

Published by: The Society of
Operations Engineers

President: Chris Grime IEng MSOE
MIRTE FCILT

Chief Executive: Nick Jones FCA

The Society of Operations Engineers is
a licensed member of the Engineering
Council

Registered in England:
Company No. 3667147
Registered Charity: No.1081753
A Company Limited by Guarantee

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: John Challen
Email: jchallen@findlay.co.uk

Editorial Director: Brian Tingham BSc
CEng MInstMC FSOE FIPlantE FIRTE
Email: btingham@findlay.co.uk

Contributing Editors: Dan Gilkes,
Dave Young, John Kendall, Keith Read

Art Editors: Martin Cherry, Neil Young
Illustrations: Phil Holmes
Production Manager: Nicki McKenna
Email: nmckenna@findlay.co.uk

Advertisement Manager: Craig Molloy
Email: cmolloy@findlay.co.uk
Tel: 01322 221144

Publisher: Peter Knutton

Transport Engineer is the official
journal of IRTE.
Produced on behalf of IRTE and The
Society of Operations Engineers by
Findlay Media Ltd, Hawley Mill, Hawley
Road, Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ
Tel: 01322 221144
Fax: 01322 221188
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 £68 UK and EU, or £70
airmail outside EU. For other SOE
members, the discounted rate is £27.

Printed by: Holbrooks Printers Ltd,
Portsmouth ISSN: 0020-3122

Views expressed in Transport Engineer
are those of the writers and do not
necessarily reflect the views of The
Society of Operations Engineers or of
Findlay Media Ltd.
© 2010 The Society of Operations
Engineers

IRTE
engineering success

Improving the standard of engineers' competence

With the new European roadworthiness testing Directive 2009/40 getting ever closer to formal implementation in the UK, fleet engineers, workshop service providers and VOSA inspectors are going to have to get their heads around checking a possible 69 new testable items. Meanwhile, operators are probably going to have to dip into their pockets, as both costs and vehicle downtime escalate.

Word is, however, that both VOSA and the DfT (Department for Transport) are eager to effect the required changes to commercial vehicle testing, without placing an additional burden on the transport industry. Accordingly, VOSA appears keen to remove what it describes as existing test items that are not mandated by the EU, but remain currently on the list. As we go to press, negotiations are underway with DfT and industry representatives to make this happen.

Also on the table is self-certification by operators and their repairers that rectification of minor test failure items has been carried out – although how exactly this will be verified remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the industry is going to need new (and probably more expensive) administrative systems, as well as more regulation and accreditation, probably along similar lines to those currently required for holding an 'O' licence.

Given the position today of improving first-time pass rates, complicated only by rapid growth in the numbers of ATFs (authorised test facilities) and closure of the existing VOSA sites (meaning that gathering of test statistics from manufacturers, operators and repairers needs some rework), transport engineers might be forgiven for thinking that this ought not to be a big deal. However, many operators say that technicians are still making mistakes and that, worryingly, some vehicles submitted straight from their dealers' PMI (preventive maintenance inspection) and vehicle preparation are even getting 'S' marked prohibitions – meaning they are so severe that both driver and operator could face prosecution.

Plainly, improving technicians' knowledge of the inspection manual (as it is now and as it will be) would help prevent this kind of outcome. However, the obvious question is how is it possible for this kind of situation to persist? The equally obvious answer is lack of adequate training and certification for technicians. And not just for technicians, but probably also VOSA inspectors, whose competence can also be open to challenge.

Given that there is already a respected technician certification scheme, in the form of irtec under the IRTE, and given also that irtec is itself currently being rejuvenated, with assistance from IMI (the Institute of the Motor Industry), it would appear the natural choice. If irtec were to move from a voluntary to a mandatory qualification for all engineers directly involved in commercial vehicle maintenance and inspection, the likelihood is that, as competence improved, the problems would vanish.

The plain fact is that, until there is formal regulation and reverification of technicians' and vehicle inspectors' standards, the status quo will probably prevail. It's high time the DfT, the traffic commissioners, VOSA and the industry made proving engineering competence a top priority.



Brian Tingham BSc CEng MInstMC FSOE FIRTE