

## With the benefit of hindsight, was the level of resistance to ATFs (Authorised Testing Facilities), prior to their implementation, warranted?

Or did the furore highlight an entirely understandable general fear of change?

On the run-up to the first of the sites opening last year, a lot was spoken and written about the scheme, which, although central to the agency's Testing Transformation Programme, was seen by many as an abdication of duty, and further loading costs and inconvenience onto operators.

ATFs, said the pundits, were inadequately thought through and a waste of money.

Most with an opinion focused on the negative aspects of ATFs. Often cited were: the closure of existing testing centres that, despite complaints at the time, had invariably suited local hauliers very well; the new procedures necessitated for technicians and managers; and, of course, the longer journey times for some operators needing to get vehicles tested.

VOSA chief executive Alistair Peoples, however, saw things very differently. "I really do believe we are at the start of something new," he stated at the launch of the ATF contract at VOSA's Bristol HQ, in February. "I know many people thought this would never happen," he added, fully aware of the scale of criticism from an understandably jaundiced industry.

Fast forward 18 months, and the 100th ATF has opened its doors. Bullwell Trailer Solutions is the latest industry name to sign up to the ATF programme and VOSA is confident that the list will continue to grow. Hardstaff, Truckeast, DAF, Don-Bur and Thomas Hardie Commercials are all operating ATFs, and the feedback to date has been almost entirely positive.

Moving to ATF status clearly needs careful consideration, but workshops that have taken this step say it pays.

As Gary Bulley, managing director at Bullwell Trailer Solutions, explains: "Since establishing our business in 2007, our entire philosophy has been based on ensuring that the HGV trailers we maintain under contract undergo minimal movement. ATFs create the most practical and economical solution for trailer repairs, maintenance and now testing."

Maybe this particular change hasn't been such a bad thing after all...



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