

# Tough times but relevant, active and fit for purpose

**A**s we prepare to welcome Peter Walsh next month as the new chief executive of the SOE (Society of Operations Engineers, the umbrella organisation for the IRTE), it's prudent to pause and consider the engineering institution he inherits, and the path it needs to tread.

For IRTE members (transport engineers, fleet managers, workshop managers, technicians etc), these are tough economic times – as witnessed by latest figures from the SMMT (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders), which show van registrations rising, but truck demand down 12.1% in April and 15.5% for the first four months of 2013.

It's not all gloom, but it's no surprise that bearing down on costs remains key, tempered only by our acute awareness of longer-term issues (such as lifecycle implications), and the importance of asset uptime, efficiency and flexibility in retaining and growing business through better customer service. Beyond all that, the other big one is staying on the right side of the law, and particularly keeping OCRS (operator compliance risk score) in the green.

So, while our stretched industry may hear the promises of improved technologies – some mandated, others not, but all invariably claimed to impact one or several of those key measures – unsurprisingly, managers, engineers and technicians alike have limited time to listen. What's more, they have even less in the way of money and resources to take the plunge. The bottom line: all need independent, professional guidance so they can prioritise their efforts and maximise the rewards. And much the same applies to their acquisition and management of services, be they third-party workshops, technicians, drivers, whatever.

By these metrics, IRTE should feel justified in patting itself on the back. Yes, there's always room for improvement, but the facts speak for themselves. The institution is behind two major initiatives that independently certify technicians (irtec licensing) and the service centres that employ them (the IRTE Workshop Accreditation scheme). It also works constantly with other engineering bodies and trade associations on policy and practice. It is one of the three co-founders of the industry's largest trade event, the CV Show. And it runs the annual IRTE conference, which delivers lessons and learning – for the industry, from the industry.

Looking at the latter, for example, the 2013 conference, being staged on 11 September at the Gaydon Heritage Motor Centre, covers topics vital to the entire membership. Starting with sustainable logistics and transport engineering, it moves on to Euro 6 emissions regulations and their financial and maintenance implications, before a panel of transport engineers debates the issues and solutions in getting vehicle specifications right at lowest overall cost. The forum also covers operators' experience to date with both longer trailers and hybrid drivelines, before tasking itself with prioritising the wealth of technologies aimed at reducing fuel consumption. There's also a legal update on transport managers' responsibilities and the importance of compliance, with Beverley Bell, senior traffic commissioner, and Alastair Peoples, VOSA chief executive, providing advice. Visit [www.irte-conference.co.uk](http://www.irte-conference.co.uk) for information.

So, yes, Mr Walsh, these are tough times, but your institution is rising to the challenges.



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