



Photo credit: Tim Gander

# UP TOOLS

**T**he event will be held in its usual month of June, although pushed back a few weeks to accommodate the delayed CV Show (now 8-10 June).

But the main message is, whatever restrictions are in place because of COVID-19, the event will be safe. Says S&B Automotive Academy training and education director Richard Belton: "Whatever happens, whether there's social distancing or not, we can run it. It might be slightly longer, with fewer people there. But we know we can run it, and run it well."

As usual, S&B's Bristol training centre hosts the event, which puts teams of apprentice and fully-qualified technicians from bus and coach operators around the country through their paces in a series of mechanical, electrical or bodywork challenges. New this year will be a mechelec category for

## After a year's enforced break, the IRTE Skills Challenge returns for its tenth year of testing bus and coach technicians

apprentices, consisting of both electrical and mechanical tests, a mixed discipline grouping that matches the recently-launched masters category only open to previous winners.


Two-time bodywork apprentice winner Michelle Wolff (pictured) recommends the experience to others. "If you do well, it gives you a lot of confidence," she says.

Now a fully-skilled technician at First Bus in Bristol, Wolff says that the challenge was well thought-out and matched real-world tasks, including welding, body filling and panel-making ("It can be quicker to make a panel rather than waiting for one to arrive").

She also said that she enjoyed the social events put on around the Skills Challenge, to help contestants get to know each other - and she enjoyed the awards dinner as well. "It's almost a thank you. You put yourself under pressure to do well; you don't have to do it. But it looks good on you and the company if you do well."

As a contestant, the worst part was simply the fear of the unknown - not being told what task she will face. That all changed once the challenge began, she recalls: "As soon as I get in there, and find out what I'm doing, then I start processing the task. How I'm going to do it, what tools I need, what I have to think about."

"To be honest I was happy to do it. It challenged me, and I do like to win. This year, if they ask me [to compete], I will."

Entry deadline is 23 April 2021. For details, see [www.is.gd/yopika](http://www.is.gd/yopika). 



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