



SKILLS

challenge

As vehicles' sophistication continues to mushroom, apprentices and time-served technicians alike need new engineering skills – mechanical, electrical, electronic and bodywork. John Challen reports

what we should be testing against and assessing." And that's the other critical component, which, in turn, guides the trainers.

Parry also makes the point that standards are strictly monitored, not only ensuring that the modules reflect developments with vehicle technologies, but also that accredited candidates will be up to the job. "We are constantly reviewing the inputs for irtec and also looking at new modules – such as trailers and roadside recovery. From an operative's point of view that includes the angle of safety," he states.

Beyond that, another reason for irtec's growing uptake is the relevance of its structure to dealerships' and operators' workshops – and to trainers and training organisations. "irtec takes you from service technician to master technician, which absolutely reflects workshop structures," observes Parry. "For people setting up workshops, [irtec's modules] provide a good model to work from. But equally, if they just want to pick different modules for their educational content, that is a good option, too."

The sharp end

Incidentally, the most popular module currently, he reveals, is Inspection Technician. No surprises there, and that fact probably also indicates a good level of competence, certainly among the OEMs' dealerships and independent workshops accredited to the IRTE's Workshop Accreditation standards.

Talk to the OEMs' training arms and it's a similarly reassuring story of updated courses. Renault Trucks,

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The relentless increase in sophisticated vehicle technologies – not least those associated with Euro 6 – is changing the role of workshop technicians and challenging conventional skills. Truck manufacturers and training providers alike know this and the good ones constantly develop their learning packages to ensure that technicians' skill sets are kept up to date. But are yours?

Speaking at last month's IRTE Conference 2013, held at the Heritage Motor Museum, Gaydon, John Parry, chairman of the irtec (the technician licensing scheme) steering group, revealed that, since its re-launch a couple of years ago, irtec has seen 3,653 candidates registered. No less than 1,000 of those came through the DAF network, and most of the others from MAN and the other truck manufacturers.

His point: the OEMs value the fact that irtec has moved with the times and now provides the transport industry's best foundation for technician training and accreditation at every level – including tackling modern vehicle technologies.

"The steering group looks at strategy, how we should manage the training and where we should be pushing forward," explains Parry. That's part of the secret of its revived success. "The irtec steering group meets on a regular basis to review [training modules] and there is also an expert working group that consists of people at the sharp end, who know





Electrical and electronic diagnostics skills are now key

for example, has been revising its training programmes, with an increased emphasis on electronics and diagnostics. "We highlighted that skills were changing and set about creating a workshop model that split the skills into three levels: from mechanic to technician and master technician," recalls Brian Burns, training manager at Renault.

That led to new training programmes, underpinned by a significant investment in Renault Trucks' own trainers, and verified by becoming an IMI training centre. Burns concedes that this process was, to some extent, forced upon the organisation, "because, at the time, we realised that, even when technicians had finished their third year, they were still lacking some of the skills we needed". But the result: Renault integrated additional high-level training

into its key programmes and also added a fast-track scheme, allowing newly qualified apprentices to go for master technician, subject to an entry test.

And for Renault, technician development continues. "Each year, the training teams review what we've learned and look at changes in technology," confirms Burns. "With Euro 6, for example, there will be a range of programmes relating to new vehicles, some for legacy vehicles and some for hybrids of both. Once we get over the new model training, modules will be broken into programmes, some of which will only have a shelf life of three years, before technicians need to come back for a refresher."

Burns believes that the step-change in technology and its training scheme response will soon plateau. "Every time we've sat down and evaluated our programmes, the bar has been raised," he explains. "So we are building on increasing knowledge and that means, when the next changes come in, the steps won't be so great."

That said, he and others worry that not everyone is being conscientious. Certainly, training carries a high cost and there will be some who put it off to another day. But the cost of failure is also high – not only in terms of incorrectly diagnosed faults causing unnecessary operator expense, breakdowns, downtime and even MOT failures, but also inevitably lost business for incompetent workshops.

As irtec's Parry puts it: "Imagine giving someone a Euro 6 engine now, without any training. You just wouldn't do it. They wouldn't know where to start. But manufacturers and dealerships are only responsible for 30% of the vehicles on our roads today. So, while we need them on board to set and maintain our standards, there is still a big job left to do, as far as the rest of the industry is concerned. We believe the answer is irtec for everybody." **TE**

Iveco irtec training school is now IMI Awards accredited

Iveco's training school has become an IMI (Institute of the Motor Industry) Awards Accredited Centre, following assessment by external verifiers. The school, based at Iveco's customer services facility in Winsford, will start running the irtec technician certification modules in 2014, before introducing Qualified Assured Accreditation (QAA) courses.

Training will be delivered by the school's five on-site trainers to Iveco dealer staff from across the company's UK and Irish network. "We felt the IMI Awards accreditation would be a perfect fit with what we are trying to achieve here at the training school – and for us to become recognised for the quality of work we do," explains Kevan Woodier, Iveco's training manager.

"The accreditation allows us to provide irtec modules to all our technicians – including Service and Maintenance

Technician, Vehicle Inspection, Advanced and Master Technician certification," he continues, adding that there are plans to introduce the irtec Service and Maintenance Award for third-year apprentices next year.

Iveco currently also runs an F-Gas course, certified by Bosch, but the company next plans to apply to IMI for its own certification status. The next step is for Iveco's trainers to undergo assessor training, with an external verifier from IMI visiting the school up to three times per year to reassess its training modules.

"Ultimately, we want to roll out our own QAA endorsed courses," explains Woodier. "There is a whole new skill set to be learnt by our trainers for them to become assessors. But our aim is that, once we have got all the pieces of the jigsaw in place, we will be in a position to introduce the new courses to our network early in 2014."