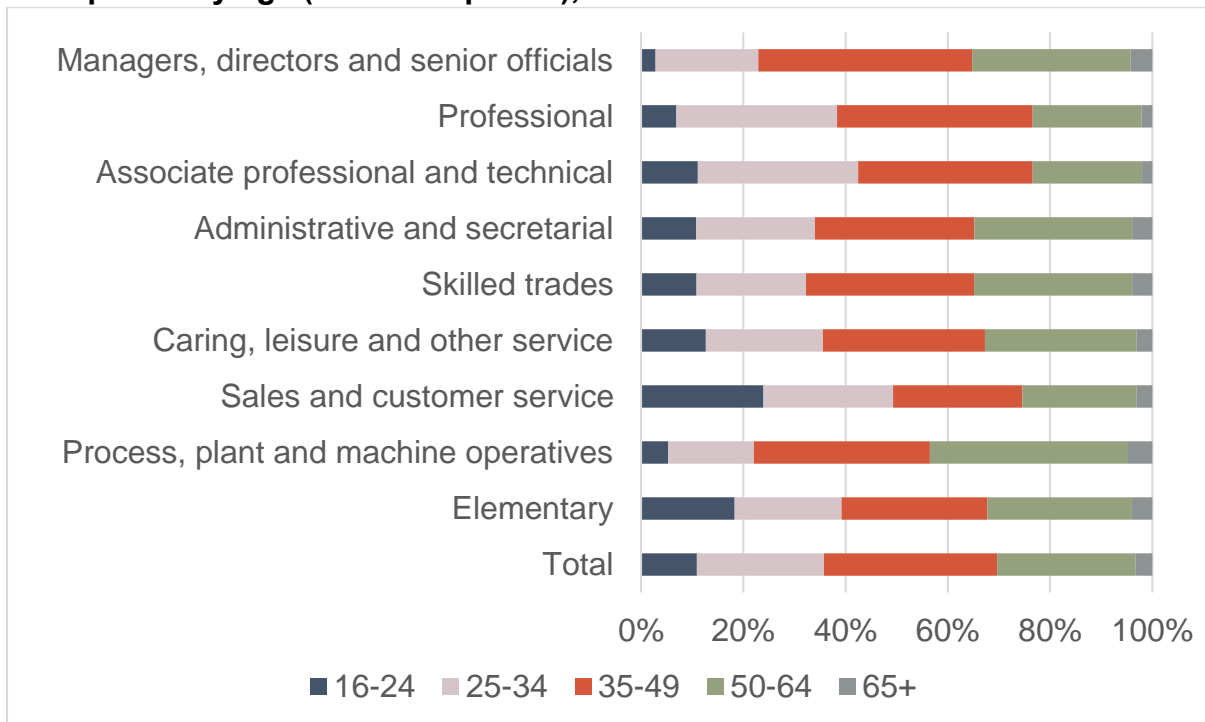
<b>Process, plant and machine operatives</b>	10.1%	108,450	8.0%	97,547	7.3%	93,762
<b>Elementary occupations</b>	12.8%	137,660	11.8%	143,891	11.0%	141,322

Sources: Census 2001, Census 2011, Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by age](#)).

## Occupation by age

Younger people are concentrated in certain types of jobs. Just under a quarter (24%) of sales and customer service occupations and 18.3% of elementary jobs were undertaken by 16-24 year olds. By contrast, the 50-64 year old cohort comprise 38.8% of process, plant and machine operatives, and 30.9% of managers, directors and senior officials, and skilled trades occupations.

### Occupation by age (% of occupation), 2021



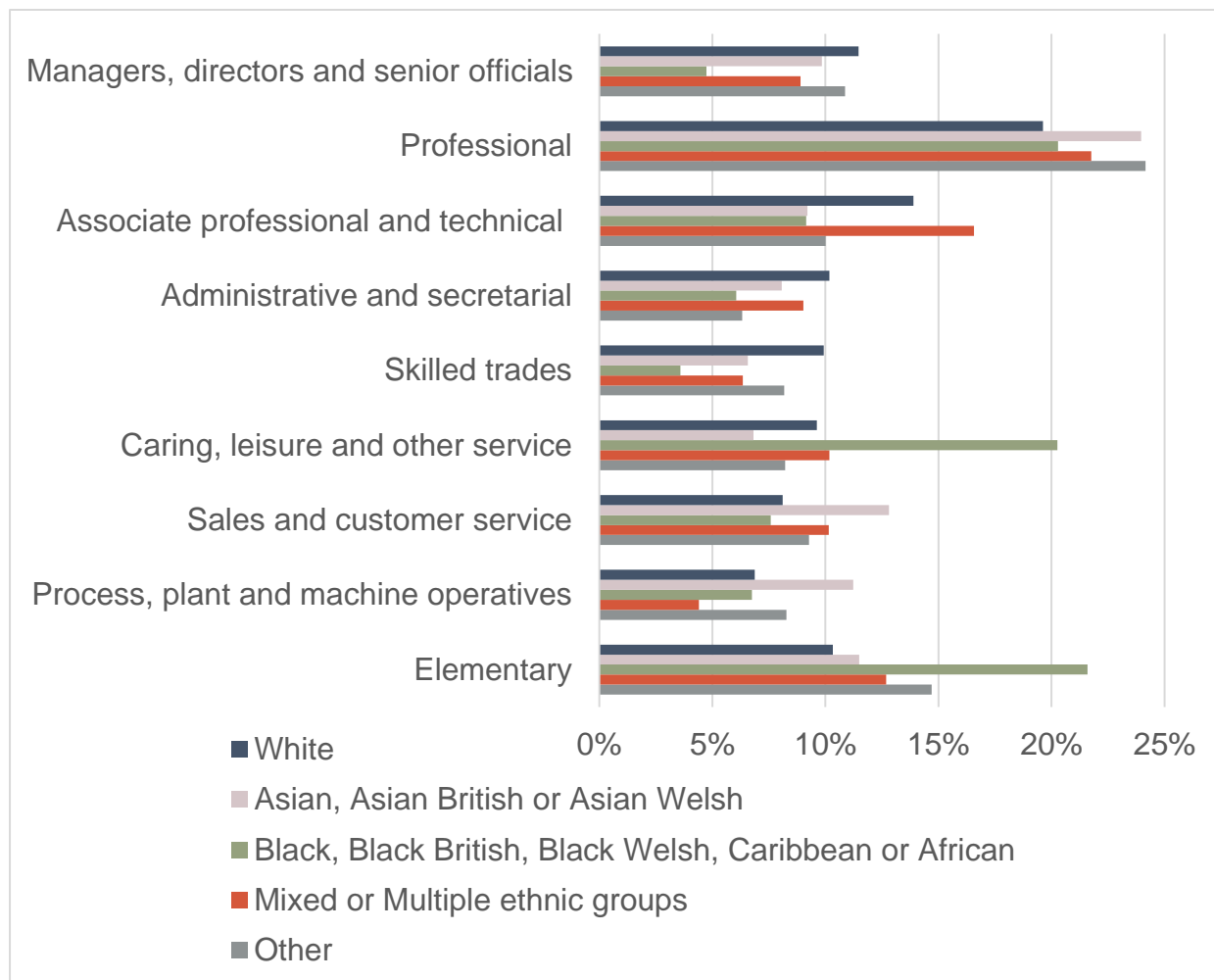
Source: Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by age](#)).

## Occupation by ethnicity

The chart below shows the proportion of each ethnicity that works in the nine occupational groupings. Residents identifying as black, for example, are much less likely to have a job as a manager, director or senior official (4.7%, compared with

11.5% among white residents), but much more likely to work in a caring, leisure or service occupation (40%, compared with 20% for white residents).

### Occupation by ethnicity (% of each ethnic group's total workforce), 2021<sup>2</sup>



Source: Census 2021, NOMIS ([Occupation by ethnic group](#)).

### Reflections

- On the face of it, the notable growth of professional occupations over the last twenty years supports the observation of a 'professionalisation' of the workforce, with the rise of services (e.g. financial, recruitment, consultancy, research) across the city region. However, there may also be some 'repackaging' or 'upgrading' of occupations, as graduate qualifications become more common and cultural norms shift over time. For instance, aspiring nurses

<sup>2</sup> 'Other' refers to ethnicities not covered by the five high-level ethnic groups.

today require a degree and are categorised as 'professionals' - but they may not always have been seen as such.

- Occupational divisions reflect – and arguably extend – social inequality. For example, the high concentration of people identifying as black in the lowest paid and least skilled type of occupations (22%) has profound implications for family life chances and will contribute to wealth gaps between ethnic groups. Workplace issues such as job insecurity tend to be concentrated in certain types of work, often frequently undertaken by particular demographic groups – for instance, occupations within sales and customer service tend to have a younger age composition. Furthermore, the stark variations in the occupational profile of districts are important for understanding the 'character' of a place.
- Apart from professionals, the note-worthy area of occupational change is among caring and leisure-related occupations. This may reflect both the expanded responsibility of caring that comes with an ageing society as well as the development of leisure services such as gyms, tourism and hotels.
- Greater Manchester was hit hard by the decline of manufacturing and other heavy industry in the late twentieth century. To some extent these effects can still be seen to be unravelling in the conurbation's occupational mix – for instance in the ongoing decline of process and plant operatives.



# Appendix

## Definitions and examples of occupational sub-groups

### **Managers, directors and senior officials:**

Production managers and directors; managers and directors in retail and wholesale; chief executives and senior officials

### **Professional occupations:**

Teaching and other educational professionals; information technology professionals; nursing and midwifery professionals

### **Associate professional and technical occupations:**

Sales, marketing and related associate professionals; artistic, literary and media occupations; welfare and housing associate professionals

### **Administrative and secretarial occupations:**

Secretarial and related occupations; administrative occupations in finance

### **Skilled trades occupations:**

Construction and building trades; food preparation and hospitality trades; agricultural and related trades

### **Caring, leisure and other service occupations:**

Caring personal services; teaching and childcare support occupations; hairdressers and related services

### **Sales and customer service occupations:**

Sales assistants and retail cashiers; customer service occupations

### **Process, plant and machine operatives:**

Road transport drivers; process operatives

### **Elementary occupations:**

Elementary cleaning occupations; elementary storage occupations