



Certified for

Rollout of the IRTE's Workshop Accreditation scheme is now underway, so the race is on to get workshop standards and accountability transparent and up to scratch. John Challen reports

When it was launched at the CV Show in 2012, the IRTE (Institute of Road Transport Engineers) Workshop Accreditation scheme had a clear rationale. "The aim is simple," said SOE (the umbrella organisation for the IRTE) chief executive Nick Jones at the time. "It is to deliver a quality, independent accreditation service that supports both maintenance providers and operators, while continuing to improve standards."

Accredited workshops, he explained, would receive the IRTE's stamp of approval, independently certifying their compliance in key areas. Those would include: the premises themselves; the workshop equipment; competence of technical and clerical staff, and the management team; accuracy and

standard of the documentation; and service quality. Clearly, this was going to be comprehensive.

And he added that the scheme would be rolled out in co-operation with the FTA (Freight Transport Association) – so adding another important aspect to its credibility and independence, as well as feet on the ground, delivering assessments.

Legal responsibility

It was an important development. As Jones pointed out, an estimated 80% of operators subcontract vehicle maintenance, yet their transport managers retain legal responsibility. "Operators recognise that, while they can subcontract their maintenance, they cannot subcontract their responsibilities for vehicle condition," he said.

Certainly, a scheme that provides independent verification of the quality of work being carried out in their names would add valuable reassurance and probably some defence when VOSA finds problems at the roadside. "With so much at stake, companies need assurances that they are getting the standard of workshop service they expect. This scheme will afford buyers of maintenance provision a confidence that has been sadly lacking until now," stated Jones.



What is IRTE Workshop Accreditation?

IRTE Workshop Accreditation entails an independent, best practice review of workshops, in terms of the business, its procedures, professionalism and set-up.

The scheme involves an audit by an IRTE-accredited FTA auditor, who assesses compliance across a wide range of a workshop's operations. These include: its premises, equipment, technical staff, management, clerical staff, documentation, quality and appearance – all of which are checked against best practice standards.

To ensure that the scheme meets the industry's current requirements, IRTE Workshop Accreditation is valid for two years, after which re-verification is required.

There are two levels of accreditation: IRTE Workshop Accreditation Standard and IRTE Workshop Accreditation Plus. Operators can be confident of a workshop's standards for both levels of certification. However, the Plus signifies availability of additional services on-site – such as open ATF (Authorised Testing Facility), and/or current irtec registrations for all workshop technicians.

Maintenance providers granted IRTE Workshop Accreditation gain significant competitive advantage. They are included in the published IRTE Workshop Accreditation Register, which publicly demonstrates their commitment to delivering high levels of service. This online database includes information on workshop location, range of services, workshop facilities, vehicle test pass rates, RIDDOR stats, HSE notices etc.

Accreditation scheme. Sims explains that he completely endorse it. "In my previous life, we did attempt, through the FTA regional freight councils, to get a scheme similar to VOSA's OCRS [Operator Compliance Risk Score] off the ground for service providers, since there was no accountability for them," he recalls. "Since then, I've been actively pushing [the scheme], so I was very keen to get involved in Workshop Accreditation."

So how was it for him? Since HRVS is a MAN dealership, Sims echoes Davies' sentiments: "Our UTP [MAN's uptime principle] scheme sets a great blueprint for workshop accreditation, so it was relatively easy for us." He says there were very few issues and only two main items that helped with compliance.

"We introduced a CRM [customer relation management] system, because I wanted to get away from service managers at other sites just having notes from meetings jotted in a diary. Information needed to be standardised and visible to everybody," he explains. The other change has seen all HRVS's workshop calibrations and testing moved to a single third-party – so

getting away from ad-hoc, local arrangements, organised by the various depots. "Now we publish our calibration certificates for every piece of equipment online, which adds to the transparency."

Overall, says Sims, the standards set by the IRTE scheme were relatively easy to achieve – which should encourage other well-managed commercial vehicle workshops to take a look. And he adds that the independence of the assessors makes it attractive and adds value for customers. "Seeing the FTA and IRTE name used in conjunction with the scheme should remove any doubt in anyone's mind. No one can criticise the audit process."

Indeed, so impressed is he that HRVS now has an application pending for its Scunthorpe workshop to be accredited. He expects to get the group's whole network of sites accredited by 2014.

For those others thinking of signing up, Sims has some words of advice: "Whether you do this voluntarily or not, it is going to come in as a mandatory requirement at some point in the future... I was really pleased to be first to sign up, because it shows the transport industry, our customer base and your own company that you are ready, and committed to quality standards." **TE**

Well, it's happening – and with growing industry approval, following the success of a pilot programme in 2011, which involved Scania and MAN trialling the system. What's more, John Davies, MAN's head of UK services and support, says that good workshops have nothing to be afraid of. "The Workshop Accreditation scheme matches what we've been aiming to do at MAN since 2006 – working to improve standards throughout our dealerships," he says. "And all of the accreditation requirements fit inside our current dealer standards. So every MAN service point should be achieving this standard."

Accreditation in action

In fact, Davies believes that any workshop following proper standards ought to find the scheme fairly straightforward. "If you are an independent, and maybe you don't have the pressures to perform, it may be different. But, regardless of whether you're franchised or non-franchised, quality organisations will achieve Workshop Accreditation relatively easily."

So what's the dealer experience? Formerly a fleet operator, Keith Sims is now group operations director at HRVS Group, which was first to have some of its sites audited under the IRTE Workshop

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