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The new name of the game is accreditation

IRTE, the professional road transport engineering institution, appears to be going from strength to strength. At last month's revitalised CV Show, in Birmingham, headline news was not only that its transport technicians' licensing scheme irtec is receiving high-level support, but also that the IRTE Workshop Accreditation Scheme is now going live.

For the Institute of Road Transport Engineers, these are significant stories. Taking irtec first, this decade-old independent competency assessment scheme for vehicle technicians has now been given official backing from no lesser figures than VOSA chief executive Alastair Peoples and acting senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell (see page 8).

Each makes the point eloquently that, in 2012, transport operators need to focus on excellence not only in terms of efficiency and customer service, but also compliance and safety – and that the engineers responsible for vehicle maintenance and inspection are inextricably interlinked with all those goals. Neither goes as far as to suggest that this currently voluntary scheme should become mandatory, but it's not difficult to discern the writing on the wall.

As Peoples puts it: "It is essential that operators recognise the need for a professional approach to vehicle maintenance – and irtec provides this through the periodic assessment of technicians' competence." And Bell: "Through ongoing certification, demonstrating current technology and legislation requirements, irtec ensures that technicians are independently assessed against industry standards." Hard to argue with either – and it follows that workshops having duly accredited technicians can expect to see increased business from operators rightly concerned about compliance and their OCRS (operator compliance risk score) stats.

That brings us on to the IRTE Workshop Accreditation Scheme, which has come about, says the IRTE, quite simply because commercial vehicle operators have been crying out for it. The point is that said operators retain legal responsibility for the condition of their vehicles, whether they maintain the fleet themselves or subcontract vehicle inspection, repair and maintenance. So what they want is an independent service that, first and foremost, accredits workshops – highlighting compliance in key areas, such as premises, equipment, staff, management, documentation, quality etc – but secondly also provides a geographically searchable online register, covering reliable maintenance suppliers, with data on workshop locations, services, facilities, vehicle test pass rates, RIDDOR stats, HSE notices and the rest.

At the CV Show, IRTE and the Freight Transport Association (FTA) announced that a framework has now been agreed and that the two are working together to deliver exactly such a scheme – effectively supporting both maintenance providers and operators, while continuing to improve maintenance standards. Under their agreement, FTA engineers are auditing commercial vehicle workshops, while IRTE provides the governance on workshop standards and the scheme model – which is not dissimilar to irtec.

In 2012, compliance is as hot a topic as the technologies that deliver commercial efficiency and flexibility. There are two win-wins here and they both revolve around IRTE accreditation.



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IRTE
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