



INSTITUTE OF THE
MOTOR INDUSTRY



The IMI's Response to the SOC2020 Revision Consultation

May 2026

The professional body for people working
and learning in automotive since 1920

Contents

About the IMI	3
Introduction	3
Please describe how SOC2020 is used by your organisation	4
What areas of SOC2020 could be improved?	4
Feedback on the proposed changes ONS is considering	6
Any other comments	7
Annex A: Summary of key occupational mapping issues raised in draft response	8

About the IMI

The Institute of the Motor Industry (the IMI) is the professional body for individuals working in the UK automotive sector, with a clear strategic ambition to elevate the motor industry workforce into a globally admired profession that inspires trust and drives sustainable innovation.

Committed to becoming the gold standard for the automotive workforce, the IMI delivers trusted advocacy, world-class education and enduring partnerships that support the development of a future-ready, highly skilled and competent workforce. Through its work, the IMI sets professional standards, provides qualifications and accreditation, and enables lifelong learning and career progression across all levels of the industry.

With a diverse membership spanning technicians, engineers, employers, educators and senior leaders, the IMI acts as an authoritative voice for motor industry professionalism. It works closely with government, employers and training providers to shape skills policy, strengthen workforce capability and ensure the sector can respond to rapid technological change, including electrification, digitisation and new mobility solutions.

At its core, the IMI is committed to building trust, advancing professional excellence and supporting a connected, forward-looking automotive community that is equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Introduction

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) is the UK's system for classifying jobs based on the type of work people do and the skills required. It is used widely across government, industry and research to underpin labour market data, workforce planning, skills policy and funding decisions. For the automotive sector, SOC plays a critical role in ensuring the workforce is accurately represented within national data and policy frameworks.

In 2026, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) undertook a review of SOC2020, seeking feedback on how occupational classifications could be updated to better reflect changes in the labour market, including the impact of new technologies, emerging roles and evolving skill requirements.

As the professional body for the automotive workforce, the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) submitted a response to this consultation to ensure that automotive occupations are appropriately recognised. Our response focused on three core themes: strengthening existing occupational descriptions, improving the visibility of partially recognised or hidden roles, and ensuring emerging occupations, particularly those linked to electrification and new technologies, are reflected within the classification system.

This document sets out IMI's full response to the consultation.

Please describe how SOC2020 is used by your organisation

The IMI uses SOC2020 extensively to support:

- Labour market and workforce intelligence
- Occupational forecasting and skills shortage analysis
- Policy development and monitoring
- Vacancy and advertised demand analysis
- Mapping occupations to occupational standards and qualifications
- Evidence used to support funding, workforce planning and industrial strategy engagement

IMI uses SOC at both the 4-digit unit group level and, where available and appropriate, the 6-digit extended level, particularly where additional occupational granularity is necessary for analysing automotive occupations.

What areas of SOC2020 could be improved?

The IMI believes improvements are needed in three areas:

1. Updating and strengthening existing occupational classifications
2. Improving recognition of partially visible or hidden occupations
3. Recognising emerging occupational specialisms associated with technological change

Improve Existing Occupational Classifications

SOC 5231 – Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians

IMI considers the unit group broadly appropriate but overly broad in its current description. While the 6-digit structure usefully recognises distinctions including:

- Auto electricians
- Light vehicle technicians
- Heavy and large vehicle technicians
- MOT testers
- Roadside assistance technicians

...the overarching 4-digit description does not fully reflect these specialisms.

Particular issues include:

- Insufficient recognition of diagnostic and digital elements of modern technician work
- Limited reflection of safety-critical compliance roles such as MOT testers
- No explicit reference to bus and coach technicians, despite being subsumed within heavy vehicle occupations
- Unclear treatment of roadside recovery operatives

Suggested updated description for 5231

Vehicle technicians, mechanics and electricians diagnose, maintain, repair and test mechanical, electrical and electronic systems in light vehicles, heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches, motorcycles and specialist vehicles. The group includes occupational specialisms in vehicle diagnostics, auto electrical systems, regulatory testing and roadside technical support.

Additional points

- Existing 6-digit distinctions should be retained and better reflected in the 4-digit description.
- Consideration should be given to a distinct 6-digit extension for Bus and Coach Technicians to support clearer visibility of public service vehicle maintenance occupations.

SOC 5232 – Vehicle Body Builders and Repairers

IMI considers this unit group broadly fit for purpose and is not proposing structural change. However, ONS may wish to consider whether the description sufficiently reflects the scope and complexity of modern accident repair activity.

The current description captures traditional body repair activity, but may understate aspects of contemporary accident repair, particularly:

- Structural and non-structural repair distinctions
- Advanced vehicle materials (e.g. aluminium, composites and bonded structures)
- Increasing use of manufacturer repair methods and technologies
- Mechanical, electrical and trim (MET) activity within modern body repair

In particular, mechanical, electrical and trim (MET) activity is only weakly implicit within the current description and could be more explicitly recognised.

Suggested revised description

Vehicle body builders and repairers repair and reconstruct structural and non-structural vehicle body components, including the removal, repair and refitting of mechanical, electrical and trim components, using manufacturer repair methods and technologies associated with modern vehicle construction.

SOC 5233 – Vehicle Paint Technicians

IMI considers this unit group broadly fit for purpose and is not proposing structural change. However, ONS may wish to review whether the description adequately reflects modern refinishing practice.

The current description is weighted toward paint application and may underplay:

- Surface preparation and refinishing activity
- Advanced coatings and modern paint systems
- Repair technologies and refinishing processes
- The technical nature of modern vehicle refinishing

Suggested revised description

Vehicle paint technicians prepare, repair and refinish vehicle surfaces using modern paint systems, coatings, wraps and associated technologies to restore or enhance vehicle appearance, protection and functionality.

SOC 8145 – Tyre, Exhaust and Windscreen Fitters

This unit group is broadly fit for purpose, but improvements are recommended. The current description does not fully reflect the broader scope of modern fast-fit activity, which may include: tyres, brakes, light servicing.

Suggested wording addition

“...including broader fast-fit service and replacement activities.”

Windscreen fitters (8145/02)

The extended description appears weighted toward installation and replacement and underplays:

- repair activity
- increasing technical complexity of automotive glazing
- associated calibration-related activity

Suggested updated description for 8145/02

Windscreen fitters inspect, repair and replace automotive glazing systems, including preparation, installation and associated technical procedures required to restore vehicle safety and functionality.

SOC 7115 – Vehicle and Parts Salespersons and Advisers

This group is broadly appropriate, but there may be under-recognition of aftersales advisory roles. In particular:

- Automotive service advisers are not explicitly visible
- These roles may be dispersed into generic customer service classifications

Suggested change

Update group description to explicitly reference:
“...vehicle sales, parts advisory and aftersales service advisory roles...”

Stretch consideration

ONS may also wish to explore whether an additional extended category for Automotive Service Advisers is warranted.

7115/03 Automotive Service Advisers

Description

Automotive service advisers act as the interface between customers and vehicle maintenance operations, advising on repair needs, scheduling work, interpreting technical requirements and supporting aftersales service delivery.

Improve Recognition of Hidden Occupations

Vehicle Damage Assessors

Improved recognition of vehicle damage assessors would strengthen visibility of the wider accident repair workforce and improve recognition of technical assessment roles that support repair decisions, insurance processes and workforce planning.

Proposed classification placement

Major Group 3
Sub-major Group 35
Minor Group 354 (Estimators, valuers and assessors)

Proposed occupational description

Vehicle damage assessors inspect vehicle damage, estimate repair requirements and costs, and provide technical assessment to support repair decisions, insurance processes and claims settlement.

Recognise Emerging Opportunities

Consideration of a New Unit Group — Vehicle Battery Specialists

IMI believes the emergence of specialist battery occupations may warrant consideration of a new unit group.

Proposed placement

Major Group 5
Sub-major Group 52
Minor Group 523 Vehicle Trades

Proposed new 4-digit unit group

Vehicle Battery Specialists (new code within Minor Group 523)

Proposed description

Vehicle battery specialists diagnose, maintain, repair, assess and manage high-voltage and traction battery systems used in electric and hybrid vehicles, including battery health assessment, repair, replacement and end-of-life management.

Potential extended structure

- Battery Technicians
- Battery Health Assessors
- Battery Recycling and End-of-Life Specialists

If a new unit group is not considered appropriate at this stage, these specialisms should at minimum be recognised through the extended structure and/or updated descriptions.

Feedback on the proposed changes ONS is considering

IMI supports the broad direction of the proposed revision approach and offers the following observations.

Support for updating descriptions

We support updating unit group descriptions to better reflect modern occupations and technologies, particularly for SOC 5231, SOC 5232, SOC 5233, SOC 8145 and SOC 7115.

Support for incorporating 6-digit extended SOC into the 4-digit structure

IMI strongly supports this. Existing extended classifications provide important evidence of occupational distinctions already recognised but not always well reflected in core descriptions.

This is particularly relevant for:

- light vs heavy vehicle technicians
- auto electrical roles
- MOT testers
- roadside assistance roles

Caution against over-aggregation

We would caution against changes that reduce existing occupational distinctions through aggregation. This important for statistical, skills and policy purposes.

Support for new unit groups where justified

IMI supports creation of new unit groups where occupational growth and distinct skill requirements justify this. Vehicle battery specialists may provide one such example.

Entry qualifications and occupational positioning

We welcome review of entry routes and qualifications. For some occupations, particularly those involving:

- regulated testing
- high-voltage systems
- safety-critical functions

Current qualification descriptors may understate the increasingly specialist nature of these occupations.

Any structural revisions should preserve comparability and provide clear mapping between SOC2020 and revised classifications to support continuity in labour market analysis.

Any other comments

Accurate occupational classification is not a purely technical issue; it has practical consequences for workforce visibility, skills planning and policy development. For the automotive sector, classification quality affects the ability to:

- understand workforce shortages
- target skills investment
- support net zero workforce planning
- reflect the full scope of the sector beyond manufacturing

Many automotive roles remain partially hidden or grouped in ways that limit their visibility in data.

In addition, IMI notes that the role of leadership and management occupations within the automotive sector is evolving. Increasingly, these roles include responsibility for workforce capability, regulatory compliance, sustainability and net zero transition. Consideration may be needed in future revisions of SOC to ensure that occupational descriptions adequately reflect the growing technical, regulatory and strategic responsibilities associated with these roles.

The IMI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review and would be pleased to support further discussion with ONS as proposals develop.

Annex A: Summary of key occupational mapping issues raised in draft response

Occupation / Function	Current SOC Position	Issue Identified	Proposed Change
Light vehicle technicians	5231 / extended 5231-02	Distinction not well reflected in 4-digit description	Update 5231 description; retain distinction
Heavy vehicle technicians	5231 / extended 5231-03	No separate 4-digit visibility	Retain distinction; consider bus & coach extension
Bus & coach technicians	Implicit within 5231/03	Not explicitly recognised	Consider distinct 6-digit extension
Auto electricians	5231 / extended 5231-01	Modern digital/electrical specialism underplayed	Update 5231 description
MOT testers	5231 / extended 5231-06	Safety-critical compliance role under-recognised	Update 5231 description
Roadside assistance technicians	5231 / extended 5231-07	Mobile technical role weakly reflected	Update 5231 description
Roadside recovery operatives	Partially represented	Classification ambiguity	Flag and improve guidance
Vehicle body builders and repairers	5232	Description does not reflect modern accident repair and MET activity	Update 4-digit description
Vehicle paint technicians	5233	Description underplays refinishing processes and modern coatings	Update 4-digit description
Fast-fit technicians	8145	Broader fast-fit activity under-represented	Broaden 8145 description

Annex A: Summary of key occupational mapping issues raised in draft response Continued ...

Occupation / Function	Current SOC Position	Issue Identified	Proposed Change
Windscreen fitters	8145/02	Repair and technical complexity underplayed	Update extended description
Automotive service advisers	Weakly visible in 7115	Dispersed into generic customer service roles	Update description; consider extension
Vehicle damage assessors	Weakly represented (proposed 354)	Hidden specialist occupation	Improve recognition
Vehicle battery specialists	Not recognised	Emerging occupational gap	Consider new 4-digit group

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Institute of the Motor Industry

Fanshaws, Brickendon, Hertford, SG13 8PQ

+44(0) 1992 519 025

hello@theimi.org.uk

www.theimi.org.uk



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