Fixing cars could be a great career choice for young people

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Why fixing cars could be one of the smartest career choices…

National Apprenticeship Week highlights a hands-on profession facing a hidden skills crisis.

As National Apprenticeship Week shines a light on apprenticeships across the UK, one essential part of everyday life is facing a growing problem – there are not enough skilled people coming through to keep Britain's cars on the road.

From school runs and commuting to work, to delivery drivers, carers and emergency services, the country depends on safe, reliable vehicles. Yet the careers behind keeping them running are often overlooked or misunderstood, particularly by young people making decisions about their futures.

That lack of visibility matters, because the reality of working with cars today looks very different from the outdated stereotypes many still hold.

Changing how hands-on careers are seen

Other traditionally practical industries have already shown how quickly perceptions can change. Plumbing and electrical trades, once viewed as fallback options, are now widely recognised as skilled professions with strong earning potential. UK labour market data shows experienced plumbers and electricians regularly earn between £40,000 and £50,000 a year, with self-employed specialists often earning more.

The Armed Forces offer another powerful example. Now the UK's largest apprenticeship provider, they support more than 20,000 apprentices at any one time. Ministry of Defence figures show that over 11,300 people joined the UK Regular Armed Forces in a single year, helping maintain a total service strength of more than 180,000 personnel. Recruitment campaigns have focused less on job titles and more on skills, teamwork and progression, positioning apprenticeships as a paid, debt-free route to a long-term career.

The same approach could transform how young people see careers working with vehicles.

What working with cars really involves in 2026

Modern cars are no longer purely mechanical. They are complex machines that combine electronics, software, sensors and increasingly high-voltage systems. The people who service and repair them need strong problem-solving skills, technical knowledge and the ability to keep learning as technology evolves.

As more electric and hybrid vehicles arrive on UK roads, demand for skilled workers is rising sharply. The Institute of the Motor Industry estimates that the automotive sector will need tens of thousands of additional workers trained to handle electric vehicles by 2030. Yet fewer than 20 per cent of the current workforce is fully qualified to work safely on these systems.

That gap presents a challenge, but also a major opportunity for young people entering the workforce or adults looking to retrain.

Apprenticeships – and earning while learning – offering real alternatives to university

National Apprenticeship Week highlights an option that many families are actively searching for – earning while learning. Apprenticeships in vehicle repair and maintenance allow people to gain recognised qualifications, practical experience and a wage from day one, without taking on student debt.

For many, the appeal is not just financial. Apprenticeships offer structure, clear progression and the chance to build a career that can lead to specialist roles, management or even business ownership.

Garage owner Jenny Price of James Price Garage says the recruitment challenge facing the industry is driven more by perception than reality. “People are often surprised by how technical the job has become. Today’s technicians are not just fixing cars, they’re diagnosing complex systems, working with electronics and using software every day. It’s a skilled profession, and it needs to be seen that way.”

A role that keeps the country moving

The importance of these careers extends far beyond individual garages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, vehicle repair businesses were formally recognised as key services, remaining open to keep emergency vehicles, healthcare fleets and essential workers mobile.

As vehicle technology continues to advance, that responsibility will only increase. Without enough trained professionals, the knock-on effects could be felt in road safety, supply chains and the wider economy.

Other sectors succeeded in reshaping their image because employers, educators and government worked together to tell a consistent story. National Apprenticeship Week provides a timely opportunity to do the same for careers working with vehicles.

The challenge is not a lack of jobs. It is ensuring that young people, parents and career-changers can clearly see the opportunities, understand what the work really involves and recognise that fixing cars is no longer a job of the past, but a skilled, future-proof career for the next generation.

For those curious to see what modern vehicle careers actually look like in practice, there is also a chance to experience it first-hand. The UK’s largest automotive trade event, UK Garage & Bodyshop Event (UKGBE), takes place this summer and is increasingly opening its

doors to a wider audience.

While the event brings together professionals from across the vehicle repair and servicing industry, it also offers a rare opportunity for students, apprentices and career-changers to explore the skills behind the scenes. Visitors can see the latest vehicle technology up close, talk to people already working in the sector and learn how apprenticeships and training routes work in the real world, not just on paper.

At a time when National Apprenticeship Week is encouraging young people to look beyond traditional career paths, events like UKGBE help make those options visible. They show that working with cars today is not about outdated stereotypes, but about problem-solving, technology and long-term opportunity in an industry that quite literally keeps the country moving.