



INSTITUTE OF THE  
MOTOR INDUSTRY



# THE APPRENTICESHIP MINDSHIFT

## How Parents Really View Automotive Careers and What Changes Minds

*Parents are not closing the door on automotive careers, but many have never been invited to look behind it. This research shows that when they are, perceptions shift.*

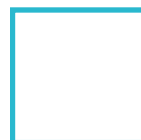
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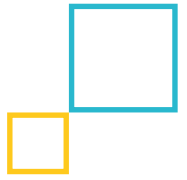
THERE'S  
MORE  
TO MOTOR

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# Executive Summary

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Apprenticeships are widely supported by parents and guardians in the UK. Around nine in ten parents of children ages 14-17, 90% would consider an apprenticeship route for their child, indicating that vocational pathways are now broadly accepted alongside academic routes. However, this support does not extend evenly across all sectors, and automotive apprenticeships face a distinct perception challenge.

As the professional body for individuals working and learning in the motor industry, we have commissioned new YouGov research to help us better understand how parents and guardians perceive apprenticeships and automotive careers, and how those perceptions influence skills supply and workforce sustainability. This research forms part of the IMI's wider commitment to ensuring the automotive workforce is recognised as modern, professional and future-facing.

Our research shows that among parents of children aged 14 to 17 who are open to apprenticeships, fewer than half (41%) would consider an automotive pathway for their child/children. This gap is not driven by opposition to apprenticeships themselves, but by sector-specific perceptions relating to culture (23%), industry sustainability (18%), and professional fit (66%). For many parents, automotive is excluded through passive avoidance rather than active rejection, sitting outside their “mental shortlist” of careers they would actively encourage. For the IMI, this highlights a critical challenge for a sector undergoing rapid technological change and increasing demand for skilled, professional roles.

The research identifies three broad parental groups: those already supportive of automotive, a much larger group who are open to apprenticeships but remain unsure or unlikely to encourage automotive, and a smaller group who are not open to apprenticeships as a pathway overall. The greatest opportunity lies with parents who support apprenticeships but lack confidence in automotive. Their uncertainty is driven primarily by limited familiarity with the sector and outdated assumptions about roles.

Crucially, the findings show that perceptions are not fixed. When presented with clear, credible information about the breadth of roles available in automotive, particularly those linked to digital skills, sustainability and future technologies, 49% of parents of children aged 14–17 became more likely to encourage an automotive career. This effect is strongest among parents of daughters (42%) and those with limited prior exposure to the sector (62%). This demonstrates the power of real, tangible examples in reshaping how automotive careers are understood.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that automotive's challenge is not one of capability or opportunity, but of recognition. There is a clear gap between perception and reality, and closing that gap is central to strengthening the future talent pipeline. For the IMI, this research provides a clear evidence base to inform careers activity, employer support and engagement with educators and policymakers, ensuring that perceptions of automotive careers better reflect the reality of a modern, skilled and future-facing profession.

Through the IMI's There's More to Motor campaign, this evidence is being translated into action. By encouraging employers, educators and partners to share real stories, insights and opportunities, the campaign aims to showcase how automotive careers are making the future smarter, safer and cleaner, and to challenge outdated assumptions that continue to hold the sector back.



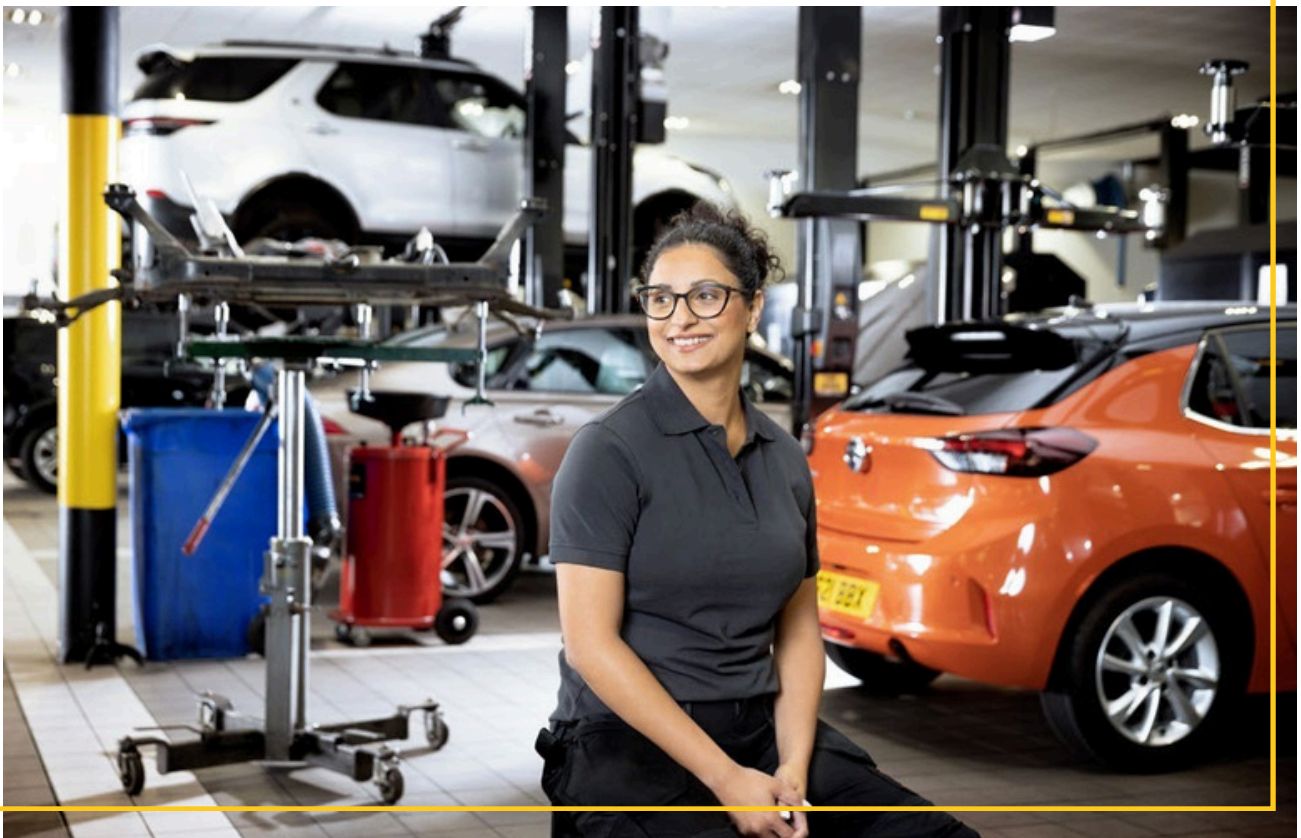
# Introduction

The UK automotive sector is undergoing rapid transformation driven by electrification, digitalisation, sustainability targets, and changing mobility patterns. Far from being a traditional or static industry, automotive now sits at the intersection of advanced technology, environmental innovation and digital capability. At the same time, employers across the sector face persistent skills shortages and challenges in attracting new talent.

Parents and guardians play a critical role in shaping young people's career decisions, particularly at key transition points between ages 14–18. Understanding how parents perceive apprenticeships, and automotive specifically, is essential to strengthening the future skills pipeline. Their perceptions influence not only individual choices, but the long-term sustainability and diversity of the workforce. As such, the IMI has commissioned a YouGov survey to provide an in-depth analysis on the perceptions of apprenticeships, with a focus in particular on the automotive sector. The research is designed to support the IMI's There's More to Motor campaign by identifying where perceptions diverge from reality, and what types of information are most effective in changing minds.

The research moves beyond headline attitudes to explore:

- Why parents support apprenticeships in principle
- Why automotive is treated differently from other sectors
- Which perceptions are most entrenched
- And, importantly, what actually changes minds



# Headline Findings:

## Apprenticeships vs Automotive

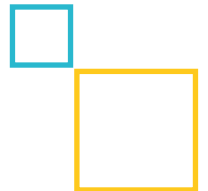
This section sets out the core finding of our research. While parents are broadly supportive of apprenticeships as a pathway, this support does not extend evenly across sectors. Automotive apprenticeships face a distinct and more acute perception challenge.

### 1. Strong parental support for apprenticeships overall

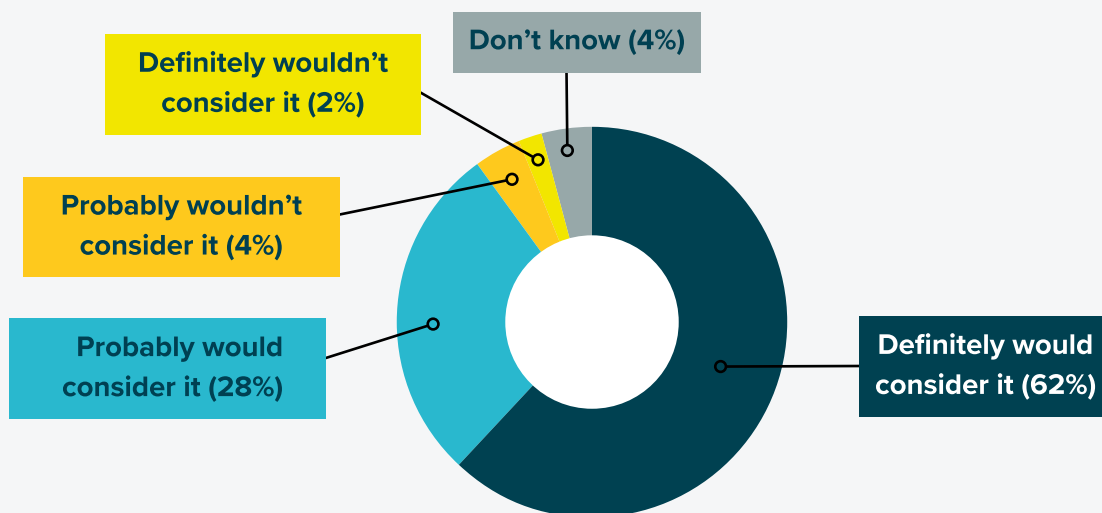
The research confirms that apprenticeships are widely accepted by parents and guardians as a legitimate post-16 and post-18 pathway.

#### Key findings

- **90%** of parents of children aged 14-17 would consider an apprenticeship for their child
- **62%** say they would definitely consider one
- **28%** say they would probably consider one
- Only **6%** of parents say they would not consider an apprenticeship for their child



How likely, if at all, would you be to consider an apprenticeship for your child / children for their career and education progression?



Base: All parents of children aged 14–17 (n=1,002)

This level of support cuts across most demographic groups and indicates that, at a system level, apprenticeships are no longer seen as a marginal or “second best” option. However, this stat needs to be viewed in context as it masks important nuances around status, prestige and perceived value.



**When parents of children ages 14-17 who would not consider apprenticeships were asked why, the most cited reasons were:**

- University is perceived as offering greater long-term value (39%)
- Concerns about prestige and status (14%)
- Uncertainty about career progression (18%) and concerns about earnings potential (12%)

These concerns reflect enduring cultural narratives rather than direct opposition to vocational learning.

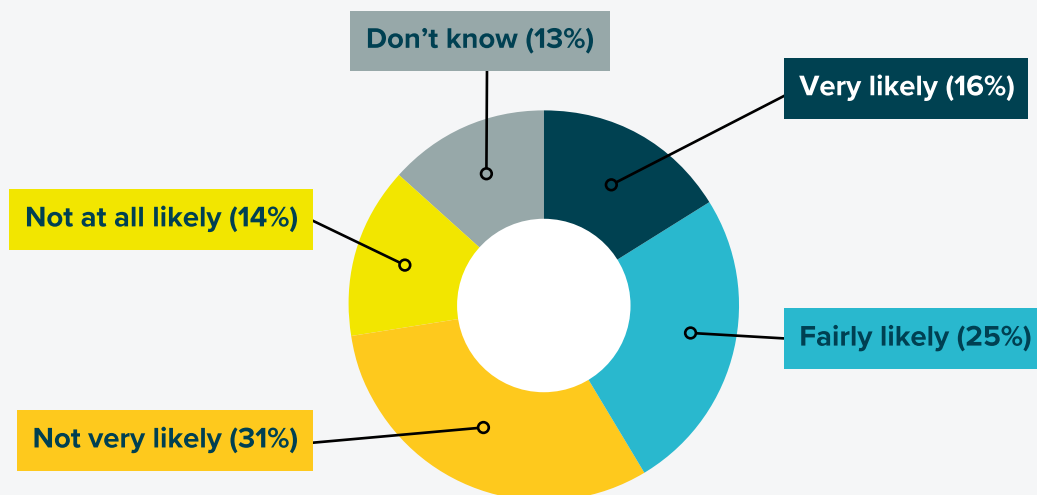
## 2. A sharp drop-off for automotive apprenticeships

Support for apprenticeships drops significantly when parents are asked to consider the automotive sector specifically.

**Among parents of children ages 14-17 who are open to apprenticeships:**

- Only **41%** would consider an automotive apprenticeship
- **45%** say they are not very likely or not at all likely
- **13%** are unsure

**How likely, if at all, would you be to consider an apprenticeship for your child / children for their career and education progression?**



Base: Parents of children aged 14–17 who are open to apprenticeships (n≈904)

This means that a majority of parents who support apprenticeships actively or passively exclude automotive from the options they would encourage.

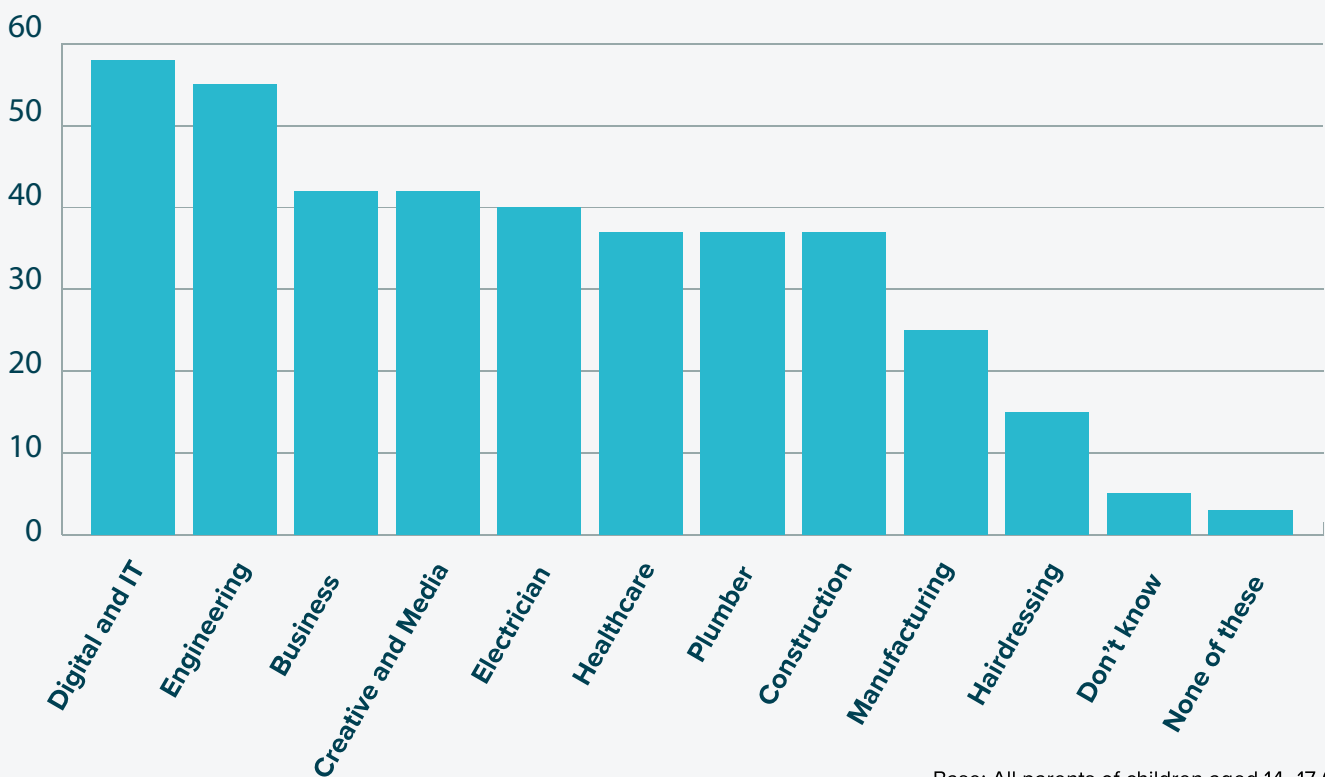
This finding is critical as it demonstrates that automotive is not competing against apprenticeships in general, but against other sectors that tend to be more readily associated with modern, professional, and future-facing career pathways.

### 3. Automotive compared to other apprenticeship sectors

Parents' of children aged 14-17 hesitancy towards automotive apprenticeships do not reflect a general reluctance to vocational or technical pathways. When asked which industries they would consider for their child to pursue an apprenticeship in, parents expressed strongest support for sectors such as Digital & IT (58%) and Engineering (56%), followed by Business & Administration (43%) and Healthcare (36%).

Support was more mixed across traditional trade and industrial sectors, with electrician (40%), Construction (35%) and Manufacturing (25%) attracting lower, but still substantial, levels of consideration.

Which, if any, of the following other industries would you consider for your child/children to pursue an apprenticeship in?



Base: All parents of children aged 14–17 (n=1,002)

Taken together, these responses indicate that parents are not uniformly positive or negative about apprenticeships by sector type. Instead, they appear to differentiate between industries they associate with modernity, professional identity and future relevance, and those they perceive as more traditional or narrow.

Many of the sectors most favoured by parents, particularly Digital & IT, Engineering and Business, encompass skills, technologies and progression pathways that increasingly exist within the automotive sector. However, parents do not consistently associate these roles with automotive itself. This suggests that automotive is often evaluated not based on its actual occupational mix, but on broader sector-level perceptions.

## 4. Culture is the defining differentiator

Among parents who would consider an apprenticeship but would not consider an automotive apprenticeship, 23% cite automotive culture as a barrier. This compares with 13% of parents who would not consider apprenticeships at all, who say that the culture of apprenticeships would not suit their child.

When parents of children aged 14-17 who would not consider an automotive apprenticeship were asked to explain why, they cited concerns relating to:

- Workplace environment
  - Gender imbalance
  - Inclusion and accessibility
- Long-term sustainability of the sector (18%) was also suggested

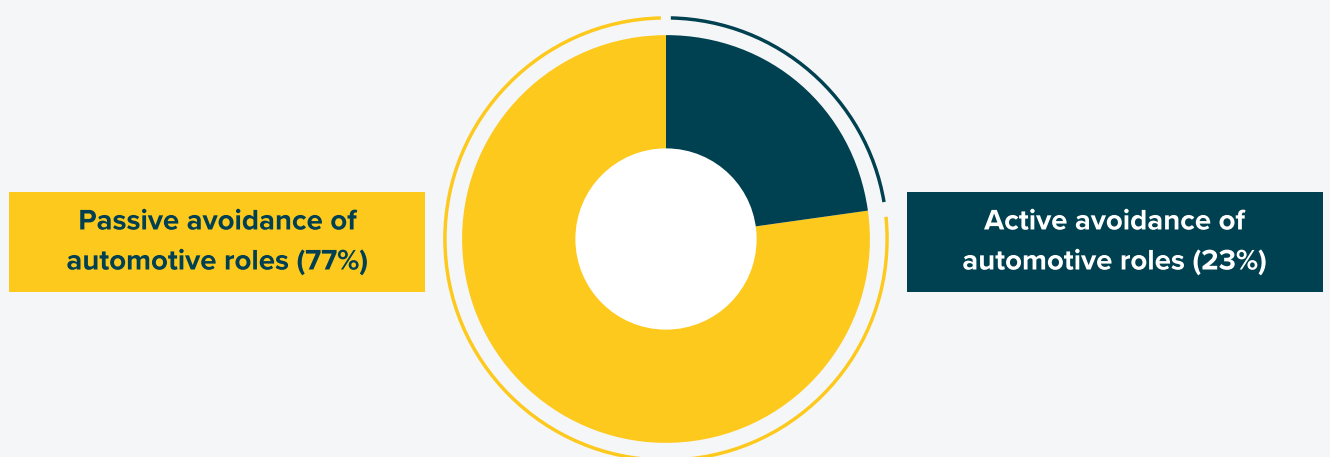
This indicates that negative perceptions of automotive are sector-specific, not inherent to vocational education.

## 5. Passive avoidance dominates parental decision-making

A crucial insight from our research is the distinction between active rejection and passive avoidance of automotive careers among parents.

While fewer than a quarter (23%) actively reject the idea of their child pursuing an automotive role, the vast majority (77%) demonstrate a more passive form of avoidance. This passive avoidance is typically driven not by strong negative views, but by a lack of familiarity with the sector, reliance on outdated or stereotyped assumptions, and the simple absence of automotive careers from parents' "mental shortlist" of acceptable or desirable options.

This distinction matters because passive avoidance is far more amenable to change than entrenched opposition. For the automotive sector, the implication is that it is losing potential talent by default rather than through conscious rejection. Many parents are not making a deliberate negative judgement about automotive careers; instead, they are simply not seeing the sector as relevant, visible, or aligned with their expectations for their children's futures.



Base: Parents of children aged 14–17 who would not consider an automotive apprenticeship for their child/children (n=415)



## 6. Familiarity with automotive influences attitudes

Among parents of children aged 14-17 who are open to automotive apprenticeships, willingness to encourage their child appears to be influenced by whether they have personal or family connections to the automotive sector. Over half of parents (55%) report having no connection to automotive at all, while 43% report some form of direct or indirect connection. When asked about their likelihood of encouraging their child to pursue an automotive apprenticeship, parents with a connection to the sector are more likely to say they are very likely to encourage this route (44%), compared with those without a connection (36%). This suggests a familiarity with the sector plays an important role in shaping parental perceptions.

This finding reinforces the potential importance of visibility, storytelling, and real-world examples in improving understanding of automotive careers, alongside the influence of peers and credible ambassadors. Without these points of connection, automotive may remain abstract for many parents, and when a sector is abstract, perceptions may tend to default to simplistic or outdated stereotypes rather than informed judgement.



### CHAPTER 2;

## Who Is Persuadable and Why

Headline attitudes alone do not explain why automotive apprenticeships continue to struggle for parental endorsement. To understand where change is possible, it is necessary to look not just at what parents think, but how those views are formed and where they are most open to influence.

Our research explored parents' views on automotive apprenticeships using a two-stage decision making approach, by asking two sequential questions: first about apprenticeships in general, and then about automotive specifically. The results suggest that a significant proportion of parents sit in a space of uncertainty rather than outright rejection.



## A two-stage decision process




Parents do not begin by judging automotive in isolation. Instead, they first form a view on whether apprenticeships are an acceptable pathway for their child at all. Only once that hurdle is cleared do they then consider whether automotive is a sector they would actively encourage.

The data shows that the first hurdle is largely overcome. Around nine in ten parents are open to apprenticeships in principle. However, at the second stage, support fragments. Within the group of parents who would consider an apprenticeship, fewer than half (41%) are positive about automotive while a substantial proportion remain unsure (13%) or not likely to encourage (46%).

This structure is important because it demonstrates that the challenge facing automotive is not opposition to apprenticeships, but a more specific set of sector-level perceptions that interrupt the decision-making process.

## Distinct groups with different persuasion potential

When parents' views are examined through this two-stage decision process, three distinct attitudinal groups emerge. These groups are not marketing personas; they are analytically useful categories that reflect different levels of openness to change and different implications for sector engagement.

Group	Approximate share of parents	Core characteristics	Persuasion potential
 <b>Supporters</b>	≈37%	Positive about both apprenticeships in general and automotive apprenticeships specifically. Typically characterised by higher familiarity with the automotive sector, often through direct or indirect experience via family or friends. More likely to be parents of boys and to view automotive as offering stable employment and clear progression routes.	<b>Low</b> – views already positive. However, Supporters play an important role as <b>credible advocates</b> , helping to challenge stereotypes within their own networks.
 <b>Movables (Persuadables)</b>	≈53%	Open to apprenticeships in principle but unsure or unlikely to encourage an automotive apprenticeship. More likely to be parents of daughters, from mid-income households, and to lack personal connections to the sector. Views are shaped more by general narratives than by direct experience, with concerns focused on culture, inclusion, professionalism, sustainability, and long-term relevance.	<b>High</b> – the largest and most strategically important group. Evidence shows their views are responsive to information, reassurance, and real-world examples.
 <b>Rejectors</b>	≈10%	Parents who are not open to apprenticeships as an overall pathway. More likely to come from higher-income households, prioritise university routes, and place greater emphasis on prestige and traditional professional careers. Typically have little or no direct experience of the automotive sector.	<b>Low (short term)</b> – views are more entrenched and less responsive to immediate intervention; more relevant to long-term reputation change.

The distribution and characteristics of these groups underline that the core challenge facing automotive is not opposition to apprenticeships as a pathway, but uncertainty and hesitation at the point of sector consideration.



## Supporters

Supporters are parents who are **positive about both apprenticeships in general and automotive apprenticeships specifically**. They form a substantial minority of the overall sample and are typically characterised by higher familiarity with the automotive sector.

Supporters are more likely to have direct or indirect experience of automotive careers, often through family members or friends working in the sector. They are also more likely to be parents of boys. Their positive views tend to be grounded in a practical understanding of the sector and a perception that automotive offers stable employment and clear progression routes.

From a sector perspective, Supporters are not a priority for persuasion. However, they play a critical role in shaping wider perceptions. Their experiences provide credible counterpoints to negative stereotypes and position them as potential advocates within their own networks.



## Movables (or Persuadables)

Movables - sometimes referred to as persuadables, represent the largest and most strategically important group identified in the research. These parents are **open to apprenticeships but are unsure or unlikely** to encourage an automotive career.

Their uncertainty rarely reflects outright opposition. Instead, it is driven by limited knowledge of the sector, concerns about culture and inclusion, and uncertainty about whether automotive aligns with contemporary expectations around professionalism, sustainability, and purpose.

### Movables are disproportionately:

- Parents of daughters
- From mid-income households
- Less likely to have personal connections to automotive
- More influenced by general narratives than direct experience

Because their views are not fixed, this group demonstrates the highest potential for change. As later sections of this report show, exposure to concrete information about modern automotive roles and career pathways has a measurable impact on their likelihood to encourage automotive careers.



### Rejectors

Rejectors are parents who **are not open to apprenticeships as a pathway and are therefore unlikely to encourage automotive apprenticeships.**

Rejectors are more likely to come from higher-income households and to prioritise university routes and traditional professional careers. They place a stronger emphasis on prestige, status, and established white-collar pathways, and are less likely to have any direct experience of the automotive sector.

For these parents, automotive is often perceived as manual, low-status, or misaligned with their aspirations for their child. While their views are important in shaping long-term reputation, the research suggests they are less responsive to short-term intervention than other groups.

## What distinguishes uncertainty from rejection

The research identifies several factors that consistently separate parents who are uncertain about automotive from those whose views are more fixed.

One of the strongest differentiators is familiarity. Parents with any personal or indirect connection to the automotive sector are significantly more likely to view automotive apprenticeships positively. In the absence of such exposure, perceptions are shaped by stereotype rather than experience.

Gender also plays an important role in shaping parental attitudes. Parents of daughters are less likely than parents of sons to encourage automotive careers (28% likely vs 36% likely), indicating a degree of hesitation towards the sector.

This pattern can be understood in the context of wider narratives about automotive as a male-dominated industry, where concerns about workplace culture, inclusivity, and the limited visibility of female role models are commonly raised in broader public discourse. These contextual factors help to explain why reluctance may be more pronounced among parents of daughters, even where they are supportive of apprenticeships in principle.

Values alignment further differentiates persuadable parents from rejectors. Parents who are uncertain about automotive frequently express a desire for their child's career to align with broader values such as environmental responsibility, social contribution, and long-term relevance. Where automotive is not associated with these values, it is excluded from consideration, even when parents support apprenticeships in general.



## Evidence that persuasion is possible

Importantly, this research does not treat persuasion as hypothetical. It measures how parents' views change when they are presented with concrete information about the range of roles available within automotive apprenticeships.

When parents of children aged 14–17 were presented with information about the range of roles available within automotive apprenticeships, including data analysis, cyber security, sustainability, digital systems and business functions, 49% reported being more likely to encourage their child to consider the sector. This effect is evident among parents who were previously unsure or unlikely to encourage automotive (43%), including those with limited prior exposure to automotive (62%).

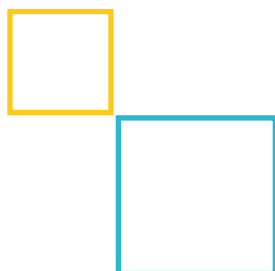
This finding suggests that for a large proportion of parents, reluctance towards automotive is linked to incomplete information rather than fundamental opposition.

## Implications for focus and prioritisation

Taken together, these findings suggest that the sector's greatest opportunity lies with parents who are open but unconvinced. These parents **do not require conversion; they require reassurance, clarity, and a more accurate picture** of what modern automotive careers look like.

Supportive parents can play a valuable role in reinforcing positive narratives, while parents with more entrenched views are likely to require longer-term cultural change rather than immediate intervention.

Understanding these distinctions allows the sector to move away from generic messaging and towards evidence-led prioritisation of effort.





## CHAPTER 3;

# What Automotive Is Competing Against

Parents' hesitation about automotive apprenticeships cannot be understood in isolation. When parents decide whether to encourage a particular pathway, they do not evaluate sectors one by one; instead, they compare them against a mental shortlist of acceptable, aspirational alternatives.

This research shows that automotive is not competing primarily with other traditional trades. Instead, it is being compared, often unfavourably, with sectors that parents perceived as having greater association with modernity, professionalism, and long-term relevance.



## A crowded and competitive mental shortlist

When asked which sectors they would consider for their child to pursue an apprenticeship in, parents consistently favoured a relatively small set of alternatives. These included engineering (56%), digital and IT (58%), healthcare (36%), business and administration (43%).

What is striking is not simply that these sectors are preferred, but that many parents who reject automotive are simultaneously positive about sectors that share overlapping skills, technologies, and career pathways.

Automotive, in other words, is not losing out because parents reject technical work or vocational learning. **It is losing out because parents are not recognising it as belonging to the same category as these more favoured sectors.**

## The roles parents aspire to, and what they represent

The research also explored the specific roles parents find most attractive for their children. These roles provide important insight into the values and aspirations driving parental decision-making.

Parents who are unsure or not likely to encourage their children about automotive consistently gravitate towards roles such as data analyst, cyber security specialist, sustainability officer, CAD designer, AI specialist, and creative or business-focused roles. These occupations share several common characteristics. They are perceived as **technologically advanced**, **intellectually demanding**, and **future-facing**. They are also widely viewed as professional roles with status, progression, and transferable skills.

Roles parents prefer	Where parents assume these roles sit
Data Analyst	Digital & IT
Cyber Security Specialist	Digital & IT
Sustainability Officer	Sustainability / Green Energy
AI Specialist	Digital & IT
CAD Designer	Engineering
Materials Scientist	Engineering
Creative Designer / Creative Director	Creative Industries
IT Business Analyst	Digital & IT / Business
HR Manager	Business & Administration
Mobility / Technology-focused roles (general)	Technology / Engineering
Healthcare-related technical roles	Healthcare

Crucially, these roles are not external to automotive. They already exist within the sector and are increasingly central to its future. However, these roles are more commonly perceived as part of other industries, particularly digital, engineering, and sustainability, rather than with automotive itself.

This disconnect between reality and perception sits at the heart of automotive's competitive challenge.





## Perceptions of modernity, purpose and professionalism

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Across the dataset, parents signal that their support for a sector is shaped less by job titles and more by what that sector symbolises.

Sectors that perform well in parents' minds appear to be associated with:

- Technological innovation
- Environmental or social contribution
- Professional identity and status
- Long-term relevance and adaptability

Automotive, by contrast, is often perceived through a more traditional lens. Parents frequently associate it with mechanical work, physical environments, and declining relevance, even when they acknowledge that the sector is undergoing significant technological change.

This matters because parents are not simply asking whether a job exists today. They are asking whether a sector aligns with their child's future identity, values, and prospects.

## Sustainability and the green economy: a missed association

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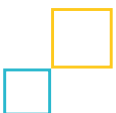


While sustainability and environmental impact were not explored as standalone sector comparisons in this research, the findings highlight a disconnect between automotive and sustainability in parents' mental models of career pathways.

When parents of children aged 14–17 were presented with information about the range of roles available within automotive apprenticeships, including roles linked to sustainability, electrification, digital systems and future technologies, a substantial proportion reported being more likely to encourage their child to consider the sector. This suggests that sustainability-related roles are not currently front of mind for many parents when they think about automotive, but can positively influence perceptions when made visible.

At the same time, insights from open-ended responses provide further context for this perception gap. When parents who would not consider an automotive apprenticeship were asked to explain why, some cited environmental concerns, including perceptions that the sector is environmentally problematic or misaligned with their values. These views indicate that automotive is not consistently recognised by all parents as part of the green economy.

Taken together, the findings point to a gap between the reality of automotive's role in electrification, battery innovation and the transition to net zero, and how the sector is currently understood by parents at the point where career options are being considered. **This suggests that automotive's sustainability narrative is either not reaching parents or is not yet being recognised as credible or relevant within wider discussions about future-facing careers.**



## Gendered perceptions and professional status

Parents of daughters are less likely to encourage automotive careers than parents of sons (28% likely vs 36% likely).. In wider public discourse, career sectors perceived as inclusive, professional, and socially progressive are often seen as more attractive options for young women, which helps to contextualise this pattern.

Automotive, meanwhile, is often viewed as male-dominated and culturally resistant to change. These perceptions affect how parents evaluate the sector relative to others, regardless of the actual roles or opportunities available.

In effect, automotive is competing not only on skills and careers, but on cultural signals, many of which are implicit rather than explicit.

## A competition automotive is not yet set up to win

**Taken together, the findings suggest that automotive is competing in a space defined by:**

- Professional identity
- Values alignment
- Perceived future relevance

While automotive offers many of the same roles, skills, and progression opportunities as its competitors, it is not yet widely recognised as belonging to this category.

This creates a structural disadvantage. Automotive is evaluated against sectors that parents see as modern and aspirational, while being perceived as traditional and narrow. Until that mismatch is addressed, the sector will continue to underperform in parental endorsement, even where opportunities are strong.







## CHAPTER 4;

# What Changes Minds: The Power of Information

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Understanding why parents are hesitant about automotive apprenticeships is only part of the challenge. The more important question for the sector is whether those perceptions are fixed, or whether they can be influenced.

This research provides clear evidence that for a substantial proportion of parents, attitudes towards automotive are not entrenched. Instead, they are shaped by information gaps, limited exposure, and inherited assumptions. When these are addressed, views shift.

## Information as a catalyst for reconsideration

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One of the most significant findings in the research is the measurable impact of information on parental attitudes.

When parents of children aged 14–17 were presented with examples of the range of roles that exist within the automotive sector, including digital, technical, sustainability-focused, creative and business roles, 49% reported a greater likelihood of encouraging their child to consider an automotive career.

This shift is not marginal. It represents a meaningful change in outlook among parents who had previously been unsure or sceptical. Importantly, this effect is observed without any attempt to persuade or promote; it occurs simply through exposure to factual information about the breadth of opportunities available.

This finding challenges the assumption that resistance to automotive is deeply rooted. Instead, it suggests that many parents are making decisions based on incomplete or outdated mental models of the sector.



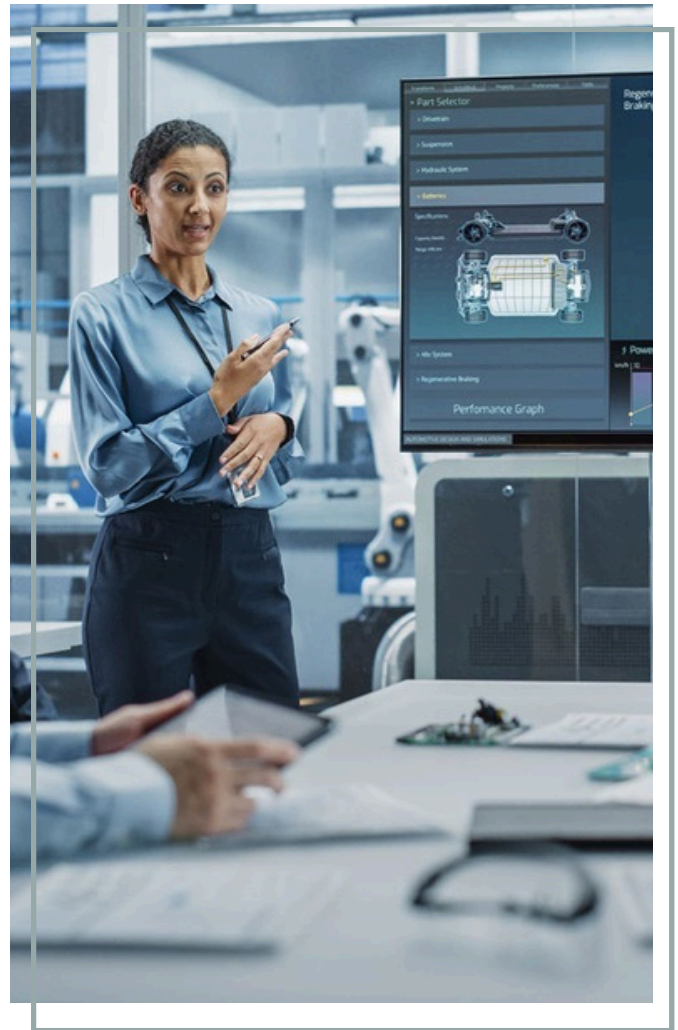
## Who is most influenced by new information

The impact of information is not evenly distributed across all parents. The research shows that it is particularly effective among groups previously identified as persuadable.

Parents who were already supportive of apprenticeships but uncertain about automotive are the most responsive. This group includes a high proportion of parents of daughters, as well as those with limited prior exposure to automotive careers. For these parents, new information does not overturn deeply held beliefs; it fills a knowledge gap.

Mid-income households also show a stronger response than higher-income groups, reinforcing the distinction between uncertainty and entrenched preference for university-led pathways.

This pattern reinforces a key conclusion of the report: the largest gains come from addressing uncertainty, not attempting to convert rejection.



## The power of specificity over general reassurance

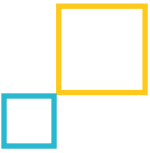
The research indicates that generic reassurance about apprenticeships or automotive is less effective than specific, concrete examples.

Parents respond most strongly when they can clearly see:

- What kinds of roles exist
- How those roles align with skills their child already has or is developing
- How those roles connect to future-facing themes such as technology, sustainability, and digitalisation

Roles such as data analyst, cyber security specialist, sustainability officer and AI-related occupations resonate not because they are aspirational labels, but because they map onto parents' existing understanding of "good" careers.

This suggests that perception change is driven less by persuasion and more by translation, helping parents recognise automotive as a sector that already contains the futures they value.



## Exposure and familiarity as reinforcing mechanisms

Beyond information alone, familiarity with the automotive sector plays a reinforcing role in shaping parental attitudes.

Parents with personal experience of automotive, or with family and friends working in the sector, are consistently more positive about automotive apprenticeships.

This familiarity provides:

- First-hand counterexamples to negative stereotypes
- Greater confidence in progression and stability
- A more nuanced understanding of working environments

In contrast, parents without any exposure tend to rely on second-hand narratives, which often emphasise outdated or partial images of the sector.

This finding highlights the importance of credible, real-world reference points in shaping perceptions, particularly for parents who are uncertain rather than opposed.



## Addressing gender and inclusion concerns

Information has its greatest impact when it addresses the specific factors that underpin scepticism. In this research, parents of daughters are less likely to encourage automotive careers than parents of sons. Insights from open-ended responses and wider contextual evidence suggest that concerns relating to workplace culture, inclusion and accessibility help to explain this reluctance.

The research suggests that perception change is most effective when information:

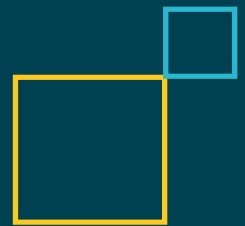
- Demonstrates the diversity of roles available
- Challenges assumptions about who belongs in automotive
- Acknowledges, rather than dismisses, concerns about workplace culture

**Importantly, the data does not suggest that parents require reassurance that problems do not exist. Instead, they respond to evidence that the sector is evolving and that there are pathways aligned with a wider range of identities, skills and needs.**

## Why information alone is not enough

While the impact of information is clear, the research also highlights its limits. A significant minority of parents of children aged 14–17 (43%) report no change in their views following exposure to new information. Among these parents, responses suggest that reluctance is less about a lack of information and more closely linked to underlying perceptions of cultural fit within the automotive sector. This indicates that while information can address uncertainty, deeper or more entrenched views may require longer-term cultural change rather than information alone.

This reinforces the distinction between short-term influence and long-term reputation. Information can shift uncertainty, but deeper cultural change is required to address more entrenched views.



## Conclusion

This research shows that the core challenge for automotive apprenticeships is not whether parents support apprenticeships as a pathway. Most do. The issue arises at the second stage of decision-making, when parents consider whether automotive is a sector they would actively encourage.

Across the findings, automotive is often excluded through passive avoidance rather than active rejection. For many parents, the sector is not on their “mental shortlist” of modern, professional, future-facing options. Where hesitation exists, it is shaped by perceptions of culture, inclusion, sustainability, and professional identity, reinforced by limited familiarity and outdated assumptions about the roles available.

The evidence also shows that these perceptions are not fixed. When parents are presented with clear, concrete information about the breadth of automotive careers, including pathways linked to digital skills, sustainability, and advanced technologies, attitudes shift for a substantial proportion, including many parents who are open to apprenticeships but uncertain or sceptical about automotive.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the gap between perception and reality is a central factor shaping parental endorsement of automotive apprenticeships. Addressing that gap requires understanding where uncertainty sits, what drives it, and what kinds of information are most likely to influence it. For the IMI, this reinforces the importance of its role as the professional body in bridging that divide.

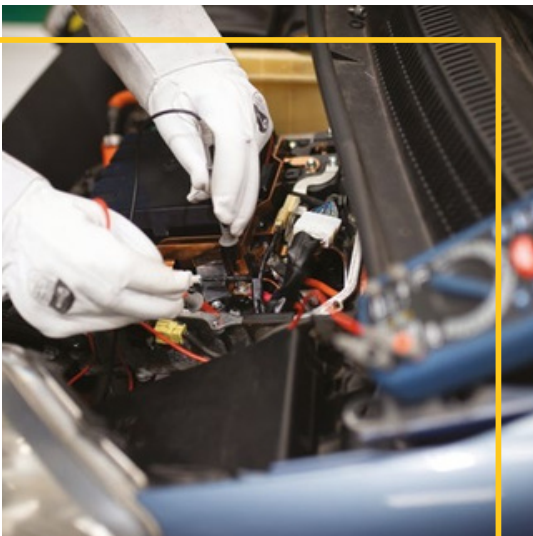
Through the IMI’s More to Motor campaign, employers, educators and partners are invited to play a direct role in closing this perception gap, by sharing real stories, insights and opportunities that reflect the modern automotive workforce. By showcasing careers that make the future smarter, safer and cleaner, and highlighting roles across digital, sustainability and advanced technologies, the sector can collectively challenge outdated assumptions, change perceptions, and attract the next generation of talent into automotive.

# Appendix

## Methodology

All figures explicitly stated as from YouGov Plc are from YouGov. Total sample size was 1,002 UK parents of children aged 14 to 17. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7th - 12th August 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults.

Segmentation analysis and thermal mapping (including the active/passive split referenced in the report) were conducted independently by the Institute of the Motor Industry using outputs from the YouGov survey.



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