

Raising our game with another Skills Challenge

With the applause for the winners of the 2011 inaugural IRTE Skills Challenge still ringing in the ears of the great and the good called to witness the awards ceremony at the Houses of Parliament earlier this summer, it's timely to think about training, education – and bringing new blood into our industry.

Currently, there is talk of extending this hugely successful technicians' competition from the bus and coach sector separately to engineers in the wider truck industry. And, if that can be organised, the potential for raising engineers' game throughout repair and maintenance, but also boosting transport's profile as a career opportunity, will be immeasurable.

That's because there are three aspects to the IRTE Skills Challenge. First, without a doubt, it's about finding and celebrating the excellence of individual technicians and their teams, wherever they work. Secondly, however, it reminds us all of the importance of engineering competence – and that includes ongoing learning and development, not least through the irtec licensing scheme. But thirdly, it draws the public's attention to the value of the transport industry as a whole and, in particular, to the challenging role of technicians who, quite literally, keep the wheels turning.

Which is precisely what we need. Anything that can up the ante for transport, and turn the right people – whether potential apprentices or more mature individuals farther into other careers – on to the prospect of getting involved, has got to be worth our while. And that applies equally to the mechanical, electrical and bodywork sides of transport engineering. Our industry, just like the rest of engineering, needs more talent.

Hence the Society of Operations Engineers' (SOE, the umbrella organisation for the IRTE) support for another very important skills challenge, hailed as the largest international skills competition on the planet – the biennial WorldSkills 2011, this year taking over the entire ExCeL Centre in London, from 5–8 October. Around 150,000 visitors are expected there, along with 1,000 competitors from 50 countries in the final heats across 45 skill disciplines – including bodywork repair and vehicle engineering, with Ross Varnam (Parker Motor Services) and John Couldridge (Inchcape Honda) respectively representing the UK.

Sponsoring organisations include big names such as 3M, BAE Systems, BT, Cisco, City & Guilds, Honda, LearnDirect, Mori Seiki, Mitutoyo, Samsung, Snap-on and Travis Perkins. All of them see WorldSkills 2011 as a primary path to finding bright young things and all have invested heavily to get their names right up there. They're not wrong and we need to get involved, both as individuals and organisations: go to www.worldskillslondon2011.com.

As the Society of Operations Engineers' new president Garry Gilby (Operations Engineer, opposite page 18, for inaugural address) says: "SOE supports the skills agenda and WorldSkills 2011. The IRTE Skills Challenge provided an unbeatable opportunity for operators to test and motivate their staff, while also learning from each other and raising awareness of what they do. Next year's event will be even bigger and better. In the meantime, let's put our shoulders behind this great event, and Team UK's students, apprentices and employees."



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