

Time to take technician training to the next level

Very little stands still in transport, and that's particularly true of its foundation technologies. Conservative our industry may be, but the engineering behind power plants, transmissions, braking, stability and safety systems, aerodynamics, tyres etc is evolving faster than ever.

So it's good news that, hard on the heels of the CV Show (9–11 April 2013, at the NEC), the IRTE, FTA (Freight Transport Association) and the IMechE (Institution of Mechanical Engineers) are together convening a conference to reconsider professional development for the technicians charged with maintaining and repairing these new systems.

The Technician Conference – which runs on 17 April, at the IMechE in Westminster, and is sponsored by Goodyear – is being billed as a forum for fleshing out increasingly pressing problems facing workshops and operators alike. Its stated aim is to start formulating a new training and assessment agenda for vehicle technicians, designed to bring them up to scratch, not only for the future, but also for the present day.

As Ian Chisholm, head of operations and communications at IRTE's umbrella organisation SOE (Society of Operations Engineers) says: "With advancements in modern vehicles, there is a very real need for the skill sets of technicians to evolve. The vehicle technician of the future will not only need comprehensive mechanical knowledge and electronic skills, but also a full understanding of diagnostic computer systems." And we might add: in-depth skills around multi-fuel, hybrid and electric vehicle technologies, too.

He's far from alone. FTA chief executive Theo de Pencier suggests that some vehicle operators are already experiencing excessive vehicle downtime, because of a lack of higher-level engineers. He and his members believe that consultation with the industry on new structured career paths for premium technicians and fleet engineers is long overdue. "It is important to start recognising and valuing these skills when acquired," he asserts.

He's right. And there is a real urgency about this. Increasingly sophisticated vehicle systems are certainly not just tomorrow's technology appearing only in hybrid buses, a few novel trucks and electric vans. Even before the advent of Euro 6 emissions-busting heavy-duty diesel engines, which become mandatory on all new truck purchases at the end of this year – and which will change the game again – ever more advanced systems have already been challenging technicians. Training and support to date are typically only available to the few, from the vehicle and system manufacturers themselves.

IRTE, which is run for engineers by engineers, is central to changing this situation and building the standards, courses and qualifications to make appropriate advanced training happen. Between the recently updated irtec technician licensing scheme and IRTE's newly rolled out Workshop Accreditation programme – now providing an independent assessment of garage standards and practices – there is a wealth of experience and know-how.

For a chance to express your views, to become involved and to get valuable insights into what new technology looks like, go to this year's CV Show. And then sign up for the Forum.



Brian Tinham BSc CEng MInstMC FSOE FIRTE

Published by: The Society of Operations Engineers

President: Garry Gilby MBA IEng FSOE FIPlantE

Chief Executive: Nick Jones FCA FSOE

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: Brian Tinham BSc CEng

MInstMC FSOE FIPlantE FIRTE

Email: btinham@findlay.co.uk

Industry Editor: John Challen

Email: jchallen@findlay.co.uk

Contributing Editors: Brian Weatherley, John Kendall, Ian Norwell, Keith Read, Robin Dickson, Steve Banner

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

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 £73 UK and EU, or £75 airmail outside EU. For other SOE members, the discounted rate is £29.



Printed by: Pensord Press UK, 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.

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