



# TOP OF THE CLASS

The IRTE's irtec technician licensing scheme is on a roll. Brian Tingham talks to some of its greatest advocates and finds out what's in it for them

**W**hen organisations as diverse as Mercedes-Benz dealership Rygor, engineering specialist Paul Clark Services (PCS), CV rental giant Ryder, the FTA (Freight Transport Association) and others all go for irtec licensing, it's time to sit up and take notice. Why would such different operations all invest in the same scheme?

Julie Wheeler, learning and development manager at Ryder, states that it's about the peace of mind that flows from accredited technicians - irtec, she says, offers independent recognition of their skills. "In fact, when we're recruiting experienced technicians, if they don't have qualifications, we put them through irtec to test their competence and ensure they are capable of doing what they say they are."

But there's more. According to Rygor owner Paul Reed, irtec proves to customers that technicians working on their vehicles are of the highest calibre. The industry, he says, now sees irtec as the benchmark - doubtless driven by DVSA's stated position - to the point that growing numbers of operators now insist on irtec in their workshop SLAs (service level agreements). And for him, going through irtec also refreshes technicians' knowledge and builds their skills. Just as important, it demonstrates his company's sincerity in investing in its employees.

"It is our commitment to the team, so they have the knowledge and competence to carry out their roles to the highest standard," insists Reed. "Building and developing confident team members also allows them to further their careers and enjoy their jobs." At a time when good technicians - just like HGV drivers - are in short supply, recruiting and retaining such valuable assets matters.

Hence his determination to take irtec, initially at Inspection Technician, to all 300-plus technicians at Rygor's 20-plus workshops. "We will also go for the IRTE's Workshop Accreditation scheme," reveals Reed, pointing to its independent validation. "And I want Rygor to become an irtec training centre... And we will be taking our senior technicians

to Master Technician, too." No surprise, then, that Mercedes-Benz UK and its network are also now committing to irtec.

Meanwhile, it's a similar story at PCS, which delivers services mostly to the bus and coach sector, but also truck operators, and the emergency services and MoD. "About 18 months ago we recognised that irtec was going to become very important to us, so we started putting technicians through accreditation," explains Mike Britten, service delivery manager at PCS.

To date, half of the firm's 100 full-time and contract engineers have been accredited to Inspection Technician, which Britten says matches PCS's primary vehicle inspection and maintenance work. The remainder will go through by the end of this year.

"It's already paying dividends," he says. "For us, it's not just the health check of their competence. It's the independent validation that they understand and are working to the DVSA's latest HGV and PSV inspection manual requirements, categorisation

of defects, etc - or better. Equally, though, it's good for our subcontractors. It proves their value to us and ultimately sets them above others who have not gone for accreditation."

Britten adds that irtec also reveals any skills gaps, which can then quickly be addressed by PCS, with appropriate training, and then audited. "This means customers can be certain we have the skills that underpin our services. For example, our workshops in Swindon are currently working on a thermal incident bus repair and an engine replacement project for Optare Versa buses. So irtec - on top of our ISO 9001 [quality], 14001 [environmental] and 18001 [health and safety] certification - helps prove our capabilities. Everybody, me included, can be comfortable as to our competence and the currency of our engineering skills." **TE**

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