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Technicians go head to head

The IRTE's annual Skills Challenge for bus and coach technicians returned bigger and better in June 2018. More than 90 apprentice and skilled technicians in 32 teams competed in mechanical, electrical and bodywork tasks. Will Dalrymple went along, too



Engineering manager of Reading Buses Phil Herlingshaw, who attended to support the company's team, describes engineers as "hidden heroes". He said that the event highlights their contributions to the business, as well as providing them the opportunity to get out of the workplace and connect with other engineers, with whom they can share best practice. The competition also reveals areas for further training, he points out.

Such is the demand this eighth year, held as usual at the S&B Automotive Academy in Bristol, that the event expanded into a fifth day. Also new this year was a master tech challenge open only to past winners of the mechanical or electrical challenge. It consists of eight tests, using the same set-ups as the other technician and apprentice contestants, but with harder questions and/or reduced time intervals. Seven entrants competed for the prize.

Scattered around the shop floor,

there were some familiar faces returning for another try, as well as fresh-faced novices. On Wednesday 6 June, technicians contesting the mechanical challenge were evenly split three-three on gender lines, a competition first. Overall, five women competed in this year's event.

There were also two teams from outside the UK, both from Singapore: Tower Transit Singapore, which competed last year, and SBS Transit.

Other new award categories in 2018 were: outstanding apprentice team - matching a similar award for skilled technicians - and top-scoring electric driveline technician, which is based exclusively on the score from the BAE Systems hybrid electric bus challenge.

Sponsors in 2018 include Allison Transmissions, ADL, BAE Systems, Bridgestone, Groeneveld, Knorr-Bremse, MAN, Shell and Teng Tools. In addition, DVSA returned this year with its usual bus inspection challenge. **TE**

LEVEL 4 TECHNICIAN APPRENTICESHIP: EMPLOYERS SOUGHT

S&B Automotive Academy has proposed taking the commercial vehicle technician trailblazer apprenticeship to its highest level so far, level 4, extending existing level 3 apprenticeships in bus and coach, and HGV engineering.

The apprenticeship could cover advanced engine or transmission diagnostics, or electronic signal multiplexing, electric vehicles, or possibly incorporate higher levels of the IRTE's irtec technician standard (which IRTE recently announced is to be revised). The exact scope of the course would be devised during the development process.

The idea came about partly because of the increasing technical complexity of vehicles that technicians are being asked to maintain. In addition, it would offer a pathway for talented apprentices who are not interested in pursuing a career in management.

To receive sanction from the Institute for Apprenticeships, any proposed trailblazer is required to have the backing of at least 10 employers, one of which should be a small to medium-sized business, according to Lloyd Mason, engineering development manager at Arriva UK bus, who was involved in the existing technician trailblazer apprenticeships.

S&B is soliciting interest from employers of technicians in the CV industry to get involved. Interested parties are asked to contact Lloyd Mason by email: masonl@arriva.co.uk.