

“One of the areas our industry is way behind in is looking after its staff”

Friendly face

For IRTE to continue its current growth trend, the organisation needs to encourage younger members and stay relevant. Steve Banner listened to senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell

A clarion call for the IRTE to recruit a phalanx of younger members to ensure it survives long-term has been issued by Beverley Bell, retiring senior traffic commissioner and patron of the Society of Operations Engineers, the IRTE's parent organisation. “Without them, the IRTE will die very slowly and very painfully,” she warned.

Speaking at this year's national IRTE Conference, Bell pointed out that many of the delegates present were well into middle age, contemplating retirement in some cases, and that the membership's overall age profile still remains too high. So she urged those present to talk to younger colleagues who might make suitable candidates for membership and encourage them to join.

“If they say ‘yes’, then get an application form, go and see the boss and get the boss to pay their subscription,” she urged. “Bosses say they can't afford it, but they can.” That said, attracting and retaining members in their 20s and 30s will require a rethink of social activities, she pointed out. Not everybody wants to attend dinners and look at old steam engines.

And advances in technology – even to the extent of autonomous trucks – need not mean that the IRTE as a professional engineering institution becomes irrelevant in the future, insisted Bell. “It can all look very exciting, shiny and new, but at the end of the day somebody still needs to check that the brakes are working,” she observed. “We will still need the skills and the expertise to ensure that commercial vehicles are working properly and safely.”

On the subject of semi- and fully-autonomous vehicles, she believes that manufacturers need to consult more with regulators prior to their introduction. When she attended



“Remember that what motivates us to go to work isn't just money: it's being valued by our employers”

a presentation on the topic recently, one manufacturer's representative looked at her with incomprehension when she suggested that this might be necessary.

Meanwhile, road transport needs to look outwards as well as inwards, and promote itself to a wider audience, insisted Bell. That is starting to happen, she revealed, thanks to the creation of a liaison group including CILT (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport), the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association. “We're going to be putting some money behind that,” she stated.

As SOE patron, she also wants to receive feedback from the membership. “What do you want from IRTE/SOE? Please send us your ideas – we want to know what your thoughts are,” she said. “The organisation is only as good as its members.”

Bell also urged transport to appreciate its employees and recognise their talents. “One of the areas our industry is way behind in is looking after its staff,” she contended. As part of that she called for a new mood of openness – one that encourages male employees in particular to speak up if they are experiencing problems, either at work or domestically. “People don't make their best decisions under stress,” she pointed out.

“And something we certainly need to do is have more awards. If we don't celebrate this industry, then who on earth is going to?” Bell continued.

Although Bell is retiring as both senior traffic commissioner and traffic commissioner for the North West in 2017, she will still sit as a deputy traffic commissioner. “You're not rid of me yet,” she smiled. ■