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**IRTE**  
engineering success

# Today's imperative must be technician training

Irtec certification is going places, and mechanics and transport managers alike need to be aware of the changes. It started late last year, with news that the commercial vehicle technician licensing scheme, now under the joint stewardship of IRTE and IMI (Institute of the Motor Industry), is getting a facelift, with a revitalised and expanded testing regime (Transport Engineer, December 2010, page 31).

First evidence of that came with their joint introduction of the new service maintenance technician (SMT) and inspection technician (IT) routes to accreditation – each, critically, reflecting recent years of change in truck and bus engineering, as well as workshop operations, to align with today's vehicle maintenance procedures.

Then last month, as irtec relaunched itself at an event for the great and the good at the IRTE's HQ in London, those developments were followed by an announcement that new qualifications for advanced technician (AT) and master technician (MT) were also now ready and undergoing trials at irtec testing centres around the UK.

Just as important, at that same event, none other than FirstBus and DAF Trucks both pledged their allegiance to irtec – striking founding partnership deals with IRTE and IMI, and talking openly about putting all their respective technicians through the new-look scheme (and, in DAF's case, those of its dealerships and R&M outlets, too).

And, perhaps providing the crowning glory to irtec's new-found status, the FTA (Freight Transport Association) has since received confirmation of its 'irtec approved centre' status, with accreditation from the Sector Skills Council, in the form of IMI Awards (page 20).

Why today's headlong rush towards irtec certification? Seems it's all about proving commercial vehicle technicians' competence, through rigorous and independent training and assessment. DAF's aftersales service manager Tony Shepherd points to operators' all-important 'O' licences, as well as their concerns over VOSA's OCRS (operator compliance risk score) regime, remarking that each effectively pushes operators to demand the ultimate in professionalism from those responsible for carrying out commercial vehicle inspections, repair and maintenance – whether of trucks, buses or vans.

Similarly, FirstBus' business improvement director Graham Belgum suggests that his organisation, and the many others like it, need to reinvigorate their investment in technician competence, starting with vehicle inspection, simply because getting this right is key to correct vehicle maintenance. That, he explains, is the starting point for correct fault diagnosis and hence appropriate repair at the right price. It's also the clearest route to minimising vehicle downtime, and avoiding the associated costs and risks of failure – particularly brand damage and falling foul of the Traffic Commissioners, in terms of both on-time services and proving proper maintenance.

In a sense, this is nothing new: Allied Bakeries, Biffa, Chatfields, DHL, Geopost UK, Northgate, Redbridge Council, Ryder, Pullman Fleet Services, Robert Wiseman Dairies, Royal Mail and TNT are among many heavyweights that have been putting their technicians through the earlier irtec for years. However, in these litigious times, there is a new imperative. Worth serious thought?



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