



WHAT IS IRTEC?

This third party scheme developed by the IRTE verifies the competence of technicians at four levels - inspection technician; service and maintenance technician; advanced technician; master technician - and by discipline, truck or coach and bus. More information is available on <https://is.gd/idepud>. It has been extended to include tyre fitters (irtec tyre). Another related standalone accreditation also administered by IRTE is Workshop Accreditation: <https://is.gd/asovat>.

Mark of QUALITY

Among operators and vehicle manufacturers, the popularity of the irtec accreditation scheme continues to grow, reports Will Dalrymple

Having used IRTE's irtec accreditation for the past five years or so as a kind of stop-gap, for qualifying time-served technicians who lacked the paperwork, Ryder changed its policy in 2017. The truck and trailer leasing provider began an 18-month programme to license its workshop technicians (pictured above). It is working with Stephenson College in Coalville, Leicestershire and The Manchester College to provide irtec inspection technician accreditation.

Catherine Steel, Ryder human resources director, explains: "Last year was the first year we said we are going to look at technician competence overall and rebuild all of our programmes. Certainly we're comfortable with [irtec]

as a licensing methodology. We hear more and more just how credible it is in the marketplace, so why wouldn't we want to adopt that industry standard? Because it certainly helps us answer the question that otherwise is really difficult: how do you know your technicians are competent for the job?"

The DAF truck brand is of particular relevance here because, in addition to its 300 technicians at 23 locations, Ryder's third party Fleet Care network of service agents mostly includes manufacturer dealers - of which DAF's are the majority.

At the 135 independent dealers across the UK affiliated with DAF, there are now 1,850 technicians who hold an irtec accreditation, thanks to a programme started, and driven, by the truck manufacturer some five years ago.

Of the motivation to change the way that technicians were licensed then, DAF service director John McMenamin recalls: "Here we were with a network of highly trained technicians looking after vehicle safety, and there was no specific licence or accreditation that was issued within the industry, other than manufacturers' own training accreditations. That bore out the idea for some form of recognisable accreditation. This turned out to be irtec, which seemed to be the preferred route at the time, and one that was recognisable to the safety authorities - organisations like VOSA [now DVSA] and the traffic commissioners."

Not only does DAF include on its own electronic service jobsheet the technician's irtec accreditation number, it also tracks irtec certifications within its dealers. States the service director: "Every year we issue a dealer incentive programme that focuses on 45 different business-critical KPIs within dealers' operations that focus on vehicle sales, service operations and parts operations. And integrated into the service function is the irtec requirement." He says irtec feeds into achieving high-quality service.

As the original irtec licences started to come up for renewal, a year or so ago, DAF dealers were changing the way that they obtain accreditations. In the early days – back when DAF made the initial investment for them – irtec vehicle inspection accreditation formed part of the mandatory three-day safety and maintenance training course DAF provided for new dealer technicians at its Thame training school head office.

Given the sheer scale of potential renewal demand, and in response to dealer feedback, DAF now allows dealers to use other providers of irtec accreditation. Offerings now include shorter courses that can be carried out on site, reducing technicians' time lost due to travel, as well as the original course at HQ. In the past 12 months or so, a significant fraction of dealerships have turned to alternative providers for renewals, McMenemy points out (see also <https://is.gd/esinef>).

Another company incentivising its service companies to sign up to irtec is global waste management company Veolia. It operates some 6,000 vehicles in six regional operations across Great Britain, each of which features a different mix of in-house and outsourced service provision, depending on local resources. Last summer, Veolia informed its external maintenance providers that they had until the end of 2018 to sign up to the IRTE's Workshop Accreditation standard



SCANIA'S MASTER PLAN

Truck and bus brand Scania is looking to expand the irtec qualifications that it offers to include service maintenance technician (bus and coach) accreditation for the first time this year, in response to customer demand, according to technical training manager Dean Rippon.

Of irtec in general, he observes: "It seems to be going down quite well; it's a recognised qualification now, and it doesn't matter which company it is and which customer it is."

During the company's five-year internal master technician qualification scheme, techs have the opportunity to earn up to two irtec accreditations at different levels. Last year, 15 Scania technicians completed the irtec master licence; that programme will be re-run in 2018, Rippon reports. The brand now has some 400 master technicians in the UK. All are required to return for an annual refresher course to keep up to date with technological developments.

Scania Training Centre, Loughborough, is one of 31 irtec assessment centres around the country, including colleges, private training firms, trade associations, transport operators and suppliers. A full list is available on <https://is.gd/esinef>.

– or risk falling off the company's register of suppliers. That follows a company initiative to put all of its technician employees at its 52 workshops (pictured, below left) through irtec inspection technician accreditation.

Chris Grime, regional head of fleet, north, explains that the requirement followed an incident at one of its service providers three years ago that caused trouble for the company, and forced a rethink. Grime described the company response: "We first of all did some internal audits. And we found that there were some areas that were lacking in similar [third party] organisations. We put those right, but then determined that the right thing to do was to go across the whole organisation."

He adds: "We felt we needed to ensure that everyone that works for us meets a minimum standard." That turned out to be Workshop Accreditation, but with a few extra tweaks to address its particular needs. That means not only providing documentation such as risk assessments and method statements, but also demonstrating that technicians are familiar with them. Grime again: "It's all well and good having documents

galore, but if the technicians doing the job aren't aware of them, then they're meaningless." Veolia has engaged FTA to perform audits. As part of the Workshop Accreditation scheme, the third parties must have accredited their technicians to irtec standards by the end of 2018, or commit to license them by their first renewal in three years' time.

Although Ryder has not (yet) gone so far as stipulating an irtec requirement of its independent dealers, the company continues to evaluate ways to develop its standards. States Catherine Steel: "Lifecycle training for a technician is the hardest element, I think. You're going to work for 30 or 40 years; what competence training do you need during that period of time? That's what we're putting a lot of focus on."

She concludes: "It's certainly clear that a renewing licence and a credible standard work for us. And at the moment we're only working on the one level [of irtec] – we'll want to look at those different levels in the future. We're certainly looking quite closely at irtec master technician now, and how that would map across to our journey to having master techs." **TE**

