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**President**  
**Howard Seymour** CEEng CEnv FSOE FIPlant FIRTE  
**Chief Executive**  
**Bruce McGill**

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**Registered Office**  
**22 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PR**  
**Tel: 020 7630 1111**  
**Fax: 020 7630 6677**  
**Email: [soe@soe.org.uk](mailto:soe@soe.org.uk)**  
**[www.soe.org.uk](http://www.soe.org.uk)**

**Editor**  
**Will Dalrymple**  
**Email: [will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com](mailto:will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com)**

**Contributing Editors**  
**Steve Banner, John Challen,**  
**Toby Clark, Laura Cork, Dan Gilkes,**  
**Peter Shakespeare, Richard Simpson,**  
**Kevin Swallow, Chris Tindall**

**Art Editor**  
**Chris Charles**

**Production Manager**  
**Nicki McKenna**  
**Email: [nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com](mailto:nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com)**

**Advertisement Manager**  
**Craig Molloy**  
**Email: [craig.molloy@markallengroup.com](mailto:craig.molloy@markallengroup.com)**  
**Tel: 01322 221144**

**Publisher**  
**Jon Benson**

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## 'You can't get the staff'

This month we profile how bus operator Stagecoach is investing in a new source of technical apprentices: its own fleet drivers. The difficulty that the company faces is shared by many others in the industry; no longer can fleet operators rely only on college leavers (see also last month's roundtable: [www.is.gd/kejoxu](http://www.is.gd/kejoxu)). No wonder that enterprising operators are looking to supplement their numbers.

But perhaps operators' own lack of imagination is limiting the scope of their search for potential vehicle technicians. Just in case, here are two suggestions of where to look for talent.

First is the armed forces, and in particular REME, the Corps of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Recruits, who sign up as teenagers, cut their teeth on solving engineering issues with its huge array of vehicles and leave after a full 22-year career with decades of working life to go. And SOE's irtec qualification is offered by the Defence School of Electronic and Mechanical Engineering near Chippenham.

Armed forces leavers have access to retraining and resettlement funds to find work in the civil (non-military) world. However, the industry is not helping itself here, as neither of the subsidised training routes include any kind of vehicle engineering. The MOD's Career Transition Partnership in-house resettlement training centre in Aldershot only offers engineering courses covering building trades, IT and electrical engineering. And there are no vehicle engineering courses on its preferred supplier list of external providers - even though there are two listings for aviation engineering. Perhaps readers should go along and have a look at the employment fairs on offer: Epsom on 7 March, Newark on 27 March, Edinburgh on 25 April, and Bristol on 13 June.

Another potential source of motivated workers for at least semi-skilled jobs is the long-term unemployed and those with barriers to work. For example, civil engineering firm Story Contracting recently offered a full-time contract to one such candidate, as a general operative at the Govan train depot of Glaswegian subway operator SPT, following work experience and a three-month trial. Robert Craig, construction manager for Story Scotland, says: "We are committed to employability in Scotland and helping those who have gone through a difficult patch to get back into work. This process takes time and it doesn't happen overnight, but it is certainly worth the investment."

Will Dalrymple  
**Editor**