

Better practice

Road safety accreditation schemes are continually increasing, with more changes on the way. Ben Spencer finds out why this ever-evolving landscape is a good thing

The emergence of road safety accreditation schemes has continued to grow over recent years, ranging from the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS), Truck Excellence and most recently the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Earned Recognition. What's more, some schemes are crossing over into others, creating a diverse marketplace that makes it more challenging to understand where one scheme ends and another begins.

FORS, an accreditation scheme of around 4,700 companies that together operate 90,000 vehicles, offers a training portfolio for fleet managers and drivers under the rubric of FORS Professional. This offering has 13 e-learning modules relating to vans, trucks and coaches, with additional sessions relating to topics such as collision investigations and bridge strikes, auditing skills and fuel management.

FORS accreditation operates on three tiers, with the bronze standard awarded to operators that demonstrate driver and vehicle safety, combined with improving operating practices through monitoring fuel and tyre usage. FORS silver accreditation builds on that by also requiring that operators check

driver licensing with a system that accesses DVLA data, and that all 3.5t+ vehicles fit an audible left turn alarm and blind spot minimisation devices.

On top of FORS silver, FORS gold accreditation requirements include demonstrating performance improvements over FORS silver, promoting the FORS Standard throughout the supply chain and producing a case study documenting its progression through to the top level of accreditation.

The FORS silver level also ties in with other operator schemes. For example, that is the level required of construction vehicles in fleet operators complying with the CLOCS (Construction Logistics and Community Safety) Standard for Construction Logistics. That standard, which also makes demands of regulators, clients and contractors, stipulates that fleet operators be part of a recognised independent fleet accreditation scheme, or have a suitable management system in place to address management, vehicles, drivers and operations.



A FORS silver certificate is also required of those complying with Transport for London's WRRR (Work Related Road Risk) freight safety initiative. That asks for enhanced road safety. For example, HGVs must have additional safety features such as blind spot minimisation through visual aids (see box).

Elsewhere, trade association Logistics UK's own scheme is called Truck Excellence. It provides operators with a method of assessing their systems and processes. The audit has nine sections that cover operators' licences, vehicle standards, drivers' hours and driver and operational management. Truck Excellence, it says, seeks to create a compliance quality mark for use by members and other parties, demonstrate attainment of high levels of compliance by road freight transport operators with operator licence undertakings and provide equivalence to comparable schemes and an alternative means of achieving them. Logistics UK did not provide a spokesperson to discuss the scheme for this article.

DVS RATING

TfL is proposing changes to the 'progressive safe system' retrofit element of the Direct Vision standard, which measures a driver's direct view through the windows of a truck or coach. Under the scheme, vehicles are given a star rating of 0 (poor) to 5 (excellent), indicating the level of risk to vulnerable road users near the vehicle. Currently, a vehicle that gets a one-star rating will need to obtain a safety permit to enter and operate in London. HGVs that do not meet the minimum standards are required to meet additional requirements, such as fitting blind spot cameras and proximity warning sensors. TfL is proposing to extend the obligation to fit extra equipment to trucks rated at two and three stars by 2024 (www.is.gd/r8iXCC).

Brigade Electronics (pictured above and left) is helping its customers understand the specifications. Emily Hardy, UK marketing manager, says: "The documents are quite long and if you are not reading them daily, it can be quite a minefield in terms of understanding what sensors are needed and what standards the equipment should be at."



validated IT system for vehicle maintenance and drivers' hours to monitor whether they are meeting a set of key performance indicators. Every four

weeks, the system will tell the DVSA if a member has missed any of the targets, allowing the administration to work with these operators to fix any problems. In exchange, ER members are able to prove they are an exemplar operator when bidding for contracts. They will also be less likely to have their vehicle stopped at the roadside for inspections or to have DVSA enforcement staff visit their premises.

Guild administrator Steve Whiteway says: "It was pointless having two audits that are done every two years. We have aligned them so that if you are an Earned Recognition member you just do the add-on module and have it audited by the Earned Recognition audit. This integration saves having to do another day of auditing that covers much the same thing. We expect members that have been with the Guild for more than two years to reach 100%, and we would give an external applicant six months and evaluate everything afterwards. For those that need further assistance, I can go through any aspects and carry out a pre-audit if necessary."

Turning to the ER scheme in particular, it allows operators to select a range of different modules that suit their business without having to carry out extra tasks that may impact their business. For example, an operator planning to bid for an HS2 contract would pick the HS2 module and ensure drivers have the correct training for vehicle use there.

Phil Breen, DVSA Earned Recognition national account manager, (pictured, right), says: "The number of modules

currently includes TfL contractual requirements. This module covers all TfL, FORS Silver, CLOCS, Direct Vision standards, Work Related Road Risk, London Lorry Control and Safer Lorry Scheme contract requirements."

Breen adds: "DVSA's resources can be deployed to focus on the serious and serially non-compliant. This means as well as saving the ER operators time and money, road safety is improved."

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

This regulatory and compliance landscape may appear complex on the surface, but Glen Davies at FORS believes that the emergence of these schemes is normalising accreditation – a process that has been more fully embraced by the construction industry.

"We can look at the different schemes as competition, but there are dozens in the construction sector that exist together with no problem," he says. "I think this is an example where we can look at another industry and learn from it."

For Davies, transport accreditation schemes are all equally important, with some schemes focusing on customer requirements, and others tailored to regulatory compliance. "Both areas matter, because if you are running a compliant business but don't have customers, you don't have a business and if you have loads of customers but are not complying with the law, then you're not sustainable." **TE**



BLURRING THE LINES

A recent example of schemes bleeding into each other can be found in a decision to unite the Guild of British Coach Operators audit with the DVSA's Earned Recognition (ER) scheme.

The Guild of British Coach Operators is an association of 26 coach companies that share knowledge to improve their services. It has an auditing process that covers safety, customer care and quality of vehicles every two years.

The ER scheme comprises 118 operators across 25,665 HGV fleet vehicles and 17,858 public service vehicles fleet vehicles. Those interested in signing up to the scheme use a DVSA-