



INSTITUTE OF THE
MOTOR INDUSTRY



The IMI's Response to the Parental Leave and Pay Review Call for Evidence

August 2025

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

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About the IMI

The IMI is the UK's professional body for the automotive workforce, representing more than 120,000 members and 73,000 learners. We provide accreditation, qualifications, CPD and workforce insight to ensure the sector can meet current and future technological demands.

Do current parental leave and pay entitlements support these objectives (Yes/No)?

Maternal health — No

- Automotive is heavily shift- and workshop-based. Low statutory pay replacement and short paid partner leave make it harder for families in our sector to take the time they clinically need, especially where recovery intersects with physical roles.
- Women are severely under-represented in automotive (only 18.6% of the workforce), with a particularly small pipeline in technical roles. Weak financial support during leave risks further attrition from an already small cohort, undermining any gains in women's participation and wellbeing.
- The sector has an older workforce profile (over 47% aged 45+) so retaining experienced women through life events, including pregnancy and return-to-work, is critical to resilience. Current entitlements and pay levels do not sufficiently support that retention in practice.

Economic growth & labour-market participation (especially for women) — No

- Automotive faces sustained skills shortages (vacancy rate 2.8%, c. 17,000 unfilled roles in Motor Trades). Improving parental leave/pay design is a direct lever to retain scarce talent.
- Women hold just 10.4% of senior roles in automotive (vs ~40% outside automotive). Weak income replacement during leave and limited partner leave/pay compound the “leaky pipeline” and slow progression back to leadership.
- Ethnically diverse staff leave automotive at significantly higher rates than White-British peers; better-paid, more balanced leave for both parents would support retention and progression across under-represented groups.

Best start in life: child development & family wellbeing — No

- In practice, affordability drives early return in our sector, particularly among workshop, retail and manufacturing staff where employer top-ups are less common. This undermines sustained bonding and consistent routines, especially where childcare is hard to arrange around shifts.
- Younger women are under-represented at sector entry (women are only 4.7% of 16–24s in automotive vs 12% nationally). The system should enable those who do enter to stay and thrive through family formation — current design and pay levels don't reliably achieve that.

Flexible and co-parenting choices — No

- Entitlements remain financially and practically asymmetric. In shift-based environments, short paid partner leave and low pay replacement limit genuine sharing of care, constrain breastfeeding/health recovery, and embed gendered patterns at home and work.
- The leadership gaps (women 10.4% of senior roles; disabled staff 9.8%; non-White-British 11.6%) are unlikely to close without a parental leave system that enables equal uptake by both parents and smooth, supported returns.

Any other objectives that should be included?

Retention and return-to-progression outcomes (sector-specific)

Track whether parents — especially women — return, stay 12–24 months, and progress. Automotive's deep leadership gap (women 10.4% of senior roles) requires outcomes beyond simple return-to-work.

Partner/second parent uptake and duration (with pay parity)

Non-transferable, adequately paid partner leave is essential to rebalance care and support maternal health; it will also improve retention in male-majority sectors by normalising leave for men.

Inclusion and intersectionality

Measure impact on disabled parents (older average age; senior under-representation 9.8%) and on ethnically diverse parents (higher turnover risk). Policy must reduce attrition across these groups.

SME/shift-work feasibility

Recognise operational realities (rotas, customer bookings, seasonal peaks). Objectives should include implementation support so smaller garages and dealerships can plan and backfill effectively.

Other comments, evidence, or suggestions

Policy design proposals informed by automotive workforce evidence:

- Introduce a well-paid, non-transferable partner/second-parent entitlement (at least 6 weeks at high wage replacement), to normalise uptake in male-majority, shift-based sectors and support maternal recovery. This will help reduce leadership and pay-progression gaps.
- Improve income replacement early in leave (for both parents), recognising affordability pressures in retail/workshop roles and the link between pay, length of leave taken, and return/retention.
- Guarantee phased, predictable return options (e.g., rostered ramp-up, protected training time) so technicians and service advisors can safely re-enter safety-critical or customer-facing roles.
- Set sector-level transparency metrics (publish return, 12-month retention, and promotion rates by sex/disability/ethnicity), aligning with Skills/LSIP agendas so local planning reflects real barriers in automotive.
- Backfill and SME support: Offer targeted grants or NIC relief for temporary backfill in small garages/dealerships to reduce operational barriers to longer or better-paid leave.
- Evaluate intersectional impact: Require monitoring for disabled and ethnically diverse parents, addressing the higher turnover risk and older age profile among disabled workers.

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