

Driving success

Welcoming 200-plus delegates to the IRTE Conference 2013, SOE chief executive Peter Walsh urged non-members to get involved now



“It’s great that so many fleet engineers, transport managers, academics, truck manufacturers and the heads of VOSA and the traffic commissioners are happy to share their knowledge with us at this IRTE conference. My thanks to all of them and also to the sponsors, who make this event possible.”

So said Peter Walsh, chief executive of SOE – the Society of Operations Engineers, the umbrella organisation for the IRTE (Institute of Road Transport Engineers) – on 11 September, welcoming delegates to the 2013 IRTE Conference. In a packed auditorium at the Heritage Motor Centre, Gaydon, Warwickshire, he continued: “We have a very full agenda ahead of us, covering really important topics for the transport industry, ranging from cost management to safety and compliance. So you’re in the right place for a challenging and informative day.”

Turning his attention to the host body, he explained that IRTE was formed back in 1944 to assist and accredit technicians and engineers involved primarily with heavy goods vehicles and passenger transport. “In 2000, IRTE merged with IPlantE [the Institution of Plant Engineers] to form the SOE, which now covers everything from road transport to manufacturing, building services, power generation, the nuclear industry, oil and gas, renewable energy and engineer surveying,” he explained.

For him, it is this sheer breadth of engineering excellence and enterprise that lends SOE its scale and strength. And hence the importance of becoming a member, achieving certification and getting involved as a true engineering professional, he insisted.

“My take on engineers is that they are people who have gone through good, technical education and training,” asserted Walsh. “They’ve got solid industry experience; they’re technically qualified; and they’re competent at what they do – as assessed by their peers. They’re also ethical, so they put the welfare of the community ahead of profit. And they are champions of the environment and sustainable development.

“Above all, though, they’re passionate about engineering and continuing professional development – including developing less experienced engineers than themselves, apprentices, students and recent graduates. We’re all learning, so many of our members give up a lot of their time to serve the profession by mentoring others – and they learn, too. Our members also sit on panels and government committees, contributing to government policy on apprentice training programmes, health and safety initiatives, the environment and climate change, etc, in terms of road transport.

“That’s why IRTE matters. And the organisation is moving on. We’ve got a new team at the helm: myself, a qualified operations engineer, lawyer and fellow of SOE; our new president Gerry Fleming, from Belfast City Council; Mick Sweetmore, of Arla, as chair of the IRTE Professional Sector Council of SOE; and Sir Moir Lockhead, former chief executive of FirstGroup, as our new patron. That’s why it’s important to get involved now. I urge you to join us as a member of IRTE and revitalise your career and those of others around you.”

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