

# Training in transition

Under the joint stewardship of IRTE and IMI, the development of the irtec licensing scheme is gathering pace. John Challen talks to high-profile industry partners



**T**he December 2010 issue of Transport Engineer reported latest developments surrounding the service maintenance technician (SMT) and inspection technician (IT) assessment routes for achieving irtec commercial vehicle technician licensing – work on which is now complete.

Now, as attention turns to the trials and testing for the advanced technician (AT) and master technician (MT) qualifications, irtec has announced the support of two major industry figures: DAF Trucks and FirstBus.

After much deliberation, these two parties have both concluded that the time is now right to strengthen their association with the irtec scheme, so have entered into partnership agreements.

Tony Shepherd, aftersales service manager at DAF, says it is a very welcome development that fits well with the industry requirement to prove engineering competence. “All manufacturers have their own standards that dealers have to adhere to, but the introduction of OCRS [operator compliance risk score] and a greater industry focus on O-licences has led us to see the benefits of the irtec scheme,” continues the DAF man. “Vehicles must be inspected regularly, but there is nothing that says who should undertake the inspections. So now we will be able to say that everyone who is responsible for vehicle inspections at DAF has been independently assessed.”

Shepherd concedes that getting the 1,600 technicians on its books – who between them

## irtec certification programme re-launched

irtec industry partners were confirmed at the re-launch of irtec, at SOE HQ in late January. Speaking at the event, both Tony Shepherd of DAF Trucks and Graham Belgium of FirstBus expressed confidence that the newly evolved scheme will help grow the quality of commercial vehicle technicians for the future.

“DAF Trucks has carried out a trial of the redeveloped irtec service maintenance technician licence and we’re now keen to work alongside irtec to promote this licence within our dealer network,” commented Shepherd.

“While DAF dealers comply with DAF training requirements, which include safety and maintenance inspections, an independent accreditation from irtec would provide additional confidence for customers, VOSA inspectors and traffic commissioners,” he added.

And, in a similar vein, FirstBus’ Belgium commented: “Over the next few years, we plan to put all FirstGroup

technicians through irtec certification. The irtec assessments will be carried out onboard our recently launched mobile training facility, which will work its way around the country assessing and, where required, developing our skilled technicians, in order to give them a licence that recognises their competence.”

Belgium also explained that FirstBus’ initial focus will be on the new inspection technician module. “Inspection is the core process in vehicle maintenance; the ability of technicians to correctly identify and diagnose faults is vital. It is key to ensuring that correct repairs are carried out, which also results in less vehicle downtime.

“Over the next few months, FirstGroup will assess and develop all staff who carry out vehicle inspections [currently around 400], with a view to awarding them irtec licences in recognition of the important role they perform.”

For more information, go to [www.soe.org.uk/irtec](http://www.soe.org.uk/irtec)



undertake more than 200,000 inspections a year – irtec-qualified, will be neither easy nor fast. “Putting all of our guys through the scheme will be quite a challenge and, because the licence has a five-year lifespan, if everyone goes through now, we will have the same problem in five years’ time,” he reasons.

As for FirstBus, Graham Belgium, FirstBus’ business improvement director, sees benefits for the entire organisation. “This [irtec] accreditation is good for the technicians themselves, as it gives them national recognition of their skills. But it is also beneficial for us as an organisation, because it demonstrates our professionalism and commitment to independent assessment,” he comments.

“We have been working very closely as a partner to ensure that the right skill sets are included in irtec,” he explains. “We have made a conscious decision, based on our own skills, and irtec has come up with an assessment for the industry that meets our requirements and gives us that external accreditation.”

Belgium confirms that FirstBus’ candidates for assessment (they are focusing on vehicle examiners first) will initially be subject to some internal assessment to identify their training needs. “We will be using FTA and FirstGroup assessors, who have been accredited by the IMI [Institute of the Motor Industry] and then training them to bridge any knowledge gaps before they are assessed to the irtec standards,” he says.

“In the past, we have sent people on a three-day training course where some only needed a couple of hours’ training, whereas others come back from the same course needing more,” reveals Belgium. “With irtec, you can never under-train the staff, because they are working towards a specific requirement and we will be providing bespoke training to get them there.”

## FTA gets irtec approved centre status



FTA (the Freight Transport Association) has been awarded ‘irtec approved centre’ status by the Sector Skills Council representative, IMI Awards. FTA will be focusing on the new inspection technician (IT) licence within the irtec programme.

Lawrie Alford, FTA’s strategic business manager, points out that the association has provided operators with technical training products for the last 10 years – and adds that larger fleet operators completing these have shown a marked improvement, with reduced mechanical defects and improved OCRS.

“I am convinced that regular technical training and assessment of technicians will improve fleet standards and performance,” says Alford.

“By providing the latest support and resources to this sector of the industry, competence-based assessments will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of workshops throughout the UK, and provide a clear direction for companies’ training requirements,” he continues. “This will benefit operators with in-house workshops and contract repairers seeking to illustrate compliance improvement to their customers.”

FTA is offering a three-day specialist inspection training programme and a one-day Technical OLAT (Operator Licence Awareness Training) course – delivered nationally, engineer-to-engineer at the workshop’s premises, so minimising downtime. Alford adds that technician assessments can be enhanced to include a company’s bespoke features, if required.

Belgium believes irtec will help FirstBus improve the quality and efficiency of its maintenance and help technicians to do their job more confidently. “Our plan is to raise the internal [diagnostic] capability, because, if we don’t have that, we’ll have to keep buying it in,” he observes. “We don’t want to buy it in; we want to have it available in-house; it makes our staff frustrated, if they see us investing in outside help, rather than paying for them to be trained and using their skills.”

Such a vision will allow FirstGroup to grow proficient and capable workshop teams, further adding to the quality of the services for which they are responsible. “We eventually want anyone maintaining our vehicles to get onto the technician maintenance grade at a minimum,” states Belgium. “Our next step is looking at how we can assess all our skilled engineers and get them accredited.”

The FirstBus man agrees that this second stage will not come to fruition for around three years, but hopes that, well before then, the first steps will be complete. “The partnering is about making irtec fit for purpose,” concludes Belgium. “We will work with them to ensure that what irtec is assessing is meeting our needs now and in the future.” 

