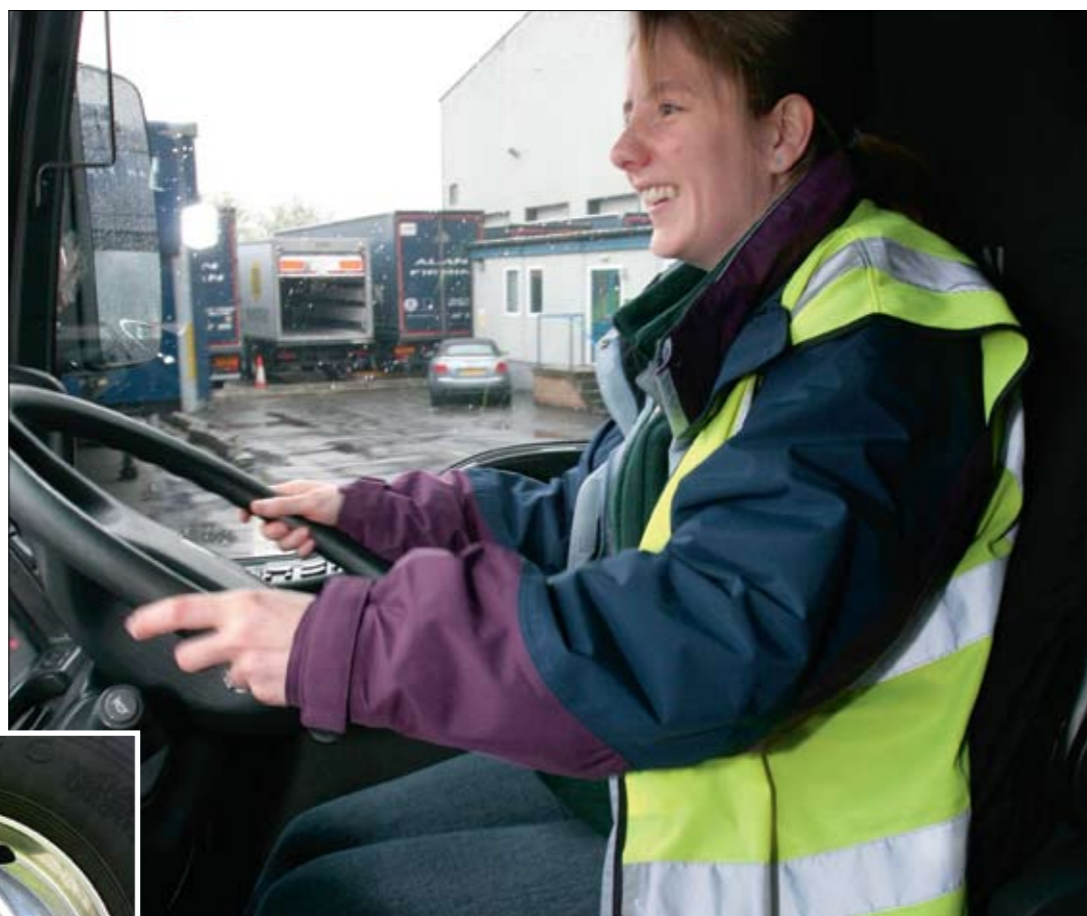




Seize the opportunity

The Driver CPC could be the best chance in a generation to improve the skills and professionalism of one of the transport industry's biggest assets – its drivers. Here, *MT* launches a new campaign to make sure it doesn't end up being a huge missed opportunity



On September 10 2009, the Compulsory Training Directive – otherwise known as the Driver CPC – came into effect for freight transport.

Under the directive, most of the 500,000 drivers of HGVs over 3.5 tonnes must undertake at least 35 hours of training approved by the Joint Approvals Unit for Periodic Training (JAUPT) by September 2014 to continue to drive professionally. A similar requirement for passenger-service vehicles (PSV) came into effect in September 2008.

The aim of the Driver CPC is to improve road safety, health and safety, the image of the industry and, vitally, career prospects for drivers – but is it working?

Based on £100 per seven-hour course, it will cost the industry around £250m to train all its drivers, and many operators fear that tens of thousands of drivers – especially the self-employed – coming to the end of their careers will decide to quit the industry rather than put themselves through the Driver CPC.

Penalising the compliant

The Driver CPC is also tilting an already uneven playing field further against professional operators struggling to compete with rivals who cut corners. Responsible fleet operators are spending millions of pounds with quality training providers to ensure they and their drivers get the maximum benefit from the Driver CPC. They are being undermined by rogue operators and drivers who are abiding by the letter but not the spirit of the law.

The problem stems from the fact that getting JAUPT approval to provide Driver CPC training involves no more than submitting the right paperwork and writing a cheque for £1,500. This has allowed low-quality training to be delivered both by operators and inexperienced or cowboy training providers. Training centres only need to submit a vague outline of the content to JAUPT to get the course approved.

“All Driver CPC trainers should have at least Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) – the most basic teacher qualification,” argues Derek Broomfield, MD of



training company Novadata. “Anyone delivering publicly funded training must have PTLLS and this should be the minimum requirement for Driver CPC trainers.”

While the Driver CPC represents a huge opportunity to improve the skills of, arguably, the most important individuals in the transport industry, too many drivers and employers are just ticking the box at the lowest possible price.

JAUPT was set up by the two sector skills councils involved in commercial vehicle driver training, Skills for Logistics (for HGVs) and GoSkills (for PSVs). At the end of April, JAUPT had approved 821 training centres, of which 90% offer HGV only or both HGV and PSV training. JAUPT also approved 1,786 Driver CPC courses, 80% of which were HGV or both HGV and PSV. With only eight auditors, JAUPT

can inspect just a small proportion of these centres – it says approved centres may receive an inspection visit sometime “before 2014”.

Varying standards

At an *MT* roundtable in March, then Conservative shadow transport minister Robert Goodwill MP said: “I have had people contact me to say training is being done in the upstairs room of a pub over beer and sandwiches. While this ticks the box, I share concerns that training is not practical and realistic. There seems to be a big discrepancy in the cost and quality of some of the training.”

“The other worry is that people won't do anything and it will get to September 2014 and suddenly there will be many older drivers who will just stop. It will be the self-employed and casual drivers who may decide to

retire early rather than be bothered with the Driver CPC.”

Thanks to the nature of the course, which doesn't require a test at the end, drivers can also get away with just turning up without necessarily learning or being taught anything. While some of the better training providers do offer employers the option of a test, this must be carried out after the seven hours training if the course is to count towards the Driver CPC.

At another *MT* roundtable, with a group of training providers, Peter Smythe, MD of Peter Smythe Transport Training, said: “The regulation of standards is abysmal. I have an ex-instructor who works for a very large company driving a truck. He attended a Driver CPC course that started at 6am – he rang me at 10.10am to say he'd just got home. They're getting seven hours under false pretences. And that was repeated in the same company every Saturday for four weeks.”

Bruce Wicks, business development manager at Paul Brown Transport Services, complained: “What we pleaded for when they set this up was that there would be a test at the end to prove [drivers had] been listening. Right now, even if they put all the wrong answers, you can't fail them.”

Gary Curtis, director of Driver Training Centre, added: “The implementation of the Driver CPC was left to the last minute and the DSA didn't have a clue. What are we going to do to get this sorted out?”

Reporting offenders

JAUPT will only respond to written complaints about poor quality training, and Novadata's Broomfield believes there needs to be an easier way to report abuses. “There should be a hotline to JAUPT like there is to VOSA,” he says. “JAUPT has to make the scheme more secure.”

The existing lax regime of approving centres and courses is not due to lack of funds – the Driver CPC is generating plenty of cash. JAUPT operates on contract to the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) and the Driver and Vehicle Agency in Northern Ireland, and fees paid by training companies for approval of centres and courses go straight to the DSA via JAUPT. The DSA then in turn pays JAUPT a fee for its work operating the scheme.

According to figures obtained by *MT* through a Freedom of Information request, between September 2009 and the end of March 2010,



KEY AIMS FOR THE MAKE IT WORK! CAMPAIGN

JAUPT

- Put in place and publish a credible business plan outlining the number of centres and courses that will be required to deliver the necessary 500,000 training days a year and the number of inspections it believes will be needed to properly police the sector.

- Create a hotline for anyone – not just the trainee – to report examples of sub-standard Driver CPC training for immediate investigation and withdrawal of centre approval if the complaint is justified.

- Introduce mystery shoppers and random unannounced inspections of centres to discourage rogue operators by increasing the chances they will be barred from the training industry.

DSA

- Urgently review the HGV Driver CPC scheme and consult on changes including: requiring drivers to undertake seven hours training per year, not just 35 hours within the five-year period; introducing a mandatory assessment at the end of each course; tightening the requirements for the trainers delivering Driver CPC to ensure they are adequately qualified.

- Record the number of HGV Driver CPC courses being undertaken so the industry and government can assess if the rate of progress is on track to get enough drivers qualified by the 2014 deadline.

- Launch a high-profile campaign to publicise the Driver CPC and encourage the hard to reach elements such as owner and self-employed drivers and own account operators to start training in good time.

HGV OPERATORS

- Do not use sub-standard Driver CPC training for your drivers, but instead develop a programme of courses – either in-house or delivered by a third party – tailored to the company's operations that upskills the workforce in relevant areas including safe and efficient driving.

- Do not leave training to the last minute, as a rush to get thousands of drivers through the Driver CPC in the run up to September 2014 could see the industry short of drivers and the cost of training rocket.

- Raise the weakness of the Driver CPC in any lobbying of MPs and report any examples of poor quality training to JAUPT in writing, including details of the trainer, company, location and date so JAUPT can investigate the problem.

DSA received fees of £1.87m from Driver CPC centre approvals and inputting details of courses completed into the Driver CPC Recording and Evidencing database, of which £349,904 was paid back to JAUPT.

Astonishingly, given the importance of getting 500,000 HGV drivers through the Driver CPC by September 2014, the DSA does not differentiate between HGV and PSV drivers who undertake courses. So while the DSA revealed that 180,614 drivers had attended 20,603 courses between 10 September 2009 and 5 May 2010, there are no accurate figures for the rate that HGV drivers are clocking up the hours and whether the industry is on track to hit the target of 35 hours for every driver by 2014.

While major own-account and haulage fleets have put in place plans to either deliver the Driver CPC in-house, through consortia or via third-party training providers, there are concerns that smaller operators and self-employed owner drivers remain largely ignorant of the Driver CPC and what it means for them.

This is partly because of a ‘head in the sand’ attitude among operators and drivers, and partly because the DSA has failed to put in place any large-scale marketing campaign to explain the importance of the Driver CPC and the consequences of missing the deadline.



Another weakness of the Driver CPC scheme is that there is no requirement to undertake one day's training per year or to undertake a variety of courses over the five-year period. As the scheme currently stands there is nothing to stop a driver doing five consecutive days on the same course and walking away with a Driver CPC valid until 2019.

If the Driver CPC is not to become a huge missed opportunity, the weaknesses in the scheme must be addressed, operators must ensure training is relevant and high quality, and drivers have to ensure they are undertaking periodic training, not leaving it to the last minute.

- See *MT 21 June* for an interview with Mick Jackson, chief executive of Skills for Logistics and a director of JAUPT