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President
Michael Sweetmore EngTech MSOE MIRTE LCGI
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
www.soe.org.uk

Editor
Will Dalrymple
Email: will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com

Contributing Editors
Steve Banner, John Challen,
Toby Clark, Laura Cork, Dan Gilkes,
Peter Shakespeare, Richard Simpson,
Chris Tindall, Lucy Radley, Brian Wall

Art Editor
Chris Charles

Production Manager
Nicki McKenna
Email: nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com

Advertisement Manager
Craig Molloy
Email: craig.molloy@markallengroup.com
Tel: 01322 221144

Publisher
Jon Benson

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Are drivers engineers?

Practicing engineers will not be surprised to learn that their job has many aspects. For City University, engineering competence includes knowledge, skill, capabilities, experience and attitude.

A conversation last month with Pulleyn Transport suggested that this definition might also apply to drivers. They must complete a recognised, independently-assessed qualification, and by law require continuous professional development, as do registered engineers.

As part of its new service to the Philharmonia Orchestra, Pulleyn's plans all of the routes, acts as transport manager in law, recruits drivers who also handle the loading and unloading of the vehicle. And it recently specified and delivered a new dedicated orchestra vehicle (see p23). Pulleyn's does it all, and the drivers are at the centre; they have become part of the orchestra, effectively, and also tour with it internationally.

The definition of engineering competence above was presented at a conference last month about systems integration. That subject deals with the way that the parts of a larger unit are brought together to make a coherent whole. Speakers argued that some engineering projects fail because their pieces don't fit together in the right way.

Is there a systems integration lesson in Pulleyn's success? Drivers have the widest scope of work of any employee: they engage with the customer, see the load, operate the vehicle, and navigate the challenges of the road, day after day. For example, they know not to put the trombone cases underneath others because their light end might be crushed underneath, and the instruments damaged. Drivers, too, can tell when an ongoing mechanical issue becomes a problem.

To improve efficiency, operators may share drivers between jobs and vehicles, and hive off route planning and load securement tasks from drivers. But without proper management, doing so risks losing out on drivers' operational experience, which could turn information into insight.

Will Dalrymple
Editor

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