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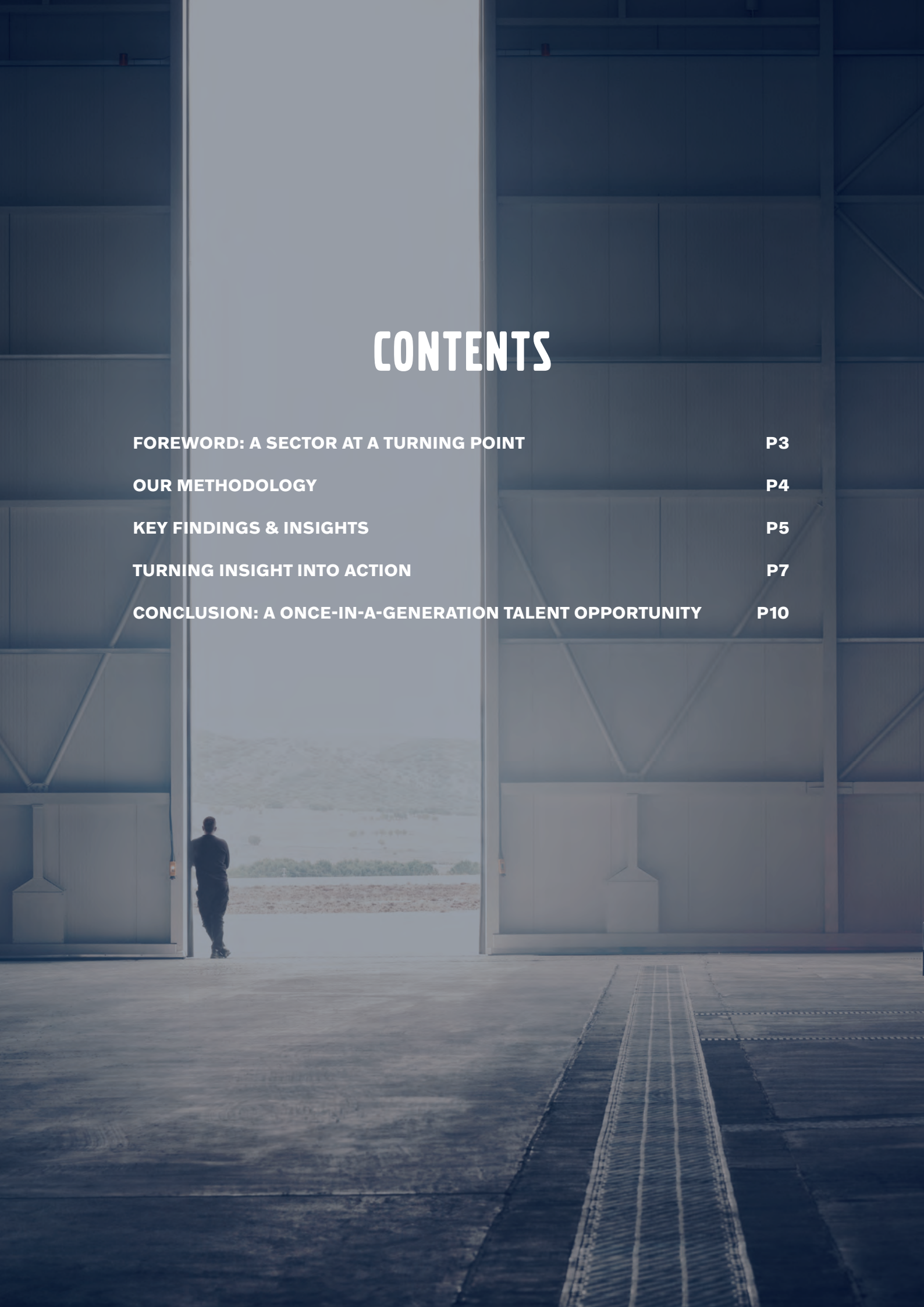
ATTRACTING DIVERSE TALENT



Volvo Trucks. Driving Progress.

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FOREWORD

A SECTOR AT A TURNING POINT

The heavy-duty vehicle (HDV) sector stands at a pivotal moment. As we move towards a zero tailpipe-emission future for trucks, buses and coaches, we are not only introducing new driveline technologies and infrastructure – we are also recruiting a new generation of colleagues.



Yet the sector's image has not always kept pace with its ambitions. Recruitment is often hindered by a less diverse applicant pool, making it harder to build an inclusive workforce from the outset. Persistent misconceptions, particularly among women and ethnic minorities, risk narrowing the talent pool at precisely the moment when the sector needs to attract and retain a broader range of talent than ever before.

Understanding the barriers to entry

With funding from Transport Scotland's Skills Challenge Fund for HDV Decarbonisation, we commissioned independent researchers to convene a series of focus groups exploring perceptions of the sector, alongside the barriers and motivators linked to training and career opportunities.

Our aim was to better understand how under-represented groups view the industry, what influences their career choices, and what may be holding them back. These insights are vital if we are to build an industry that reflects the communities we serve and unlocks the full breadth of talent available.

Insights for the whole industry

This summary shares our findings in a clear and accessible format, alongside recommendations to help shape future strategy. Importantly, its relevance extends beyond our own organisation. The insights offer value to manufacturers, fleet operators, educators, policymakers and anyone committed to strengthening and diversifying employment across the truck, bus and coach sectors.

Together, I hope we can build a cleaner, fairer and more inclusive future – supporting the decarbonisation of our industry across Scotland, the UK, Ireland and beyond.

Amy Stokes

Decarbonisation Director
Volvo Trucks UK & Ireland

OUR METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by DJS Research using a multi-stage qualitative approach designed to explore the perceptions, motivations and barriers experienced by women and ethnic minorities when considering careers working in and around zero tailpipe-emission trucks, buses and coaches.



All research activity took place between October and November 2025, focused on participants who were based across Scotland and the North of England, to ensure regional consistency.

Those taking part included:

1. Women-only research

To understand the specific experiences and views of women:

- Five focus groups (4–7 participants each).
- One in-depth interview.
- Mix of online and in-person sessions.
- These participants represented a range of roles, industries and career stages.

2. Ethnic minority research

To explore perceptions among ethnic minorities of different genders and backgrounds:

- Four online focus groups (5–8 participants each).
- Six in-depth interviews, conducted in person.
- This ensured representation across a range of roles, seniorities and lived experiences.

3. Volvo Trucks

A paired interview with two colleagues from Volvo Trucks, who identified as having protected characteristics. They offered an internal perspective on inclusion and sector experiences.

4. EDI expert interview

One in-depth interview with an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) expert, who provided wider sector and societal context.



KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

Despite the fundamental role that the shift to more sustainable transport will play in our lives, the survey found that the zero tailpipe-emission HDV sector remains largely unseen to those who are outside it.

A sector few can picture

This near-total lack of awareness was surprising, given the industry's focus on shifting to cleaner driveline technologies, including battery electric, fuel-cell electric and hydrogen combustion-engined vehicles.

Instead, initial associations centred on the more stereotypical view of the road transport industry – namely mechanics working long hours and carrying out heavy manual work in dirty, overwhelmingly male environments. The language and image it depicts also felt technical and inaccessible, creating an immediate barrier for those without a background in heavy vehicle mechanics.

However, when the concept is explained simply – and framed around 'future technologies' –

the reaction from the target groups shifts quite remarkably. Participants quickly connect the work to sustainability, innovation and climate goals. For many, this unlocks interest, and the idea of working in a sector which has the potential to impact so positively on the future becomes more appealing.

What people value in any job

Across groups, participants were consistent in what they look for when searching for roles. And perhaps surprisingly, the actual sector matters far less than meeting key practical and cultural priorities, such as:

- Work-life balance and flexibility.
- Fair pay and salary transparency.
- Supportive, inclusive workplace culture.
- Opportunities for growth and development.
- Meaningful work with purpose.

Where these factors are clear, participants reported being open to moving into new or unfamiliar industries.

Barriers to entry: perception, language and visibility

The research found that a potential employee's interest in a particular sector drops quickly when they cannot picture where they fit in. Women and ethnic minorities largely assume that roles in the industry require candidates to possess:

- Engineering degrees.
- Physical strength.
- UK-specific qualifications.
- Deep technical knowledge.

However, the sector includes a wide array of professional, digital, operational and customer-facing roles, but these opportunities, and an awareness of what they require to apply, are rarely visible in public-facing communications.

The research found that job descriptions often exacerbate the issue. For example, they might include confusing industry jargon, long lists of essential requirements, or inflated job titles which can serve to quickly undermine confidence and prevent an interested party from applying.

Many participants report ruling themselves out if criteria feel overly strict or unclear.

What increases appeal

When the sector is better understood and its breadth becomes visible, interest grows significantly. This is particularly the case among tech-curious professionals and values-driven individuals motivated by societal impact. What resonates strongly with these groups is:

- Environmental purpose and the opportunity to make a tangible contribution to climate goals.
- Innovation, future-facing technology and opportunities to learn new skills.
- Clear training pathways for those without sector experience.
- Evidence of a company possessing a truly inclusive culture, not just making bland corporate statements.
- Presence of visible role models – for example, women and ethnic minorities succeeding in the sector.

Pragmatic jobseekers, including ethnic minorities or those still early in their careers, are also open to exploring and applying for roles within the sector when stability, and structured development are evident.

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TURNING INSIGHT INTO ACTION

This research clearly indicates that women and ethnic minorities are open to careers within the sector, but only once opportunities feel understandable, inclusive and accessible.

For Volvo Trucks, Volvo Buses and the wider industry, the findings offer an invaluable insight to support real, long-term change. The challenge now is to translate these findings into tangible actions which deliver real-world practical solutions.

Here at Volvo Trucks, our initial focus will be on activities including:

1. Making the sector more visible & easier to understand

Public awareness of career opportunities within the industry is extremely low. Many potential applicants can't picture the sector, the companies operating within it, or the types of roles available. To bridge this gap, the industry needs to focus upon clear and simple communication, such as:

- Using plain, jargon-free language when talking about the industry.
- Describing the sector in ways that link to what people already know – such as talking about cleaner transport, sustainability & innovation.

- Showing the full array of potential roles available – beyond purely technician roles in workshops. For example, opportunities within digital, sustainability, HR, legal, finance, parts, administration, planning, customer support, operations & project management.
- Publishing beginner-friendly explainers, videos, FAQs, or 'Starter Guides' which introduce the sector and its career paths.

When people understand the growing trend for zero tailpipe-emission trucks, buses and coaches, and why they matter, interest grows significantly – especially among values-driven jobseekers.

2. Make career pathways clear, structured & visible

One of the biggest barriers highlighted in the research is the assumption that roles require engineering degrees, UK-specific experience or specialist technical knowledge. This excludes many who have the potential to thrive in the sector.

People trust evidence of inclusion, not corporate statements or claims which aren't backed up.

To address this, the industry should:

- Provide clear entry routes for those without prior industry or engineering backgrounds, career changers and international candidates.
- Highlight transferable skills explicitly in job ads and on career pages.
- Offer structured training and apprenticeships.
- Be transparent about essential vs desirable criteria, to ensure candidates don't self-exclude unnecessarily.
- Make salary, working patterns, hybrid arrangements and progression pathways visible up-front.

Participants repeatedly said they would consider the sector if they could clearly see where they would fit, and how they would be supported to grow and flourish in their role.

3. Bring inclusion to life through visibility

On the topic of inclusion, the research was unequivocal. People trust evidence of inclusion, not corporate statements or claims which aren't backed up. Women and ethnic minorities want to see evidence of real people, like themselves, succeeding in the sector.

To build this trust and belonging, the industry can:

- Showcase authentic employee stories – not polished marketing statements, but real colleagues talking about their real-life journeys and experiences.
- Use imagery that features women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ colleagues, disabled employees, and those in both technical and non-technical roles.
- Highlight flexible working policies and supportive managers, especially for those balancing caring responsibilities or settling into a new life in the UK.
- Make inclusivity visible in everyday content, not just on careers pages and within annual statements.

Put simply, when people can see themselves in a workplace, they are far more likely to apply for a role.



4. Lead the sector in early careers & community engagement

To broaden the talent pipeline, the industry must make its culture, purpose and pathways more visible.

Simple steps which could drive long-term change include:

- Partnering with schools, colleges and community organisations – especially those which work with under-represented groups. To include arranging for women apprentices, or those from ethnic minorities, to go in and talk to students during assemblies, or on special careers days. Young people want to talk to young people – so let them!
- Talking to parents about career opportunities for their children. For a lot of young women, the most powerful voice in their career decision is their parents, guardians or caregivers.
- Arranging drop-in dealership days for local schools and colleges, so pupils can see what life is like in a real dealer environment.
- Developing early-career programmes, internships and apprenticeships tailored to diverse audiences.

Put simply, when people can see themselves in a workplace, **they are far more likely to apply for a role.**

- Working with industry bodies to champion sector-wide efforts to promote skills development, sustainability and inclusion.
- Increasing presence on job boards, social media, and platforms where diverse candidates already search – such as Indeed, LinkedIn and community-based networks.

There is the real potential for organisations to take a leadership role in these areas and help to shape the future of the industry.

5. Communicate purpose clearly & consistently

Once they understood it, participants reported feeling motivated by the sector's potential impact on sustainability and climate goals. However, this message is still not being communicated effectively.

Companies in this sector should:

- Make sustainability more a part of their brand story, and not just a product story.
- Link everyday roles to real environmental impact.
- Emphasise the chance to contribute to a 'sector of the future'.

Purpose appeals to candidates who thrive on new possibilities, energises those who want their work to matter, and reassures those focused on taking on a role which has the potential to have long-term impact.



CONCLUSION:

A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION TALENT OPPORTUNITY



The findings from this research have made one thing very clear: the shift to a zero tailpipe-emission HDV sector represents a significant opportunity to attract a broader and more diverse workforce. But that potential will only be realised if key stakeholders make the industry easier for potential applicants to imagine a future within.

No single player can do this alone

As part of Volvo Group UK, a major employer with more than 3,000 people working across the country, we are well positioned to lead this change – but it's a bigger challenge than any one manufacturer can accomplish alone.

Our task as an industry is to build clearer pathways into the sector, supported by communication that empowers people from all backgrounds to see themselves within our respective businesses.

Start small. Signal loudly

At Volvo Trucks, we know first-hand how meaningful progress can begin with small but intentional steps. When we first set out to attract more women into our technician apprenticeship programme, the initial move was simple: we ensured women were visibly represented across our recruitment materials – from leaflets to website imagery. It was an important signal that these opportunities were open to everyone.

Inclusion is a performance advantage

As more women joined the programme, another pattern emerged from the data: teams that included women were consistently outperforming others on technical assessments, and they scored more strongly on the organisation's measures of team cohesion and group bonding. Diverse groups weren't just 'more representative' – they were delivering improved results. Even incremental changes were creating measurable improvements in performance, learning and collaboration.

Proof that the pipeline can shift

Today, 14% of the applicants for technician apprenticeships are women. In a sector where the average share of women in the workforce remains close to 3%, this shift is sizeable. It demonstrates that visible inclusion encourages participation, and that participation strengthens teams.

If the wider industry adopts a similar approach, and combines this with transparency, clear career routes and a culture that actively values difference, then it should leave the door open to a far wider array of talent.

This doesn't just broaden opportunity, it elevates the whole industry.

Karen Bailey

Head of Competence Development
Volvo Trucks UK & Ireland

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