

Deserving of RECOGNITION

"We took the decision to make FTA Truck Excellence the same standard [as ER], because we really don't want to see a proliferation of standards"

Keith Gray

An expert panel delivered a positive verdict on Earned Recognition: HGV and PSV operators, big or small, should pursue it - though they'd like more benefits for ER holders. By Brian Weatherley (pictured, far right)

Third party logistics giant Wincanton is an Earned Recognition founder member. Technical services director Dave Rowlands MIRTE (pictured, left) told attendees: "I jumped on that journey from day one."

Entering into an early dialogue with the DVSA provided the company with a chance to say how ER should work for the industry. He believes ER is set to change the way responsible operators are dealt with by the authorities. According to Rowlands, "It's more of a business approach, as opposed to a policing relationship. The relationship with DVSA is very constructive."

Wincanton's ER journey wasn't without its challenges. "With digital tachographs it's easy to tick the box," said Rowlands. "However, generating digital service data was another matter altogether. It's a pain in the half-shafts!" With multiple contracts ranging from high-street retailers to fuels customers, Wincanton has to integrate many maintenance systems, some of which are 'donated' by its customers. Consequently, the consolidation of key performance indicators down to one set of numbers to satisfy the DVSA's ER requirements has proved challenging.

"We're having to invest in new systems in order to digitally provide the four-weekly maintenance KPIs," reported Rowlands. "This is going to take time to implement and mature, hence we've agreed with DVSA to progressively achieve this over a three-year period. This maintenance digitisation 'dispensation' now

appears to be commonly used with other operators, in order for the ER scheme to grow." But for small companies running fewer vehicles, and using a single maintenance provider, Rowlands insists things will be considerably easier.

A staunch ER supporter, Rowlands nevertheless reckons holders should get more in return for their efforts. "I want my technicians to do annual testing on ER vehicles using our own ATFs. What's the point of having ER without some major benefit?" Other paybacks, thought Rowlands, could include: an 'MOT holiday' on the first three years of a truck's life, guaranteed MOT bookings, and the ability to 'self-clear' the occasional MOT fault or prohibition defect by written declaration. "Why shouldn't we get something from the services the DVSA provide? I think we've earned the recognition - but we're not necessarily getting recognised for it."

SUPPORTING TESTIMONY

While Earned Recognition is in its infancy, all four panellists backed it strongly. Ian Lockett says: "It should be supported, as it will eventually help the good in road transport and target the bad. If operators are conforming to their O licence requirements, there really shouldn't be much issue in obtaining ER status."

Keith Gray concurs: "The scheme is all about active and demonstrable compliance with

Locketts Travel is the largest coach operator on the South Coast and the first PSV operator to gain ER in the UK. Managing director Ian Lockett (pictured, p26) told delegates that, following conversations with the DVSA, the company started working towards ER six years ago. However, he

O licensing. This is the standard for safe vehicle operation in the UK. Operators should be making it an aspiration; it will raise standards within the industry. Trailblazers like Wincanton, Locketts and the other founder members have shown the way, and shown it's possible. There's a collective desire to make it work."

Dave Rowlands adds: "It's a great opportunity to change the way that responsible operators are dealt with by the authorities."

FACT

DVSA has given three years for the industry to become digitally compliant and get on board



by taking the enforcement away from the good people, you should have more time to spend on the bad people. I just don't think that's happening at the moment. That's something that we try and hammer home at every opportunity when we see the DVSA."

Keith Gray, FTA general manager, training audits and standards, (pictured, main image, second from right) has been closely involved with ER from the start. As a DVSA-approved auditor, FTA examined roughly half of all ER founder members. "We have to have quality management systems ourselves," explained Gray, before adding that FTA auditors hold a transport manager's CPC, are qualified auditors and have operational experience, too.

Although FTA previously developed its own accreditation scheme called Truck Excellence, with the advent of ER, Gray said, "we took the decision to make Truck Excellence the same standard [as ER] because we really don't want to see a proliferation of standards. That's the danger. Our standard Truck Excellence is really ER without the electronic management systems, and some operators have found it useful as a staging post to ER."

While concern exists among some would-be ER applicants that the results of any preliminary audit – including any possible failings – would go to the DVSA before any action plan could be implemented, Gray provided this reassurance: "Since the scheme

emphasised: "We were already doing a really good job. Our compliance was great. What we had a challenge with was proving it."

Having gained ER, Lockett thinks the scheme needs further tweaking. "I can genuinely see the benefits. However, it's not 'there' yet, is it? I recently asked my staff in the workshop and the traffic office, 'What do we see out of it?' And they said 'It's great – but we still get vehicles stopped.' Most of the time they get released and are told, 'You're an Earned Recognition operator, that's fine.' But in terms of the stats, I believe there were 138 stops in the first three months of the trials, of which 38 weren't actually released immediately, so they went through a full inspection. There are a few unhappy bunnies out there."

Providing compliance KPIs on drivers' hours was relatively straightforward, explained Lockett. Maintenance data was another issue. "We had

a challenge to make sure that the maintenance system that we used was compliant with ER." Considering ER in its broadest context, Lockett thinks it "demonstrates the intent of the business. When we gave the DVSA access to our online tachograph system at the start, some people thought we were mad: 'Why on earth have you done that?' Well, we don't think we've got anything to hide. And if we've got an issue, we'll sort it out."

Lockett's close working relationship with DVSA included a site visit from the agency to see what 'good' looked like, and to establish benchmarks (see also <https://is.gd/ubojil>). "I haven't got a problem with that. We want to do it properly. We had to put some new systems and processes in place in the back office, but it's made us a better business for it."

However, enforcement remains an issue. He continued: "ER was sold to us on the basis that

has gone live, it's a little bit different – you can have the audit three months in advance of the ER application. So operators now can hold themselves against the standard and see where they are. It's a useful measure."

For Gray, ER acts as an excellent 'one-stop shop' of all O licence compliance requirements. "It's also really prescriptive – so every section tells you exactly what the criteria are and what evidence the auditor should be looking for." Moreover, "you can do a lot of it yourselves as operators, because it's all laid out for you. That's why I like it." ER also cross-references other industry initiatives like the IRTE's workshop and technician accreditation schemes and FTA's Van Excellence. Ultimately, said Gray: "I think it's a quality management system that shows you where things have gone wrong or areas for improvement – and not just fixing it, but designing it out of the process."

Fourth panel member Tim Griffiths, operations director at fleet software company r2C Online (pictured, main image p25, right), felt the perceived requirements of ER were still proving a barrier to some for wider adoption. Having worked with a number of ER holders, he reported: "While everybody wants to prove that they're compliant, a switch to digital can appear daunting for some."

r2c Online's mission in support of digital compliance actually began 14 years ago, with the company's inception. "For us, ER is really just an extension of that," said Griffiths. "Digital compliance is something we've been pushing for such a long time." Echoing previous comments, he confirmed that managing maintenance data can be tricky. "If you use multiple suppliers, the data sources are from multiple locations and it becomes very difficult to pull all that together. If you don't have a digital system connected with your supply chain, it takes management by the operator to ensure they're reporting their compliance accurately."

However, he had some good news: "The DVSA gave three years for the industry to become digitally compliant and get on board. I think there's certainly time for repairers and fleets to achieve that. We're sharing the knowledge we've gained as we can with other parts of the industry, and are continually improving our in-house ER



FACT

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support services to try to make sure we can all pull together and deliver ER easily."

Griffiths reported that, while ER applications are growing, "there's a process to get through, including having three months worth of data. It does require somebody to sign up to a system or have a system in place that can produce the data for three months and make sure that it's compliant with the KPIs." What's more, ER data needs to be "very transparent, very black and white".

Concluding, Griffiths said: "We continue to make great strides in simplifying the transition along this digital journey, making it as easy as possible for those that want to take it. And we've got a lot of work going on in the background to bring all the data together to make sure it can all be managed in one place...that's taken some time, but it's all there now."

One thing ER holders want from the DVSA is approval to promote it more visibly to potential customers. "We're allowed to put it on our website and on our stationery, but not on our trucks," said

Rowlands. Lockett felt likewise: "I'd like to be able to say to everyone that, because of the compliance we have, we're safer than other people. DVSA needs to put more effort into marketing the scheme to the general public. We're trying to educate our customers as to why we're the right choice for them. I'd love to stick big signs up on our double-decker buses saying what ER is – but I don't know that we're allowed to."

During the audience Q&A afterwards, delegate Darran Harris, director of CheckedSafe, stated: "DVSA has missed a trick by not telling people that there's no 'deregulation' here, only rules." And he insisted: "You're not being asked to jump through hoops, you're not being asked to provide more information. You're telling them [the DVSA] once a month 'I've either met a KPI or I haven't.'" If an operator is compliant, Harris added, why shouldn't they wish to say so? And he pointed out that many operators were already being regularly audited, either by their customers or as part of other schemes, such as FORS. ■