



# Closing the Vehicle Repair Skills and Diversity Gap

HOW MARGINAL GAINS CAN IMPROVE THE BOTTOM  
LINE OF MODERN VEHICLE REPAIR BUSINESSES

Solera | Audatex



# CONTENTS

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Repairing the skills gap
- 03 An opportunity for all
- 04 Build with apprentices
- 05 Challenging perceptions
- 06 Putting vehicle repairs on the radar

# INTRODUCTION

**“Your workforce is your most valuable asset. The knowledge and skills they have represent the fuel that drives the engine of business - and you can leverage that knowledge.”**

- Harvey Mackay



Challenged by the demand for new technology and innovation in almost every sector, the modern workforce is ever-changing. Faced with the challenges of an aging workforce, an influx of Millennials who want to do things differently, as well as unprecedented levels of technology adoption, the skill set required to maintain business continuity has nothing short of transformed and although this has been an evolution, to many of us it feels like a revolution. As a result, many business owners and leaders are struggling to keep up.

These challenges have been felt in almost every industry worldwide but have become particularly prevalent across the vehicle repair and automotive sector. **A recent analysis of the future UK car body repair market found that over a third (35%) of bodyshop owners and managers are fearful of a skills crisis in their sector**<sup>1</sup>. With industry consolidation, ever more technical repair methods, and demand for repairs rising, vehicle repair businesses must work harder than ever to narrow the skills disparity and market themselves to a wider recruitment marketplace, in order to maintain their competitive edge amidst further change.

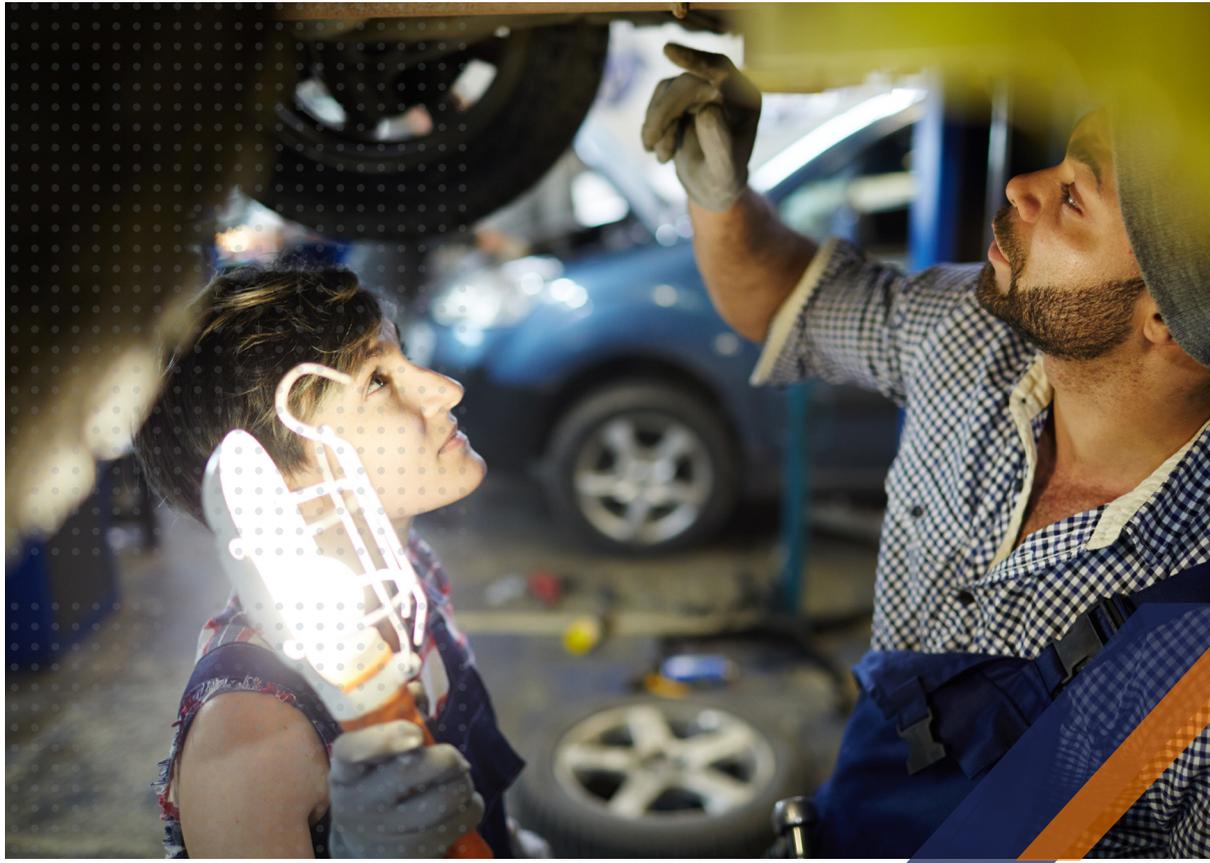
Yet with this challenge ultimately comes an opportunity for the members of the vehicle repair sector to be innovative and define what can be done differently to tackle common preconceptions of the industry, educate about the wide range of career opportunities and usher in an inclusive workforce with a broad skill set. We have seen companies across many other industries face these challenges head on and find ways to overcome the lack of skills and diversity which has threatened to slow down innovation and, ultimately, success in recent years.

**From public healthcare to the construction sector, we're now seeing pioneering initiatives from industry representatives to break down the barriers in order to welcome a highly skilled and diverse set of professionals.** For example, in recent years we've seen an enormous drive in schemes designed specifically to plug the NHS skills gap and arm the organisation with the next wave of qualified nurses, as healthcare continues to grapple with public uncertainty over demand versus quality of service. These efforts haven't stopped there, with the Government pledging to increase each nurse's training budget by £1,000 to help their careers develop and prevent them from exiting the industry<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.am-online.com/news/latest-news/2019/02/04/body-repair-industry-s-biggest-threat-is-skills-crisis-survey-reveals>

<sup>2</sup> <https://inews.co.uk/news/health/nhs-nurses-extra-funding-pay-rise-training-budget-494582>

While the UK's public health sector faces these challenges on a unique scale, this trade-off between workforce and service levels also rings true for the automotive sector today. Investment in these areas is therefore vital, not only to combat the skills shortage, but to bridge the gap between the new and traditional workforces and strike the right balance between experience and expertise to keep efficiency and productivity high. In this eBook, Audatex investigates the current challenges faced by modern vehicle repair businesses when fostering a culture of diversity, and demonstrates how investing in entrants across a wide range of potential routes will help futureproof the sector against inevitable change as technology continues its path of constant development.



**Simply put, the skills and diversity gap in today's vehicle repair sector is only as big as the industry chooses to make it. While there is no overnight fix, decision makers must embody these changes, by working to challenge existing practices and improving marketing for the sector to a wider net of potential workers.** This report will also spotlight the stories of people in all corners of the sector who are actively working to overcome the age-old perceptions of traditional automotive businesses and embracing the next generation of workers needed to drive the industry forward.

# REPAIRING THE SKILLS GAP

Traditionally, the vehicle repair industry has been powered by a largely manual approach to returning vehicles back to manufacturer standards. However, the sector has undergone a transformational shift in recent years, with technology now at play at almost every stage of the repair lifecycle - so much so, that bodyshops are often tipped to look “more akin to a laboratory than a workshop”<sup>3</sup>. As with any industry adjusting to the power of technology, pressure to repair increasingly complex vehicles and adopt new systems rapidly has created a significant skills gap across the automotive sector.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.driving.co.uk/news/car-repair-servicing-garage-future-look-some-thing-like/>

Decision makers have faced vast challenges as a result, particularly when equipping their existing staff with the tools and training needed to complete modern vehicle repairs quickly and with optimal accuracy. **In order to narrow the current skills gap, it is crucial to identify and evaluate which areas of a business would benefit most from investment in developing a more tech-savvy workforce and seeking those with the right skills and mindset to support the team and company’s operational goals.**

Now faced with this threat of struggling to keep up with the growing demand for fast and accurate repairs, managers are also required to broaden their horizons and look beyond the traditional routes into the industry in order to tap into the full talent pool and encourage interest from those entering the sector through more diverse avenues.

Recent findings from the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) state the automotive industry is currently running at a ratio of 10:2 males to females<sup>4</sup>. **With 15.3 million women aged 16 and over now employed in the UK<sup>5</sup>, more efforts need to be made to appeal to the female workforce and position the automotive sector as an exciting and attractive place in which to build a career.**

The question for vehicle repair decision makers is therefore one of self-reflection; what can we do better to overcome the traditional, male-dominated perception and build a more inclusive workforce which allows us to narrow the skills and diversity gap on an industry-wide scale?

Unlocking the benefits of true diversity within a team will not only afford vehicle repair businesses with a modern skill set, but with better ideas, performance and problem-solving abilities<sup>6</sup>. Decision makers must now work to challenge current perceptions and act to pervade diversity across an entire organisation - a process which can begin by reviewing their current talent acquisition strategy.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.businessleader.co.uk/how-to-empower-women-in-the-automotive-sector/61020/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06838>

<sup>6</sup> <https://store.hbr.org/product/the-latest-research-diversity/DIVRES>



# AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

Diversity is an extremely vital factor which extends across the entire modern workforce. Supporting diversity in the workplace, from decision makers to junior staff, demonstrates a clear understanding and appreciation for the value that everyone can bring to an organisation. In a traditionally male-dominated sector, automotive businesses and, more specifically vehicle repairers, are no exception to the need to build a more inclusive working environment. But what does it mean and how can this be achieved?



**According to Investors in People, diversity is more than hiring from underrepresented groups; it is about increasing people's actual engagement and activity, not just their symbolic participation.** With an abundance of research to suggest that diversity of thought and opinion makes us more creative, diligent and hard-working, vehicle repairers must take practical steps to invest in their people, to achieve true workplace diversity and maximum operational performance<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.investorsinpeople.com/knowledge/workplace-diversity/>

**Despite being traditionally very slow to adapt to the changing workforce, the current vehicle repair sector is already showing signs of being far more diverse than previous generations.** For example, we are now seeing a rising number of female industry professionals entering the industry, both on the workshop floor as well as more technology-centric roles. From those who are ex-armed forces, to people who are returning to work and professionals who are simply seeking a new career having already trained in another sector, the industry is welcoming people from many more walks of life than ever before.

Looking at this through the lens of an individual repair business, this level of diversity within can only be achieved if it becomes one of the core values of a company, its leaders, its management, and across an entire workforce. When thinking practically about how this can be achieved, vehicle repair businesses must begin by evaluating their existing company culture and establishing where the opportunities to build a more diverse workforce lie within their company - in terms of their people, skills and the working environment in which employees operate daily.

Once this is acknowledged, developing a Diversity and Inclusion framework<sup>8</sup> is an excellent next step. This framework will outline the ambitions for workplace diversity and how the company looks to achieve a more diverse and inclusive future. Once finalised, this will set a benchmark for bodyshop decision makers to embrace and ultimately become an important reference point for both employees and managers.

<sup>8</sup> <https://medium.com/@ManagedbyO/frameworks-for-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-workplace-dc14f938edf>



**That said, introducing a framework is not a one-size-fits-all approach; every vehicle repair organisation must think carefully about their own workplace diversity and recognise that their best course of action is to provide employees with the most inclusive workplace with utmost recognition and satisfaction.** Having a clear vision of workplace diversity will also prove essential for overcoming the traditional perception of what it means to work for a bodyshop, which is still very much alive today.

With this in mind, let's turn our attention to some different ways of pursuing a career within the modern automotive industry, and what more can be done to encourage a diverse and inclusive workforce of the future.

# BUILD WITH APPRENTICES

Fostering a 'ground up' attitude towards the training and development of future employees in job-specific roles is indispensable for any business wanting to leverage the full value of the next cohort of vehicle repair professionals. While the industry continues to tackle the challenges posed by traditional perceptions of working within the vehicle repair sector, the demand for professional grassroots training in an increasingly technical sector is rising.



In England alone, vehicle maintenance and repair apprenticeship schemes now rank within the top 10 most popular apprenticeship frameworks, with 6,000 new starters between 2017-18<sup>9</sup>. This is a clear indication that bodyshops now must bolster their existing employee base with an investment in vocational training and technology skills.

The challenge for vehicle repair businesses, however, is having the internal infrastructure in place to ensure they can fully support apprentices as they learn their craft on the shop floor. For those building an internal apprentice scheme, starting small is often the key to long term success. **By taking on a small number of junior staff in the first instance, existing staff can gain an understanding of how to balance the support of trainees while maintaining their rate of high-value repair work.**

Meanwhile, decision makers can establish the amount of resources needed to successfully employ and train an apprentice and use this understanding to scale the initiative over time. It is also vitally important that the apprentice has a clear set of objectives with small incremental increases in reward/compensation when they achieve one of their objectives. For example, setting quarterly targets with increases in hourly rate for success is a great motivator to ensure the apprentice commits to learn and develop.

<sup>9</sup> <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06113>

The move towards an industry-wide reliance on new technologies will continue to shake up the current training programmes of bodyshops, with more on-the-job training courses required to keep skills development, efficiency and productivity levels high. Once successfully implemented - with the right balance of education and practical experience - these schemes are not only vital for attracting new vehicle repairers; they also play a fundamental role in helping bodyshops to retain talent as apprentices become integral to their workforce.

**Yet to truly succeed, these efforts must be led from the top, with decision makers embracing internal staff training and investing in the skill set of their current and future employees as they become increasingly tech centric. However, training doesn't stop with the apprentice. Rather, it needs to persist across the workforce, no matter their age or experience.** Older technicians, for example, are not immune to changing technology and as we are all having to work longer, it is vital that these older technicians are still able to contribute through the provision of continued training and development by bodyshop managers and owners.



## Industry spotlight

In March 2017, UK accident repair business, Gemini Accident Repair launched its nationwide Apprentice Scheme to bolster its workforce and support a new generation of vehicle repairers with the training and development needed to kick start their careers. Spearheaded by its Managing Director, Dave Sargeant, the scheme provides new talent with the opportunity to learn their craft, and each apprentice is supported in gaining their industry standard qualifications. To date, Gemini has recruited and supported a total of 50 apprentices and continues to celebrate the success of their growing cohort of apprentice - some of which have now also been recognised for their development at both national and international award ceremonies.



### What attracted you to the vehicle repair industry before starting your apprenticeship?

"I have always loved working on cars. I trained at college on the mechanical side, so when I saw the apprenticeship, I thought it would give me the opportunity to learn the other side of the industry."

- Cory Middleton, Multiskills Apprentice,  
Gemini ARC

"I wanted to challenge myself as I knew nothing about cars prior to joining."

- Jack Gittus, Multiskills Apprentice,  
Gemini ARC

### What can the industry do to encourage more people to pursue an apprenticeship?

"Expose the benefits; work is always going to be available in this industry, show the many different routes you can take within it, show how interesting it can really be. If University isn't for you, then this is an excellent alternative."

- Reece Walker, Multi-skills Apprentice,  
Gemini ARC

### What skills have you been able to use and develop in your apprenticeship?

"In this apprenticeship, I have been able to develop my physical skills in the sector of MET, Panel and Paint, getting a good eye and feel for repairs and how to complete an accident repair job to a high standard. Furthermore, I have developed people skills, presentation skills, as well as some acting and filming skills with the presentations and events Gemini have given me to do."

- Daniel Worrall, Multiskills Apprentice,  
Gemini ARC

Innovative technology is now placed firmly at the heart of crash repairs and has already replaced many of the manual processes within the repair life cycle. However, this reliance on technology requires a trained workforce able to effectively operate these systems in a bodyshop setting. As these solutions become deeply ingrained in day-to-day bodyshop management, the demand has created a vast opportunity for skilled developers with the technical expertise to both build and implement these systems successfully.

# CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS

There are many stereotypical preconceptions of the vehicle repair industry as a whole, which often limit people's views of it as an attractive and innovative environment in which to build a career, especially for the young and the inexperienced. It can also seem to be an inhospitable place for a woman to work, but it doesn't have to be this way. The traditional 'nuts and bolts', 'tools on the wall' idea of the sector is still very much imprinted on the minds of those without a pre-existing knowledge of the industry today. This has often worked against any efforts to attract a more diverse pool of talent both in the workshop and beyond.

A combined, industry-wide effort is now required in order to proactively challenge these outdated perceptions and build a more inclusive and diverse workforce both now and in the future. **One way to achieve this is to better engage the technologically savvy millennial generation by improving the sector's position as an exciting place to both work and develop the key skills needed to build a longstanding career.**

The key here, however, isn't to only invest in building an apprentice training programme designed for new bodyshop technicians, but to also educate others about the whole spectrum of roles which are crucial to a successful vehicle repair centre today. From front-of-house customer support, and administrative roles, to damage assessors, and the shop floor technicians themselves, these roles all require widely different skill sets which, if marketed correctly, can help the industry attract a more diverse pool of candidates.



Consider the practical ways to overcome the common misconceptions about the inside of a bodyshop and attract the attention of potential new entrants. **For example, can you open your workshop to the public for a day and display the clean state-of-the-art technology which has removed much of the vigorous activity from the repair process? In this scenario, seeing the technology in action as well as the precision of work within a modern bodyshop could ultimately make the sector highly attractive to potential new employees, whether they are looking for a change in career or their very first job opportunity.**

At a recent industry event in South Africa when the moderator asked if the audience recognised/acknowledged the skills shortage in the industry, almost everyone raised their hands. But when he asked how many would encourage their children into the bodyshop business most hands in the room withdrew!

### Industry spotlight

“Like many others, I unknowingly fell into my career in the vehicle repair industry. I completed a BEC in Travel and Tourism at college, realised cabin crew isn’t as glamorous as it looks and then worked in a call centre whilst saving to travel. Once back, I undertook various temping roles, before becoming a Customer Service Advisor at Glass’s. I then worked in four different roles over 6 years at the company, as Customer Service, Sales Ops, Network Management and finally as Product Owner for delivering data software applications, after which I joined Audatex as Business Analyst in 2018.

As someone who has built a career in automotive with no prior knowledge of the sector, I believe that we as an industry now have to play our part in educating others to look beyond the traditional bodyshop floor stereotype, and see the many career possibilities on offer to individuals with all types of backgrounds, personalities and skills. We’re already seeing these perceptions begin to change slowly, but now we have an opportunity to work better together to tell the exciting and innovative story of the modern vehicle repair sector and encourage others to actively pursue a career within it.”

- Jenni Light, Business Analyst,  
**Audatex Solera UK**

# PUTTING VEHICLE REPAIRS ON THE RADAR

“You can never go wrong by investing in communities and the human beings within them.”

- Pam Moore



When building a workplace of diversity, a critical question that vehicle repair decision makers must ask themselves is just how much they are doing to negate common perceptions and put their business and values on the map within their local community.

For example, are you promoting the different types of career and training opportunities within your business, both on the shop floor and across other areas of the organisation? Are you building relationships with local schools, colleges and the wider public to broaden awareness of your business and strengthen recruitment streams? Evaluating how your business currently scores in these areas can help to identify key opportunities to make more noise to the right audience and improve the perception of the sector as one full of opportunity for people from all professional and personal backgrounds.

Exploring different recruitment opportunities can also be an extremely effective means for modern repair businesses to embrace more diverse people and skill sets. **The best employees may not have taken a traditional route into the industry but have an alternative professional background which can provide them with fresh ideas and experiences able to take the vehicle repair sector in a new direction.**

Once these opportunities are established, taking steps to market your business, through channels such as social media, advertising and award entries on both a local and industry scale, can increase your profile and help to organically broaden your potential employee base. Use these avenues to display the training and development opportunities offered, not only for workshop technicians but also for those pursuing other roles within the vehicle repair cycle. Doing so, vehicle repairers can put themselves at the forefront of industry development and equip the industry with the diverse knowledge, skills and people needed to maintain the sector's rapid course of innovation.

### Industry spotlight

“Before joining the vehicle repair sector, I had pursued a teaching career. I had no prior knowledge or experience of just how much behind-the-scenes work and technology now goes into fixing a car. Having retrained in Marketing and achieving the CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing, I joined Audatex in 2016. It became clear to me just how little the whole vehicle repair sector was doing to promote itself and the huge amount of career opportunities it has available to a wider audience, beyond the traditional family-run approach to recruiting from within the sector.”

“We’re seeing advantages of a more diverse workforce coming to fruition across other industries and achieving this in our sector should begin with driving more awareness of it as an innovative, growing and exciting industry filled with equal opportunity - regardless of your background, profile or skillset.”

Amy Dyer, Head of Marketing,  
**Audatex Solera UK**

### Want to find out more?

Contact the Solera Audatex team at [servicedesk@audatex.co.uk](mailto:servicedesk@audatex.co.uk),  
or visit [Audatex.co.uk/](http://Audatex.co.uk/)