

DRIVE TIME

Lucy Radley spoke to two operators who are also founder members of Earned Recognition to find out how this part of the DVSA compliance scheme works

The drivers' hours part of the DVSA Earned Recognition (ER) deal is simple. There's a two-day audit process which must be completed every two years, but otherwise it doesn't look too onerous. Make sure your driver management is done using one of the approved software providers, then send the reports it generates into the scheme once a month to show you've got everything under control. (For the maintenance part of ER, see pp18-19).

In return, not only can you prove to customers that your fleet is verifiably well-managed, you're also far less likely to have your vehicles' work

interrupted by being waved into DVSA checkpoints. But these things are very rarely as easy as they first appear, and take-up has been poor since the scheme launched in April 2018.

Which is not to say the scheme is unpopular among operators involved. JP Walton & Sons is a general haulier based near Doncaster, South Yorkshire. With 45 vehicles on the road, this family-run firm says the scheme is a means to both assure itself and demonstrate to customers that it actively pursues best practice. "It makes you sleep better knowing you've done everything possible to do the job right," director Kristian Walton says.

He thinks it has made a real difference to how JP Walton operates. "The two-day audit is absolutely massive and you have to do everything by the book, but it made us adopt that best practice in a lot of fields – even when setting a new driver on," Walton says. "We used to just have an informal interview, [but] now we record everything. Not just licence details and other basics, but also past history and criminal records." New drivers no longer go straight on the road, either. "Now they have a two-day induction, followed by two days with a driver buddy, then only on the fifth day do they go out alone."

When it comes to drivers' hours, the hardest part has been getting the drivers to buy into the level of accuracy required – and get used to both their card and vehicle being downloaded a lot more frequently. JP Walton uses Aquarius Clockwatcher for its analysis, which in turn feeds into fleet management system Fleecheck.

"We're 100% on the maintenance KPIs, but we struggle hitting the targets on tachographs," Walton admits. "It's always silly little things, like 44 minutes' break [a minute under the statutory requirement], or driving nine hours two minutes [120 seconds over the statutory



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Lesley O'Brien

maximum]. That's annoying from a management point of view, because then I have to write an explanatory report," he continues. "If it's the same drivers every month, DVSA expects you to deal with repeat offenders." While usually just a case of closer management and re-education, this also includes letting drivers go, as a last resort. "We had one guy who just could not cope with the working time directive [WTD] part of it, despite us repeatedly sitting him down and talking to him, showing him a training video on the subject," Walton says. "So when it got to the third month we simply had to draw a line."

BETTER RECOGNITION NEEDED

Overall, joining Earned Recognition has been worthwhile, but the firm would like to see it better publicised, especially to potential customers. "They won't let us put stickers on the vehicles, which is a shame," Walton points out. "You speak to a lot of people and they just don't know about it, that's the thing. We're FORS Silver and Earned Recognition but most of the time we're still seen on a level with Joe Bloggs."

Lesley O'Brien agrees with that wholeheartedly. One of the partners behind Bradford-based operator Freightlink Europe, she says would like to see Earned Recognition carry the same weight as FORS does within the construction sector, making it effectively compulsory for those seeking to gain major contracts. "I really hope it's going to take off," she says. "But there needs to be more marketing among manufacturers, not hauliers." She also points out that Earned Recognition is stricter than FORS, as operators must submit KPIs monthly rather than having an annual audit.

As well as being an operator herself, O'Brien performs compliance auditing for others via subsidiary business Freight Train, which also provides training for

D-CPC, among other things. This gives her a unique perspective on the ER process. "Quite frankly, at Freightlink Europe we were doing everything we needed to do already," she tells us. "But when I'm auditing other companies, I ask people to 'show me', to provide evidence of what they are doing. So for us, I asked the same question and made sure we had documented policies for everything."

For example, Freightlink Europe now has one simple tachograph analysis policy, which includes all the measures the firm takes to ensure compliance. For ER, operators must download digital tachographs every 14 days rather than the 28-day statutory minimum. "We already did it every Friday, but how could I evidence that?" O'Brien asks. "I could just look at the IT system we use, but I also made sure it was in our driver handbook and in our policy, so I have lots of pieces of evidence as well."

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Like at JP Walton, the biggest challenge came with Freightlink Europe's infringement ratio. "When we asked to go on the scheme, DVSA looked at our data and the ratio was about 12%," O'Brien recalls. "They wanted us to get it below 3.5%, so we just spoke to the team, told drivers what we had to do collaboratively and warned them we were going to be really drilling down on compliance with drivers' hours." The most important thing, she says, is communication and working together. "It can't be just a manager sitting in her office writing procedures. The team has got to live it as well."

"For software, we were lucky, because we were using TruTac via the RHA, so we were already using an approved supplier for the transmission of information," O'Brien states. "If you were using someone who wasn't approved and you'd already paid for the year, you might have an issue, as



STANLEY COACHES

Local and international operator Stanley Coaches is also a founder member of the Earned Recognition scheme, and has used TruTac CPT Tacho Analysis software at its County Durham base for the past three years. A cloud-based system, CPT Tacho Analysis integrates with all remote downloading options and provides immediate access to manager and driver dashboards, with KPI reporting. This means Stanley Travel can keep on top of its infringement levels – a key consideration when satisfying its Earned Recognition criteria and one of the main reasons Stanley Travel selected the system.

"It was easy to install and is simple to use," director Andrew Scott states. "The system is a superb management tool, and cuts the overall risk of inadvertently breaching tachograph and drivers' hours rules. We don't expect a DVSA inspection any time soon," he adds, "but we certainly have nothing to hide!"

you'd have to change supplier. But I think most reputable main analysis suppliers are on board with ER now," she adds, "so it would only be a problem for the minority of operators who still do the analysis themselves."

WTD compliance is another stumbling block for some. "Make sure you're making manual entries for holidays and sickness," O'Brien advises. "Only then will you have a true record of drivers' hours compliance in accordance with the WTD."

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that, contrary to popular perception, DVSA doesn't want operators to fail. "It wants to get as many people on to this scheme as possible," O'Brien adds. "Therefore Earned Recognition gives you a direct contact to call if you're having an issue, and they answer straight away. That's been one of the big pluses for me." **TE**