

## Recent news of expansion of apprentice programmes has brought much cheer to the next generation of transport engineers.

The stories are especially encouraging, as they come at a time when we are all more likely to hear about job losses than positions being created. Scania has revealed that more than 50 youngsters were signed up to its apprentice programmes between September 2011 and January this year, while Smith Electric Vehicles' dedicated scheme for electric vehicles continues to go from strength to strength.

The latter is a great example of a commercial vehicle company seeing a gap in the market, taking a risk and making it work. After recruiting six apprentices in 2010, Smith Electric Vehicles set about engaging them in the production process for its battery-powered vans and LCVs. Halfway through a four-year course, the participants are now backing up their practical knowledge with time in classrooms at Gateshead College.

Now, that company's students will go through a similar scheme – also gaining valuable experience working in a wide variety of functions, including service engineering, quality control, design engineering and business administration.

But what more can be done for others looking to education to boost their career opportunities in the transport sector?

Some industry pundits have suggested that the national increase in university tuition fees indirectly presents a great opportunity for industry. The idea is that commercial organisations can invest in selected young people by sponsoring them through college or university – the carrot being a job at the end of their studies.

A combination of the two, with apprentices earning their chance to go to college or university, is not out of the question. It would clearly benefit all parties, including our industry as a whole – as more, higher skilled individuals join those already maintaining the UK's transport fleet.

It's time to embrace the apprenticeship, and look to the future.



**IRTE**

Transport Engineer's regular 'IRTE to IRTE' members' column: focusing on the issues, challenges and concerns that matter to transport engineers and fleet managers