

The need to raise and maintain standards is not new but, in light of the continuing and growing importance to reduce downtime and increase efficiency, it is more important than ever. Many of the terms and names will be familiar – Earned Recognition; Workshop Accreditation; ISO – but many operators might not be fully sure about the value of each and how they can improve their business.

“IRTE’s Workshop Accreditation is a recognised standard, where an independent auditor goes in and checks everything that happens within the workshop,” explains John Eastman, IRTE board member. “Areas covered include the standard of the technicians; the people who they have in reception; how they take calls; how they deal with customers; health and safety checks, etc. It is a very thorough process, which is required by the business to meet the high standards that are set by Workshop Accreditation.”

Eastman says that as the accreditation is totally independent, it is recognised and welcomed by the industry and alleviates concerns about competence and practices within some workshops. “The accreditation is there to give comfort to fleet managers and engineers, so that when they take their vehicles to a workshop, they have confidence in that business and also the technicians who are doing the work.”

Workshop Accreditation is also recognised by traffic commissioners and DVSA as part of its Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness. Eastman says that the process checks everything in the workflow itself, such as calibration, tools, lighting, exhaust emissions – and how many vehicles fit in the workshop itself. He adds that the audit stretches to inspections made to the lifts, to ensure they are calibrated, and training records of the technicians. “Having been a fleet engineer in the ‘good old days’, getting



The list of third-party reviews and audits for maintenance technicians is growing. John Challen finds out how valuable they are to transport fleets

your vehicle repaired often meant doing it while you were in your local area or spending time driving around looking for the best places while on a job,” he recalls. “Now, we’ve got a fully audited list that is easy to access [see also www.is.gd/izimic] and has in-depth information about a business and its workforce, to ensure you are getting the right service for your vehicle.”

There are more than 500 workshops signed up so far, says Eastman, with a lot of manufacturer support behind the initiative, too. However, he would like to see more from the OEMs and other trade bodies and workshops

themselves looking to raise standards. “We want operators to commit to using workshops that have been put through our accreditation and who have licensed technicians on their books,” he reasons. “It comes back to having the confidence that they know that they’re putting their vehicles through a reputable company.

“We’re gaining a lot of traction when it comes to Workshop Accreditation and we hope that continues,” adds Eastman. “We know it’s a competitive market but we have a constant stream of members carrying out audits on workshops all over the country – and beyond.” Eastman reveals the scheme has been expanded



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to Singapore and Hong Kong, with more international locations planned.

“We regularly review the workshop audits, to make sure that we’re covering everything and to know when we should be introducing or including updates to the procedure. At the end of the day, it’s good for both parties because the operator gets the benefit if it is using a reputable workshop and the business knows that the accreditation will make it stand out and hopefully win more business,” he concludes.

EV-BASED EVALUATIONS

Looking further ahead to the challenges posed by more and more electric vehicles appearing on UK roads – and the need for their roadworthiness to be upheld – IRTE has launched an electric vehicle module in the irtec technician accreditation standard. In addition, the IMI offers TechSafe, a standard designed to show proof of competence through the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications or IMI accreditations. Recognition requires 18 hours of CPD, which must be aligned to a specific framework and completed within three years, before ultimately being independently assessed.

“The licensing issue has been discussed within the automotive

industry for what seems like forever, but there is essentially no licence to practice maintenance,” reasons Tom Denton, eLearning development manager at the IMI. “So, when electric vehicles first came out, at the IMI we realised that we were moving into a new area where, when you make a mistake, the consequences are potentially more serious than with an ICE vehicle. TechSafe is a proof of your competence to practice within the areas of high-voltage vehicles.”

Denton explains that there are six main elements to gaining TechSafe recognition. Firstly, the training has to be relevant and cost effective. Some online pre-training is completed to gain a better understanding of what it is and how downtime can be reduced. Then training takes place by qualified trainers at an IMI centre, using current technologies and methodologies, before an IMI-approved assessment is completed to the appropriate level. With the qualification achieved, maintenance engineers can then join the IMI Professional Register, with three years’ TechSafe recognition in place. Finally, CPD is required over a three-year cycle to keep the registration in place.

While early adopters for TechSafe have come from the passenger car world, Denton encourages the commercial vehicle industry to get involved. “There’s no distinction between small and large vehicles because if you touch the wrong

parts, you’ll injure yourself or cause problems.”

The name offers a nod to the Gas Safe Register, which replaced the CORGI registration list in the gas industry in 2009. In that market, it was designed to offer an official list of gas engineers who are qualified to work legally on appliances. “TechSafe doesn’t just mean that you’re keeping yourself safe, it means you’re keeping the customer safe,” says Denton. “There is an expectation that maintenance engineers fix vehicles properly – and that’s not just EVs. We’re moving into hydrogen, more connected vehicle technologies and even autonomous [units]. It’s important for fleets to have faith in the people looking after their commercial vehicles.”

Finally, in the ISO world, there is growing interest in the 45001:2018 standard for occupational health and safety management. It replaced OHSAS 19001 as the benchmark for workplace safety and is designed to be a more ‘flexible, process-based approach’ (see also *Operations Engineer* December 2022, pp20-21). The main goal was to ensure that safety is built into daily operations, instead of being a separate area for technicians to concentrate on. It is claimed that the new standard offers several advantages for vehicle manufacturers, including: fewer workplace safety incidents, injuries and illnesses; standardisation of safety processes and improved productivity and quality. In addition, the certification aims to reduce safety costs, workers’ compensation claims and absenteeism and improve regulatory compliance.

Back in 2020, Scania UK (whose technicians competing in a team challenge event are pictured, left) said it became the first commercial vehicle organisation to achieve the accreditation, and has since been joined by Refuse Vehicle Solutions, at least, which recently supplied an RCV to Wilrose Environmental (pictured above). [IE](#)