

# PROFILE

## Van Excellence – what's in it for me?

**What is the Van Excellence scheme and what could fleets gain from signing up? Gary Whittam, chair of the Van Excellence Governance Group and former director of commercial vehicles at Ford, explains all.**



Over the years vans have become a large part of all of our lives – whether we are in business, buying things via the internet or simply going about our daily life – vans are involved at every stage. From a business perspective we are all becoming used to the constant pressure to reduce costs, do more with less and stretch our resources further than we ever thought possible. We look at every part of our business and identify areas of thrift where we can.

Van Excellence is a scheme initiated by the Freight Transport Association and aimed at getting the very best from a fleet of vans by using the best specified vehicles, driven by the most qualified drivers in the most economical way while being

maintained by a network of dealers who understand vans. All this regardless of what manufacturer name is on the van or outside the dealer's door.

The Van Excellence initiative has over the last two years brought together the widest ever section of the van industry – operators, makers, providers, dealers and many others – to set out the best ways to operate a modern fleet of vans. The objective of Van Excellence is to recognise those in the industry who are doing a good job, encourage those who want to get better and provide a forum for everyone involved to benefit from the savings in running costs when things are done well.

From a management perspective the major challenges come when processes are not followed, vehicles are badly treated and, as a result, costs soar. The Van Excellence Best Practice Guide provides a solid benchmark to measure how effective one's own operation is and to see how some of the best

operators in the industry tackle certain problems and maybe teach the pro-active director new ways to save money.

From what we've seen so far, even the best businesses can find ways to improve; from the way the fleet is run to the amount of fuel put into the tanks each week. To provide a simple example of how this works, everyone is searching for lower fuel costs and makers constantly need to reduce emissions. The driver of a van is often untrained, unloved and pushed to deliver more and more. The net effect is lots of time with the engine running at full throttle, brakes that wear quickly and tyres not lasting as long as everyone thought. Most businesses would happily pay more for a qualified driver who treats the vehicle with more re-



spect and therefore reduces maintenance costs. Van Excellence seeks to share how the best operators train and look after their drivers and show how this affects their vehicle damage expenses, fuel costs and whole-life vehicle costs.

So why should decision-makers get involved in Van Excellence and adopt it as a process in their businesses? Simply put, we can all learn from each other – the sum is often greater than the individual parts. We have a structure now that will allow the van industry to raise its game, cut costs and present a much better face to the outside world.

The day we all stop learning is the day we stop making progress.

To find out more about Van Excellence contact [mcartwright@fta.co.uk](mailto:mcartwright@fta.co.uk) or visit [www.vanexcellence.co.uk](http://www.vanexcellence.co.uk)

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