

Published by
The Society of Operations Engineers
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Registered in England
Company No 3667147

Registered Charity
No 1081753
A Company Limited by Guarantee

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Publisher
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Transport Engineer
is the official journal of the IRTE,
a professional sector of the SOE.
Produced on behalf of the IRTE by
MA Business
Hawley Mill, Hawley Road,
Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ
Tel: 01322 221144
www.transportengineer.org.uk

Transport Engineer
is distributed free of charge to SOE members,
dependent on membership sector. For
non-members, the annual subscription rate
(12 issues) is £79.50 UK and EU, or £81.50
airmail outside EU. For other SOE members,
the discounted rate is £32.

Origination by
CC Media Group

Printed by
Pensord Press UK
ISSN
0020-3122



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A new way

John Parry, irtec steering group chair, states: "The driver shortage is well documented. No one mentions the technician shortage." These days, technicians are needed not only to service commercial vehicles, but also, according to DAF, to perform a compliance function: the regular checks every two months or so required in DVSA's Guide to Roadworthiness (www.is.gd/nofine).

The trouble is, creating drivers - that is to say, recruiting and training candidates until they are competent - is easier than creating technicians. That must be driven partly because of the sheer numbers of car drivers: 40.6 million full driving licences as of November 2018, according to DVLA statistics quoted by the RAC Foundation, although it estimates the number of actual drivers is seven million less. And the driving exam is arguably easier to pass successfully than an independent technician accreditation scheme such as irtec.

So it's exciting news that a new approach to the irtec inspection technician assessment is being trialled at the moment. That is one of the five irtec qualifications: the others being service and maintenance technician, advanced technician, master technician and irtec tyre. No short cut to competence, this DAF scheme, profiled pp12-13, might even be harder than the regular prerequisite for an irtec assessment, which is three years' industry experience. It features instead an intensive four-month training programme, with tests along the way.

DAF was looking for a way to bring into the workshop its existing semi-skilled technicians, as well as others in the business lacking formal qualifications. In other words, it hopes to solve the skills shortage not so much by recruiting outsiders, but by developing people who are already here. That's similar to Stagecoach's Trade Up scheme for bus technicians, profiled in March (www.is.gd/ofopoh).

Although the trial came about because DAF approached irtec, Parry was keen to point out that it need not remain exclusively a DAF thing. The irtec steering group would be equally willing to accept proposals from other companies to vary irtec application requirements, provided they can demonstrate that their way offers candidates similar levels of training. The more the merrier.

Will Dalrymple
Editor