



Economics to
improve lives

Trustee demographics in grant making trusts and foundations

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About PBE

We use economics to improve lives. Through analytical expertise and our close connection with the social sector, we help charities, funders, firms, and policymakers tackle the causes and consequences of low wellbeing. Our analysts, researchers, and economists work on a wide range of issues related to low wellbeing, including mental health, education, employment, financial security, poverty, disability, inequality, volunteering, and civil society. Working with over 600 volunteer economists, we have supported over 600 charities since 2009.

About The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF)

ACF is the leading membership association for foundations and independent grant-makers in the UK. Driven by a belief that foundations are a vital source for social good, our purpose is to strengthen trusts and foundations so they can rise to the challenges of our times. We do this through the provision of policy and advocacy, research and information, and a wide-ranging programme of events and learning. Charitable trusts and foundations across the UK collectively hold £89 billion in assets and give over £8bn annually.

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1. Introduction

In 2024, PBE partnered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales to survey 2,194 trustees. 233 of the survey respondents chose “Grant Making Foundation” as a principal focus area of their work. This report focuses on the responses of the trustees from those organisations.

This report has been commissioned by the Association of Charitable Foundations and produced independently by PBE and covers the following demographic characteristics:

- Sex
- Age
- Highest education level
- Employment status
- Personal income
- Caring responsibilities
- Ethnicity
- Disability status
- Sexual orientation

A note on sample sizes and weighting

Among results presented in this report, some demographic characteristics were reported by a small percentage of respondents. When we focus just on the Grant Making Trusts and Foundations (GMTF) sector, where our sample was 233, this means for example that if 2% of respondents chose a particular answer, this translates to around 5 individuals. As such some of these results need to be interpreted with particular caution – we indicate where in the text that accompanies each chart. In some cases, we group response categories due to small sample sizes.

Responses in this report have been weighted according to the annual gross income of the respondent’s organisation to ensure the results are representative of the population of charities in the Charity Commission of England and Wales Register. We have applied these weights as in our original report: [Trusteeship – a positive opportunity: Understanding skills, experience and demographics in England and Wales](#). This allows us to compare the results for trustees from GMTFs with those of the overall sample of trustees from across all sectors.

Key findings

Trustees responding from GMTFs:

39% female

60% over 65

68% educated at level 4 (degree level) or above

54% retired

32% have annual household income over £100,000

20% have caring responsibilities

94% from White ethnic backgrounds

15% disabled

88% heterosexual

2. Results

For each of the following demographic characteristics, we report results for trustees from the 233 respondents from grant making trusts and foundations (GMTFs) alongside results from the full sample of trustees (2,194) from across all sectors and, where available, population level statistics for the working age population (16+) in England and Wales.

Where comparisons are made to the wider population, the population data covers people aged 16+ in England and Wales. This is because the trustee survey was conducted in partnership with the Charity Commission of England and Wales and therefore did not reach trustees in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Overall, in only two cases are the differences between results for trustees from GMTFs and the wider sample of trustees statistically significant¹. These are: the proportion of trustees aged under 50 (this is lower for trustees of GMTFs than the wider sample of trustees); and the proportion of trustees with household incomes exceeding £100,000 (this is higher for trustees of GMTFs than the wider sample of trustees). No other differences are statistically significant. This is something we might expect given the relatively small sample size of trustees from GMTFs, which results in wider confidence intervals.

However, it is worth noting that while most of these differences are not statistically significant, the results for trustees in the sample of GMTFs were, in every demographic category except sexual orientation, more likely to be in the majority group than across the whole sample of trustees surveyed.

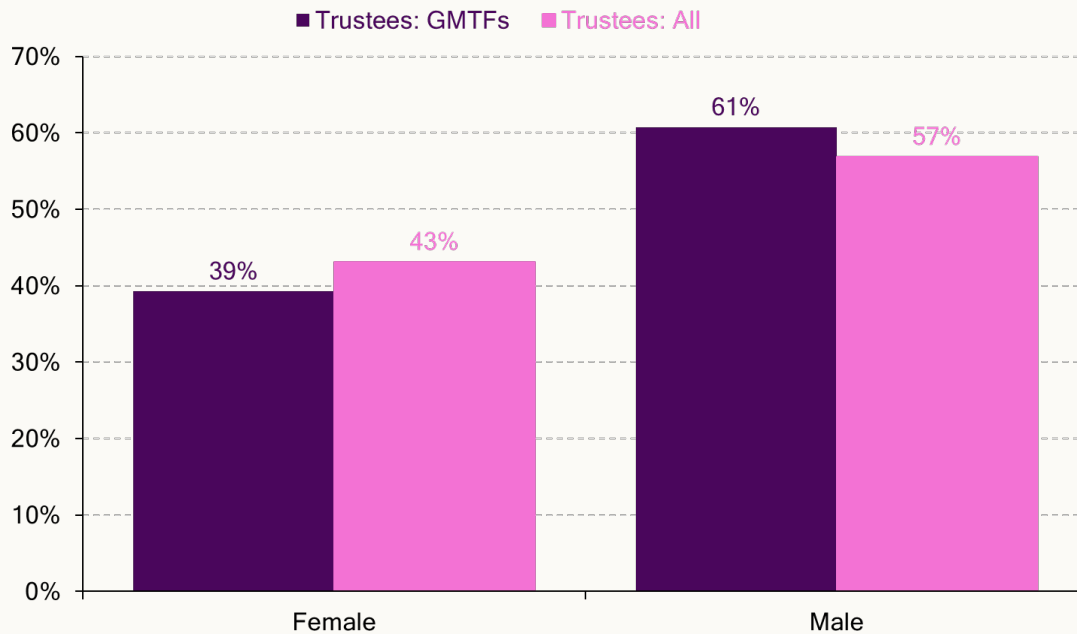
¹ The survey data was collected from a sample of the population and therefore we cannot say with 100% certainty that the results provide an accurate representation of the trustee population. To account for this, we have calculated confidence intervals that allow us to say we are 95% confident the true value lies within a given range (with the results reported sitting in the centre of those confidence intervals). Where the confidence intervals for our samples of all trustees/trustees from GMTFs do not overlap, we can be at least 95% sure that the differences are statistically significant, or not caused by those included in the sample. This helps us understand how certain we are about a result from a sample. The smaller the sample size, the wider the confidence interval.

Sex

Over six in ten trustees responding from GMTFs were male, considerably above gender parity. This result is slightly higher than across the wider population of trustees surveyed, but this difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 1: The majority of GMTF trustees are male

Proportion of trustees in GMTFs and across all sectors, by sex



Notes: Results above show percentage of respondents by sex, excluding those who chose "Prefer not to say". In both the GMTF and across all sectors, 2% of respondents chose "Prefer not to say".

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024.

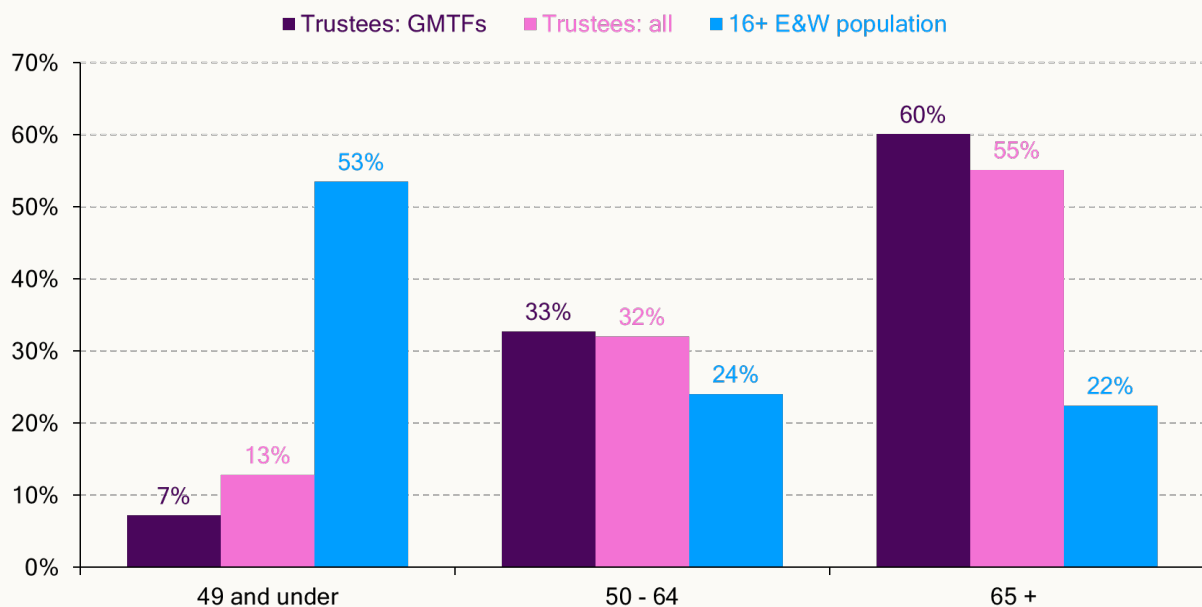
Age

Three in five trustees responding from GMTFs were over 65, considerably higher than across the wider population where the figure is closer to one in five.

One in 14 trustees responding from GMTFs were under 50, almost half the corresponding figure – around one in eight – for trustees from across all sectors. This difference is statistically significant.

Figure 2: More than half the adult population is under 50, compared to one in 14 trustees in GMTFs

Proportion of trustees in GMTFs, trustees across all sectors and working age population of England and Wales, by age



Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024; ONS 2023 population estimates for England and Wales.

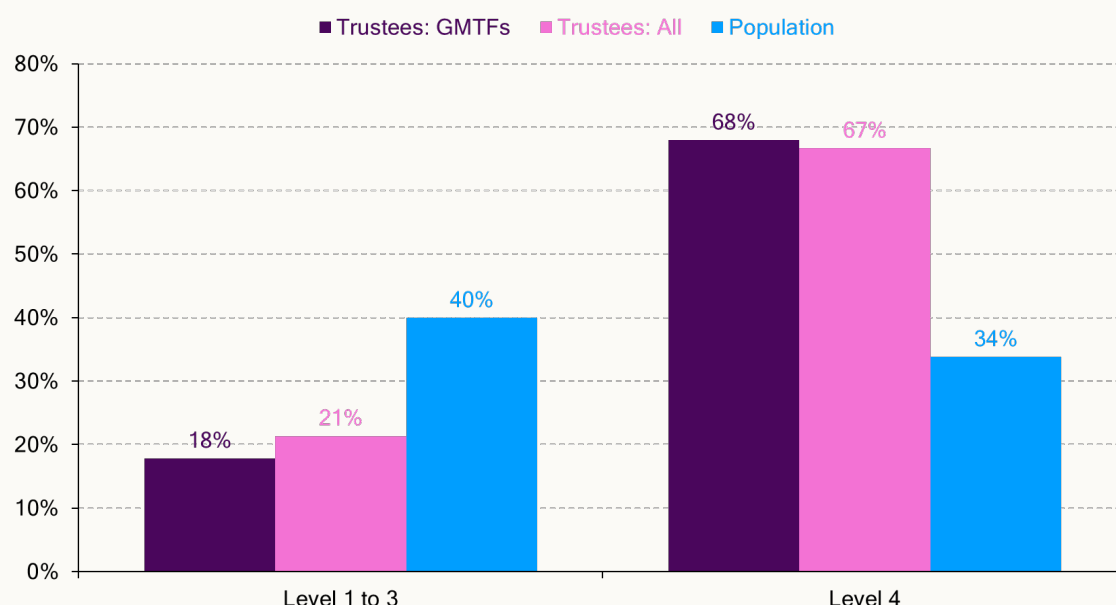
Highest education level

Around two-thirds of GMTF trustee respondents had level 4 or educational achievement or above, a similar figure to trustees from across all sectors. Level 4 includes degree level and above.

This figure is around twice as high as the prevalence of level 4 and above qualifications among the adult population of England and Wales.

Figure 3: Twice as many people have level 4 qualifications or above among GMTF trustees, compared to the general population

Proportion of trustees in GMTFs, trustees across all sectors and working age population of England and Wales, by highest education level



Notes: Qualification levels are used to categorise qualification levels in the UK Census, see: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/educationvariablescensus2021/highestlevelofqualification/>. Some caution is needed when interpreting the above results, as some answer categories used in the survey of trustees sit across multiple education levels: in this chart we have included the 2% of trustees who chose "NVQ" as their highest level of educational attainment in the group "Level 1 to 3", though people achieving NVQ Level 4 to 5 should be included in the Level 4 category. The following are included in "Level 1 to 3": GCSEs, O levels, National 5 or equivalent; AS, A levels or Scottish Highers; BTECS, OCR Nationals and other vocational qualifications; International Baccalaureate Diploma or equivalent; NVQs. The following are included in "Level 4": Bachelor's degree; Doctorate/PhD; Foundation degree; Higher National Certificates or Higher National Diplomas; Postgraduate degree. The following trustee survey responses are not included in the chart: Other, Prefer not to say. The following responses from the England and Wales population are not included in the chart: Other: apprenticeships, vocational or work-related qualifications, other qualifications achieved in England or Wales, qualifications achieved outside England or Wales (equivalent not stated or unknown); No qualifications.

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024. Population percentages are reported for the adult population for England and Wales, ONS Census 2021 statistics.

Table 1: Highest level of educational achievement

	Trustees: GMTFs	Trustees: All
GCSEs, O levels, National 5 or equivalent	6%	8%
AS, A levels or Scottish Highers	6%	6%
BTECS, OCR Nationals and other vocational qualifications	4%	4%
International Baccalaureate Diploma or equivalent	1%	1%
NVQs	2%	2%
Bachelor's degree	34%	28%
Doctorate/PhD	6%	6%
Foundation degree	2%	3%
Higher National Certificates or Higher National Diplomas	4%	7%
Postgraduate degree	23%	23%
Other	11%	9%
Prefer not to say	3%	3%

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024.

Employment status

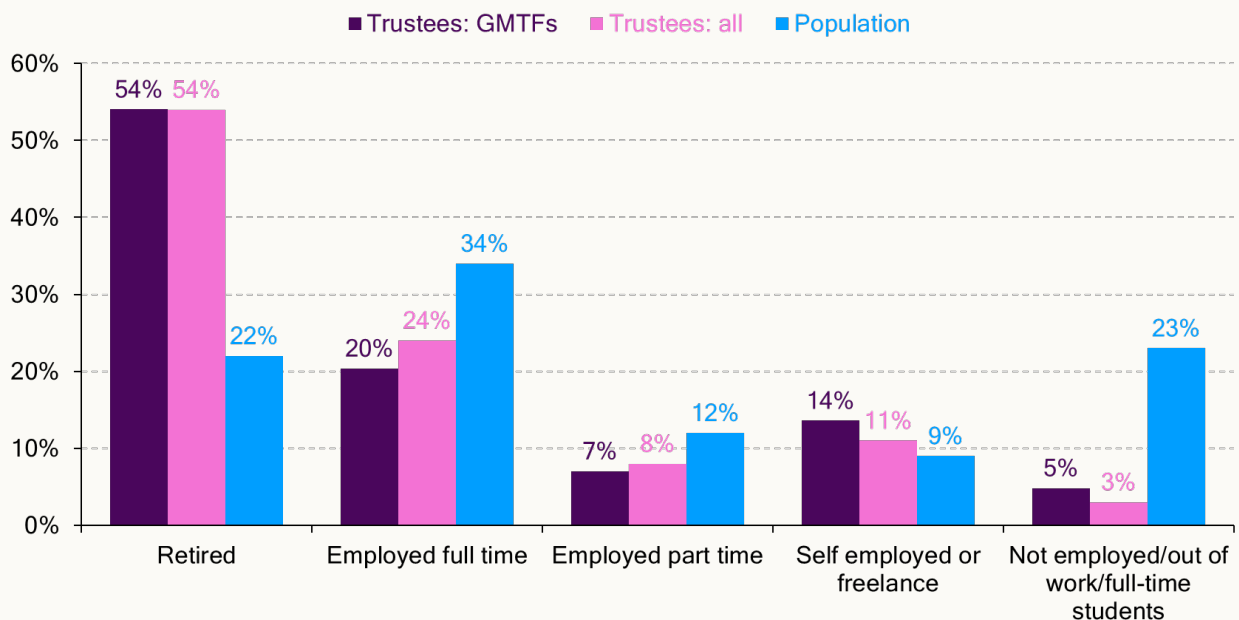
More than half of GMTF trustees were retired – the same proportion as trustees from across all sectors. This is considerably higher than the wider adult population, where closer to a fifth are retired.

Fewer trustees from GMTFs reported being employed full time and more reported being self-employed, compared to trustees across all sectors, but these differences are not statistically significant.

One in twenty trustees responding from GMTFs were not employed/out of work/full-time students, similar to trustees across all sectors, whereas this group comprise nearly a quarter of working age adults across the population.

Figure 4: More than half of trustees from GMTFS and the wider sector alike were retired

Proportion of trustees in GMTFs, trustees across all sectors and working age population of England and Wales, by employment status



Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024 and ONS economic activity status.

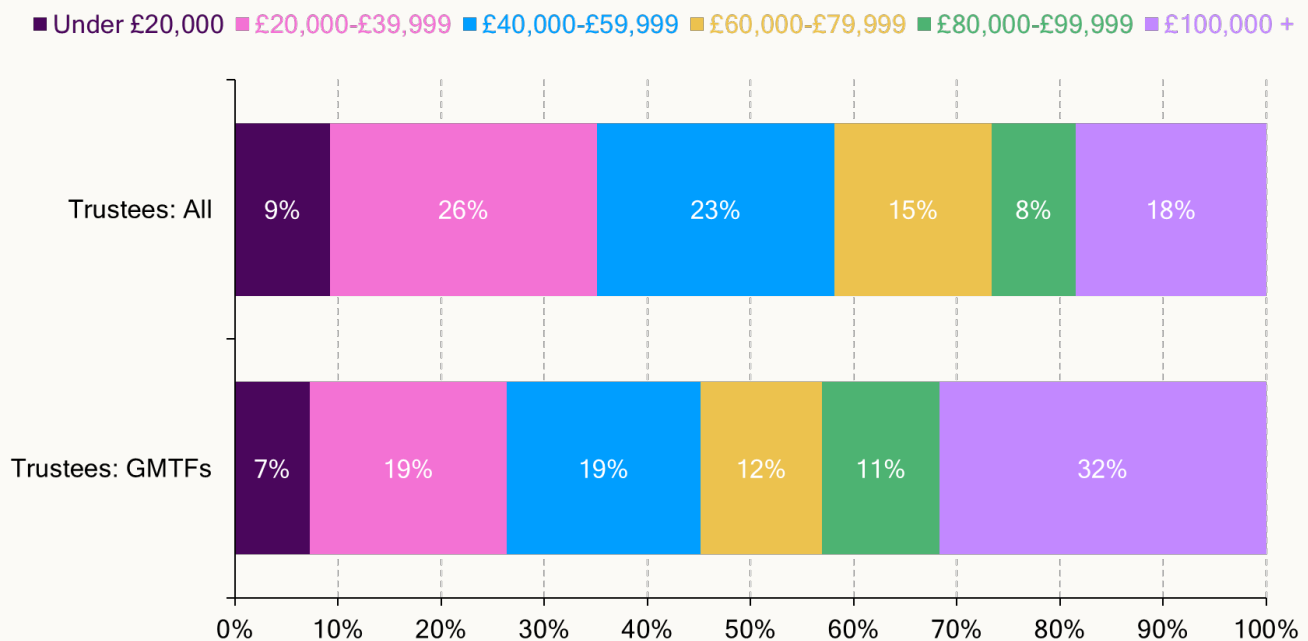
Personal income

Nearly a third of trustees in GMTFs reported annual household incomes above £100,000, compared to just below a fifth of trustees across all sectors. This difference is statistically significant.

At least three quarter (74%) of GMTF trustees reported household incomes above the national median household income of £34,500.

Figure 5: A third of trustees from GMTFs reported household incomes over £100,000.

Household income after tax, reported by trustees from GMTFs and trustees across all sectors



Notes: Survey question was: "Which of the following best describes your annual household income after tax? Please include all sources of income (wages, benefits, investment returns, etc.) for all members of your household"

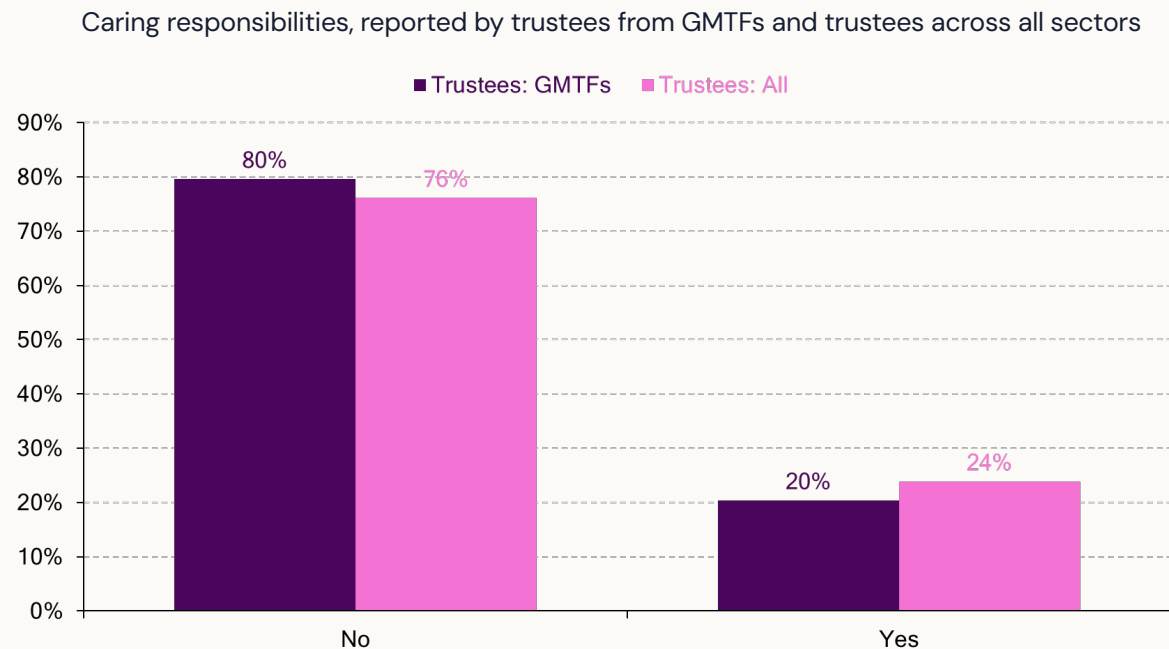
Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024

Caring responsibilities

A fifth of trustees at GMTFs reported having caring responsibilities, similar to trustees across all sectors.

Of those trustees at GMTFs with caring responsibilities, around half reported caring for children, around a third reported caring for an older person, and around a quarter reported caring for a disabled child or adult. However, the smaller sample size of trustees at GMTFs with caring responsibilities means we should treat these breakdowns with caution.

Figure 6: A fifth of trustees from GMTFS reported having caring responsibilities



Notes: Survey question: "Do you have any caring responsibilities for a child/children and or another adult/adults?"

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024

Ethnicity

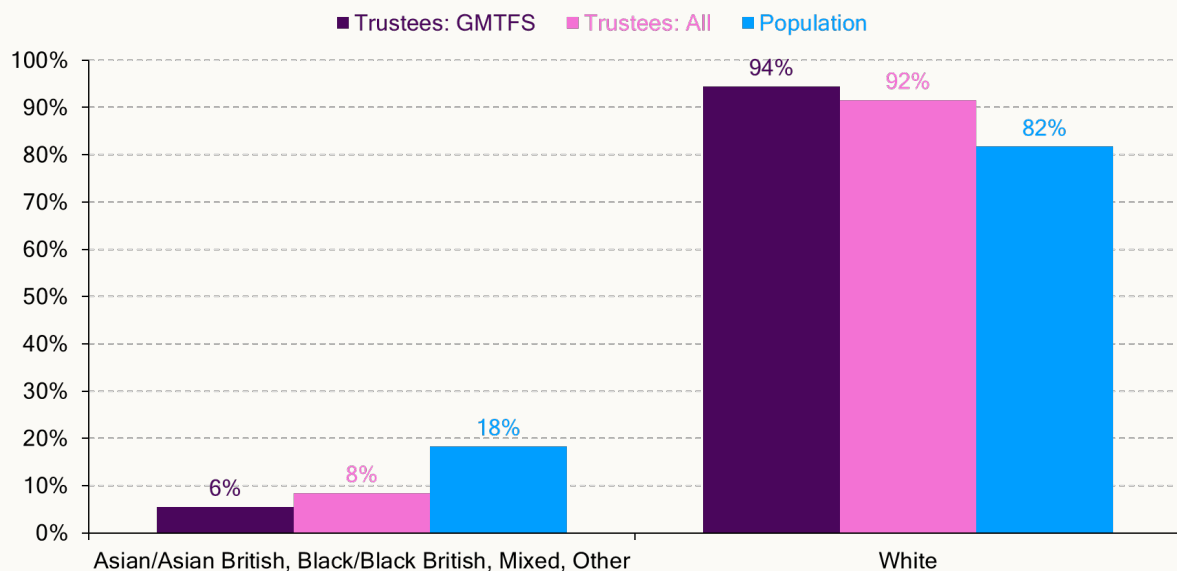
Trustees at GMTFs were less slightly likely to report having Asian, Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds than across trustees from all sectors, but this difference is not statistically significant.

Trustees from GMTFs, as with trustees from across the sector, were less likely to report having Asian, Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds when compared to the general population of England and Wales overall. Just over one in twenty trustees from GMTFs reported having ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to just under one in six among the wider population.

Please note that in the chart below we have grouped respondents choosing Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, Mixed or Other backgrounds due to small sample sizes among these groups.

Figure 7: 94% of trustees from GMTFS reported having a White ethnic background

Ethnic group or background, reported by trustees from GMTFs, trustees across all sectors and working age population in England and Wales



Notes: Responses above exclude “Prefer not to say”, to allow comparison with population level data. 5% of trustees from GMTFs and 3% from the overall sample of trustees across all sectors chose “Prefer not to say”.

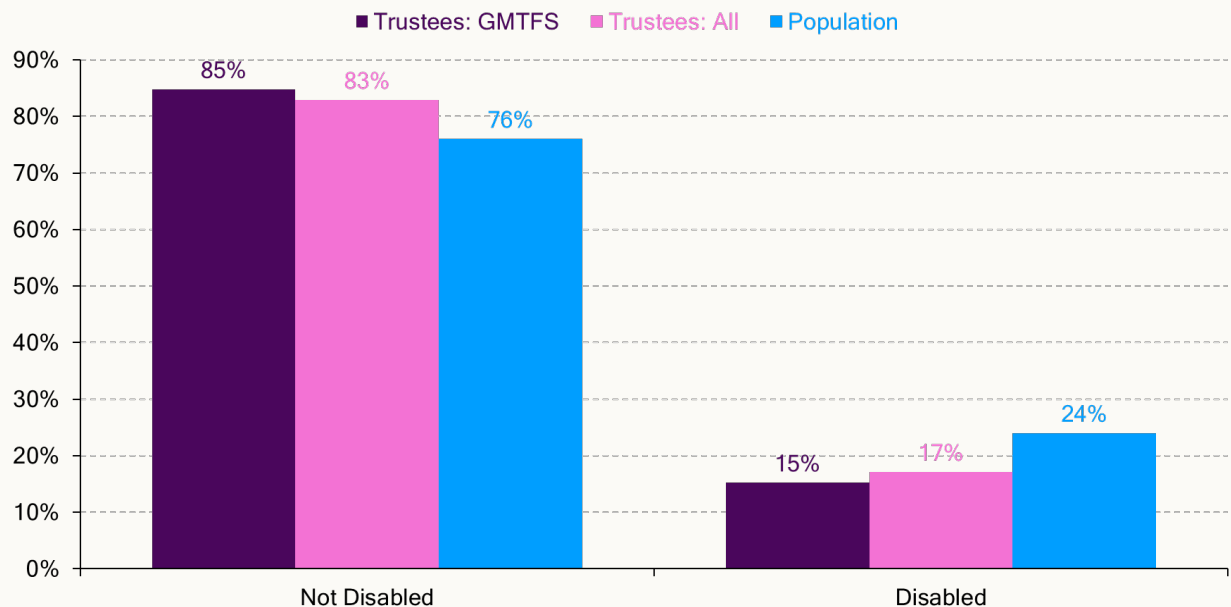
Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024 and ONS Census 2021 data Ethnic group, England and Wales.

Disability status

Similar to trustees across all sectors, around one in seven trustees in GMTFs reported being disabled or having a long-term health condition, compared to nearly a quarter of people in the wider population.

Figure 8: Around one in seven trustees from GMTFs report being disabled, compared to a quarter of the population

Disability status, reported by trustees from GMTFs and trustees across all sectors, and working age population in England and Wales



Notes: Survey question: Do you consider yourself to have a disability, neurodivergence, learning disability, learning difficulty, or long-term health condition?

Responses above exclude "Prefer not to say", to allow comparison with population level data. 2% of trustees from GMTFs and 2% from the overall sample of trustees across all sectors chose "Prefer not to say".

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024 and ONS Census 2021 data.

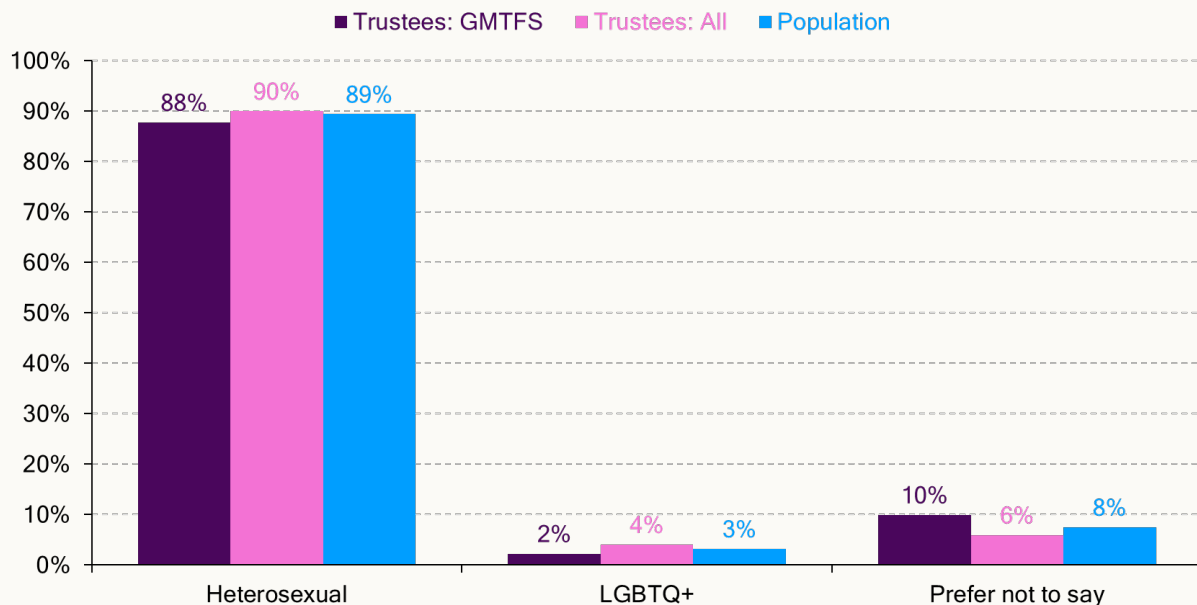
Sexual orientation

Approaching nine in ten trustees in GMTFs reported being heterosexual, close to the proportions in the wider population.

2% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. While this is lower than the 4% of trustees from all sectors choosing this option, the difference is not statistically significant, and the small sample size here means we must interpret this response with caution. Moreover, one in ten survey respondents from GMTFs selected “prefer not to say” for this question. Considering the high non-response rate to this question, the comparison with the wider trustee group and the general population should also be made with caution.

Figure 9: Nearly nine in ten trustees from GMTFs identified as heterosexual

Sexual orientation, reported by trustees from GMTFs and trustees across all sectors, and working population in England and Wales



Notes: Survey question: “Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?”

LGBTQ+ includes those selecting one of: Gay woman, Queer woman or Lesbian; Gay man or Queer man; Bisexual (Bi) or Pansexual (Pan); Other sexual orientation

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024 and ONS Census 2021 data.

Satisfaction with board diversity

Trustees were asked whether they were satisfied with their board's diversity, in terms of ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion/faith, gender, social class and personal experience of the organisation's services or issues of focus.

Around half of trustees from GMTFs tended to be satisfied with their board's current level of diversity. The highest levels of satisfaction related to diversity in terms of gender (65% satisfied) and personal experience of the organisation's services or issues of focus (72% satisfied). The lowest levels of satisfaction related to diversity in terms of disability (43% satisfied) and sexual orientation (45% satisfied).

On every aspect of diversity asked about, trustees at GMTFs were less likely to report being satisfied with current levels of board diversity than the full sample of trustees. These differences were statistically significant for diversity in terms of ethnicity and disability.

Trustees at GMTFs were also more likely to report that their satisfaction with board diversity was "not relevant" on every aspect asked about. In five out of the eight aspects, the proportion of respondents choosing "not relevant" was statistically significantly higher for trustees from GMTFs than from the overall sample of trustees.

Results are reported in Table 2 below. Differences that are statistically significant are highlighted in light blue.

Table 2: Around half of trustees from GMTFs feel satisfied with current levels of board diversity

Satisfaction with board diversity, reported by trustees from GMTFs and trustees across all sectors

Are you satisfied with the board's diversity in terms of:	% of respondents all trustees	% of respondents GMTFs
Ethnicity		
Satisfied	54%	46%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	9%	8%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	11%	7%
Don't know	2%	2%
Not relevant	24%	37%
Disability		
Satisfied	53%	43%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	5%	7%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	11%	7%
Don't know	5%	5%
Not relevant	25%	38%
Age		
Satisfied	67%	60%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	9%	10%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	8%	4%
Don't know	1%	1%
Not relevant	16%	25%
Sexual orientation		
Satisfied	52%	45%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	1%	1%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	5%	5%
Don't know	10%	9%
Not relevant	32%	40%
Religion/faith		

Satisfied	56%	54%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	1%	0%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	3%	1%
Don't know	8%	8%
Not relevant	32%	37%
Gender		
Satisfied	71%	65%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	4%	3%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	3%	3%
Don't know	1%	2%
Not relevant	21%	27%
Social class		
Satisfied	57%	50%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	3%	3%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	7%	8%
Don't know	5%	4%
Not relevant	27%	35%
Personal experience of the organisation's services or issues of focus		
Satisfied	78%	72%
Not satisfied and planning to address this	3%	3%
Not satisfied but no formal plans to address this	2%	2%
Don't know	3%	1%
Not relevant	13%	22%

Notes: Differences between answers from the overall sample of trustees and trustees from GMTFs that are statistically significant are highlighted in light blue.

Source: PBE analysis of CCEW and BMG Research, July to August 2024.

Annex A: Methodology

In 2024 PBE partnered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales to survey 2,194 trustees.

The survey was conducted by BMG Research and was produced in English and Welsh. We sampled trustees by their organisation's annual gross income, oversampling in certain groups to ensure at least 200 responses from trustees of charities within each annual gross income band. The data was then reprofiled to ensure the weighted base sizes reflected the overall profile of trustees on the Charity Register. For further information, see: [Trusteeship – a positive opportunity: Understanding skills, experience and demographics in England and Wales](#)

233 of the survey respondents chose "Grant Making Foundation" as a principal focus of their work and this is the sample population for this project. It is worth noting that 136 of these also selected other focus areas, as well as GMF (the relevant survey question (Q 22) allowed organisations to select multiple principal areas of focus). This reflects the fact that many GMFs focus on specific issue areas, but it is possible that the sample population includes charities for whom grant making is one of their activities.

To compare results for the GMF sample to the wider pool of respondents, we apply the same weighting to this sub-sample as we applied to the full survey results. This weighting is based on organisations' income. We appreciate there is a conceptual issue with doing so with this sub-sample, as GMFs may have small annual incomes, but large asset values. For quality assurance purposes, in our preparation of the data we have compared results with and without weighting, to ensure no significant anomalies arose through applying weights to the data.

Table 1: Proportion of survey respondents by organisational income (weighted)

Response	% of all trustee respondents (weighted)	% of GMTFs trustee respondents (weighted)
Less than £10,000	28%	23%
£10,001 – £25,000	15%	16%
£25,001 – £100,000	20%	18%
£100,001 – £500,000	20%	21%
£500,001 – £1 million	4%	6%
£1,000,001 – £5 million	5%	4%
Over £5 million	3%	3%
My charity is new and has not completed accounts yet	5%	9%

Notes: Survey question: "What was the gross level of income (from all sources) achieved by your organisation in the last financial year?"



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