

Adam Russell, DAF business services manager, explains why the company has developed an intensive, accelerated four-month training course that leads to an irtec inspection technician accreditation

FAST TRACK

The technician shortage was something that our dealer network came to us about. A lot of dealers are looking for more technicians, but there's only a finite pool. They say that they need an extra 200-300, across the 136-dealer network.

A few years back, MOT inspectors could do a fast track to become an inspector. Why couldn't we look to set up something similar for people doing safety and maintenance inspections on the vehicles every six or eight weeks? Essentially, it's a very similar check. The only real difference is on the inspection you are carrying out, to say it is roadworthy for a period of time, rather than just roadworthy at the point when you look at the vehicle.

We run our apprentice programme to get people fully trained and qualified as technicians and into the workshop. That is a three-year programme, and tends to be school leavers and younger applicants coming through, although it is open to all age groups. But we think we're missing a trick with people who are a little bit older, a little bit further into their careers, who are looking for a career change, but who maybe can't

afford to go back to an apprentice wage and the apprentice route. We wondered if we could get them to a useful competence level to do safety and maintenance inspections on the vehicles, which is obviously a large proportion of the work that goes through the dealer workshops. We're looking at people who have worked in agricultural mechanics, plant mechanics, car or motorbikes, or ex-MOD. They might have some sort of engineering skills, some basic qualifications, but have never worked in the truck environment.

This will hopefully free up our more qualified technicians to concentrate on

more technical repairs and diagnosis work within the workshop. At the moment, with the sheer volumes that we have going through, we have advanced and master technicians doing safety and maintenance work, which is not the best use of their time, and also distracts them from repairs and diagnostics work coming in.

HOW IT WORKS

First of all, we get dealers involved to pick a mentor - an existing technician - and send him or her down to us in Haddenham, and we train them for one day on how to coach and mentor others in the business. That's our starting point. At the moment, this is a pilot: one group of seven, one of eight. We tasked dealers with finding good candidates; some already had people working in the business who were yard men or the delivery driver, or others who showed interest in moving into the workshop, but didn't know how to. Once the mentor has been trained, we then put the applicant through a series of e-learning modules to understand MOT best practice, O licence requirements for the customer, a basic product introduction and knowledge of DAF Truck's systems.





They have to complete an on-site health and safety training course for the dealership, and obtain a certificate for that. Then they'll come down to the DAF Academy for their first three-day vehicle inspection introduction: that includes an introduction to DAF Check, - which is our maintenance inspection system - and how it works, and then going through, in depth, the Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness.

They then go back into their workshop for two to three weeks, and work alongside their mentor, putting this into practice, but all the while being guided by the mentor. When they first go back, they follow their mentor who is doing the work. Then, maybe after the first week or so, they will take over and do the inspection, but have the mentor over their shoulder following them and making sure that they follow the procedure correctly. They put the theory into practice within the workshop, while being monitored all the time.

They will then come back to us to do a basic electrics course, which is a two-day course. And then they go back to

the dealership for two to three weeks, and then back to us for a basic servicing course, back to the dealer again for two to three weeks, and then back to us for a basic brakes course.

We could train them just how to inspect the vehicle, but we really want them to have a good basic understanding of what they are inspecting as well: not just inspecting it - seeing whether it is right or wrong - but understanding what the consequences are if there's a defect on a particular part. They get a good bit of practical training here, and the follow-up in the dealership as well.

At the end of that, we wanted some form of independent accreditation. We use irtec for all of our technicians anyway; we have got over 1,600 in the dealer network. One of the challenges with irtec is the requirement for three years' workshop experience before you could do the irtec licence.

I took this to the irtec steering committee, and spoke to them. They said that they were happy to dispense based on that criteria.

We have just finished the courses (the end of March). Some of the guys already have some experience, so we've already had two who have passed their irtec assessment, which is very positive. We are hoping to put the rest through the irtec assessment in the next couple of months. Then we can monitor the amount of inspections that they do over the next three months (the target is eight per week, or 96 in total). Then the plan is to roll out more courses at the beginning of next year, about 50 people/year. [IE](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

irtec Inspection Technician - www.is.gd/ozukog

IRTEC PERSPECTIVE

John Parry, chair of the SOE's irtec steering group, explains why it decided to grant permission for the fast-track scheme.

"DAF has a strong presence in the UK market, and has been a great supporter of irtec from the start. When it came up with a problem, we listened quite closely.

"While the precursor to all of this is that in no way were we prepared to dilute the irtec licence, DAF came forward with a training programme for new recruits, if you like, that involved people who had been involved in the industry in some capacity at a junior or less-qualified level. It had a formal assessed training programme for these people. That programme is quite detailed. We've assessed that, and agreed the content.

"When somebody passes all of the elements of the pre-assessed training - and all of the elements have to be passed before the candidate can apply for an irtec assessment - we'd take that as equivalent to three years' experience. Because during those three years, we don't actually know what they've done. With this, we do know. DAF is assessing against a standard that has been agreed.

"With the three-year qualification, what we are trying to stop is someone bringing in a postman off the street, teaching them how to inspect a truck, and calling them irtec-qualified. There have been people doing that.

"This kind of dispensation is open to anyone else. It is not exclusive to DAF; we are not giving special treatment.

"There's a massive problem with getting enough technicians into industry. What we should be doing is trying to find a solution. SOE is trying to add something, to help industry get over the problem without diluting quality."