



Earning and learning

Complementing a good relationship with the DVSA was a compelling advantage to sign up to DVSA's enhanced compliance reporting system, 'Earned Recognition', ER, for founder member, Luton-based recycling specialist Cawleys. Managing director Phil Gudgeon bought into the scheme after learning about the advantages of being able to actively demonstrate his company's 'ultra-compliant' status.

This allowed Cawleys to show it was operating above OCRS standards, distinguishing the business from others not at the same level. He recognised how this would help the DVSA identify some of the worst operators so that it could improve compliance across the industry.

"As a family business, compliance has always been top of our agenda, but the ground rules laid out by ER, including a 95% minimum MOT pass rate, 100% compliance with PMI, and daily driver checks, have allowed us to ensure our approach is more structured.

Earned Recognition was launched by DVSA in a flurry of publicity two years ago, but relatively few operators have since achieved the standard. Richard Simpson assesses its benefits and consequences for vehicle maintenance

These checks are now part of our everyday operations and are reviewed every Monday morning. Tachographs are analysed by TDI, and Fleetmatics telematics cover driver behaviours."

"We have our own workshops, but over the last four years we have reassigned the maintenance on our new trucks to our suppliers: Scania and Volvo. These dealers have been able to smoothly transfer their records on to our r2c system.

"We chose ER ahead of commercial schemes such as CLOCS and FORS, because ultimately DVSA and the Traffic Commissioners have the power to take your O-licence away. Sadly, London tenders still seem to mention FORS and CLOCS, rather than ER. However, although we didn't enter the ER process for a commercial advantage, it would help if the scheme was better recognised. Once it is explained to

clients, its benefits are appreciated and our membership is well received.

"We have heard some in the logistics industry liken it to 'getting in bed with the devil'. However, we believe that problems only arise if there are compliance issues with your business in the first place. As long as you have a good, open and honest relationship with DVSA and rectify any issues quickly and effectively, there is no problem. Ultimately, you just need to demonstrate that you are maintaining the standards you promised when you first took out an O-licence.

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Signing up to Earned Recognition was also a matter of professional pride for another founder member, Barnes Coaches of Swindon, according to

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Phil Gudgeon



brothers Luke and Matt, the company’s fourth-generation managers.

Explains Luke Barnes: “Financially, it wasn’t a massive cost; it’s more a matter of man-hours, but then we were doing everything correctly anyway. It was more about being able to demonstrate that, than changing what we actually did. Once the initial audit is done, most of the hard work is out of the way, as long as you operate the way that you said you will. We got a perfect score at our last audit in December 2019.

Barnes maintains its own 32-strong coach fleet in-house. Luke adds: “We already used the Distinctive Systems vehicle management system, but had to add extra reports to achieve ER compliance. We also installed a tachograph monitoring system from TruTac.”

“One noticeable advantage is that we don’t get stopped for roadside checks anymore, but that’s not something that happened too often anyway, because we already had a ‘green’ OCRS (operator risk compliance score) with DVSA.

“We don’t see any direct correlation between Earned Recognition and increased sales. In fact, there has been some confusion, because when you get Earned Recognition your OCRS score turns from green to blue, and some customers who are aware of OCRS want a green score. We have to explain what a blue score means, and what ER is. Sadly

though, most people still go with the cheapest quote.”

Sympathetic to that point of view is Ryan Shaw, operations director of ER-approved IT systems provider Blue Crystal. He argues that while achieving compliance isn’t a barrier to taking up ER – “anyone who, for example, is a member of the Guild of Coach Operators could do it in a heartbeat,” he contends – procurement in the market is a bigger problem. “Coach operators can see the advantage of ER from the DVSA’s position, but ask what the point is when work like schools contracts is awarded on price. If there was greater commercial advantage, then more would do it. It’s not a cheap exercise; I’ve been told by a client that an audit on a fleet of 20 coaches can take three days.” He also argues that the scheme needs to be made more attractive to operators.

NEW MEMBER

Finally, one recent advocate of the scheme is Keith Hughes, head of fleet at Openfield, the UK’s only national grain marketing and arable inputs cooperative. He is responsible for a fleet of 36 tractor units and 41 bulk tipping trailers, and achieved ER in August last year. “I can’t speak highly enough of it,” he enthuses. “It’s the best thing we’ve done.”

“When I first heard of it, I thought it might be something that would be nice

to do in the future. DVSA came to see me and explained the benefit of it. We had FORS Bronze accreditation at the time, and weren’t really getting anything from it, so I made the decision to let that go and get Earned Recognition instead.

“Gaining ER took nine months, which was longer than I expected. I engaged Dave Robbins Transport Consultants as auditors and MDM Training in Hampshire did much of the work.

“Some operators question whether it’s a good idea, but DVSA’s own attitude is extremely pragmatic. ER makes you dot the I’s and cross the T’s, tie up the loose ends and pick up the genuine mistakes before they become serious issues. With drivers’ daily checks, for example, you have a ‘nil defect’ system, and if a niggling issue is raised, it is presented until it is dealt with.”

Moving to ER saw Openfield put drivers’ daily checks on to the same r2c IT system that was already in use for PMIs and servicing (it uses Tachomaster for tachograph and drivers’ hours records; see also pp22-23 for more on how ER works with drivers’ hours).

Openfield contracts out all mechanical work on its fleet, including the trailers, to Scania and Volvo workshops. Scania’s workshops use r2c anyway, and Hughes says Volvo transfers details from its own workshop system to r2c on request.

One of the benefits of ER touted by DVSA is the reduction of roadside stoppages. This was not a big issue for Openfield, Hughes says. “We only had trucks stopped four or five times in the previous 15 years with no issues, but have had no stops at all since achieving ER,” he recounts. Still, he concludes: “I’d recommend going for ER 100% to anyone in my position.” **IE**

FURTHER INFORMATION

ER Scheme guide - www.is.gd/ijirib
ER debate at 2018 IRTE conference - www.is.gd/suleyu

