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# Welcome from SOE president Shaun Stephenson

Welcoming a packed hall of delegates to the 2016 IRTE Conference, SOE (Society of Operations Engineers) president Shaun Stephenson stated that this national event now ranks among the institute's most prestigious annual events. Thanking the speakers and the sponsoring organisations that together make the conference possible, he used his opening address to update the audience on the IRTE, its umbrella organisation SOE and the organisation's ongoing role in the burgeoning transport industry.

Key developments for IRTE over the last year, he said, started with July's inauguration of a new patron in the form of Beverley Bell, senior traffic commissioner for Great Britain. "We're honoured that she agreed to join us as patron. We've already done a lot of work with Mrs Bell, particularly on our trustee board, and I have no doubt that she will be instrumental in taking the IRTE forward and keeping the institute relevant for the transport industry it serves."

Turning to the IRTE's technician licensing scheme irtec, Stephenson told delegates that registrant numbers are now well on the way to 8,000. Under the directions of the irtec steering group and the expert working panel, he stated that the scheme's popularity is going from strength

to strength, not only among the major truck and bus OEMs' dealerships, but also in independent workshops.

Certified technicians, he said, are improving professionalism in the transport sector, driving up standards and proving their skills and competency against independent assessments. "irtec sets the bar for UK technicians. When trained and assessed to the irtec standards, first-time MOT pass rates rise, quality of maintenance is better and vehicle breakdown profiles are lower. It's absolutely the right thing to do... Next we intend to move irtec technician licensing into Europe."

Talking of engineering skill, Stephenson turned to this year's national Skills Challenge for bus and coach technicians, which, he asserted, had been the most successful to date. Staged over several days during the summer, the competition stretched host organisation S&B Automotive Academy, in Bristol - and IRTE is now expecting this popular event to grow further. "Participants were highly engaged and, you know, these young people

demonstrated that they have the potential to become fleet engineers, even directors, in their own right. I urge you to get involved in the future."

Moving on to the organisation itself, Stephenson said that the SOE is seeing a transformation. From a declining membership a few short years ago, the society is now in growth mode, with numbers up to 16,000 he told delegates. "We've got aggressive targets for membership growth in 2017 up to 17,000, and beyond that the goal is 20,000, which I believe is achievable."

But the SOE is not only looking after its outward facing side and, in closing, Stephenson pointed to the London head office refurbishment and the revitalised team under the leadership of newly confirmed chief executive Ian Chisholm. "Ian has brought in a new management team. Under his stewardship, I know we can be confident

of growing this organisation over the next decade and ensuring its relevance and role for members and the industry."

**Shaun Stephenson**  
President, SOE



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