

Standard bearers

Photographs: Graham Richardson

You don't need a mandatory qualification to teach HGV drivers, which has allowed brokers to play off training companies against each other, as a recent *Motor Transport* roundtable of training providers heard. **Karen Dempsey** reports

Steve Hobson, editor, Motor Transport: "One key issue facing road transport is the lack of regulation of HGV driving instructors. There are voluntary Driver Standards Agency (DSA) and RTITB qualifications but, unlike

car driving instructors, there is no requirement in law. Is regulation the only answer? Does it need a change in the law to introduce mandatory training qualifications, or can the industry agree on voluntary codes of practice?"

■ **Gary Curtis, director, Driver Training Centre:** "We're a DSA-accredited centre, but that counts for nothing. Had I known that 10 years ago, I would have saved myself a few thousand pounds. People aren't interested in standards because the industry just wants the cheapest training, hence the problems with the brokers and the other sub-standard providers in the industry."

■ **Bruce Wicks, business development manager, Paul Brown Transport Services:** "It's easy for a one-man band to set up. He can go out and buy a truck, tax it as private light goods, put some fuel in it and some L-plates on, and he's up and started. The problem is that's what they do, and start undercutting other people who've paid to do their DSAs."

■ **Peter Smythe, MD, Peter Smythe Transport Training:** "The assumption is that all instructors are qualified. When you tell potential custom-



■ Steve Hobson, editor, *Motor Transport*

ers that all our staff are registered and qualified when they don't have to be, they say 'what!'"

■ **Ed Pargeter, MD, EP Training Services:** "One of the things we need to do is try to educate people that when they come to a DSA-approved centre they're going to get good training."

■ **Nigel Smith, director, TAL Training:** "I've just employed a lad who's an ex fire-service instructor. He's been instructing for the fire service for the past 10 years but doesn't have a DSA qualification – yet he's more qualified than everybody around this table. We need to look at what existing qualifications people hold, are they transferable, and if they are, then let's hold them up. If they're valid, let's transfer those skills."

■ **Sean Pargeter, sales director, EP Training Services and owner of hgvlgvtraining.co.uk:**

"If the DSA isn't going to take up this fight and promote and invest in it then we, as a collective, should. It's not mandatory that you get this qualification and DSA approval. Remember, nobody's actually asking for this."

NS: "You can't even advertise you've got DSA-approved instructors. You can say you've got a DSA-registered instructor. But you can't use its logo."

SH: "No one has mentioned the B word yet – the brokers. Are brokers ruining the industry?"

■ **Terry Finn, co-ordinator, Driver Training Centre:** "Brokers are screwing our customers for a lot of money, without a doubt. It goes back to the length of training courses – they will advertise five days' training and earn £30,000 at the end of it. They think they can get that for £500 or whatever stupid amounts of money they're advertising it for and that they'll come out the other end a qualified driver."

EP: "We supply training to one of them, as I am sure most training companies do."

BW: "It annoys me that a certain company advertises on its website that its head office for the South-west is Bristol – but it's never even put a foot inside the place."

EP: "I rang one company to ask it about ADR training, where it does the training, and it said it does it from a centre in Leatherhead [where EP Training is based]. It said it has a company there and was going to charge me £1,000 for a course that should normally cost £500. I reported it to the DSA, but nothing happened. There are some good brokers, but there are others who will take the money and they just disappear. It's like all industries – you've got good and bad."

"These set-ups get the business because they come up first on a Google search. It's almost impossible for us to compete because these guys pay £20,000 a month to get the first slot."

GC: "I agree with what you're saying about the brokers and we have wages to pay, but, maybe to my own detriment, we won't deal with them."

They've come in, but we're just not going to go there and we've been proved right. They are there, some are disappearing, but will come back because it's all about money.

"But how do you stop them?"

SP: "If everyone had DSA approval you could still have the brokers doing the same thing."

TF: "If you get a trainee through a broker and give a high-quality service, they go away happy with what's happened. Who do they think has delivered the service?"

NS: "There is a way around this. These companies contact me in London and they force a price on you, they say they've got a budget. But my budget far exceeds theirs, so my view is: that's the cost of the course, if you want your training delivered by me, I'm not going to reduce the cost or the number of hours. I'm not going to reduce my course from 20 hours to 17 because it suits their budget. That is the only way I've found – do not budge on the hours."

EP: "I'd love to agree with you, but we're in business."

SP: "Should we all stop dealing with them then? But think about all the trainees coming through the pipeline who're going to be affected. Not only that, but not every training company is going to say they'll stop that tomorrow."

BW: "One-man band set-ups are cheap as chips and will still work with them. We need to educate people about what is being done and that they're being ripped off."

SP: "That's the problem. You call these brokers and within three rings your call is answered. They're proper sales people. With us independents we're doing a reversing exercise and the bleeper's going so we can't get to the phone. The brokers will tell them whatever they want to hear." ■



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