



## **Building up the back office**

### **George Cassavetti looks at the current trends in parking back office training**

Since the introduction of the Traffic Management Act (TMA) 2004, training and professional development have been high on the parking industry's agenda. Part 6 of the act places an emphasis on both staff training and continuous professional development, while the operational guidance introduced by the Department for Transport (DfT) in March 2008 states that:

“Authorities should make sure that all civil enforcement officers (CEOs), back office staff, supervisors and managers are trained to provide accurate, fair and consistent enforcement.”

So, how has training within the industry developed over the last 3 years?

For civil enforcement officers, training has developed quickly. In 2008 the City and Guilds Level 2 1885 Certificate for Parking Attendants was replaced by the 1889 Certificate for CEOs to reflect the changes introduced by TMA. However, until 2010 and the introduction of City and Guilds 1916, there has not been a nationally accredited qualification for back office staff.

Notice Processing is an important area in parking enforcement but little recognised training has been available. Notice Processing staff make decisions in a quasi-judicial environment and so need a robust understanding of the technical and legal requirements. As a training provider, Alpha Parking has offered a number of courses to meet the needs of local authorities but it is an area that has been undervalued. In 2009, Alpha Parking in partnership with London Borough of Hillingdon Council took steps to readdress this issue by achieving accreditation by the Institute of Leadership and Management for the



ILM Level 2 Notice Processing course, the first endorsed notice processing qualification available to the industry.

“Continuous professional development for all parking staff - not just Civil Enforcement Officers - is at the heart of the TMA guidance to local authorities,” explains Angela O’Shea, Parking Administration Manager at London Borough of Hillingdon, “but there was an enormous industry gap of accredited training for areas such as notice processing.”



The Hillingdon Team

The ILM course acted as a good precursor to the British Parking Association’s (BPA) release of City and Guilds 1916 Award in Notice Processing. Finally back office staff had a national vocationally related qualification (VRQ) to call their own. An important step, not only in terms of providing further training but also because it validates the work they do; qualifications are morale boosting and give staff confidence in their own ability.

The City and Guilds qualification is the first of its kind to be specifically designed for notice processing staff and gives delegates the skills necessary to pursue a career in notice processing. Since its introduction uptake has been steady and Alpha Parking have trained a number of council’s eager to



take the opportunity to provide staff with a qualification that their role demands.

Two such councils are Southampton and Portsmouth who joined forces to provide training for their staff in a cost-efficient manner as they shared the costs between them. Southampton's seven strong notice processing team travelled to Portsmouth City Council to join their nine staff and undergo the training in modular form.

"Being able to share the training with Portsmouth City Council has provided us with the opportunity to limit the amount of time our staff are away from their desks and helps them to continue to provide a quality service whilst gaining a valuable City and Guilds qualification" says Southampton City Council's Office Manager (City Parking and Patrol Services), Dave King.

"For too long notice processing teams have been overlooked and we are delighted that there is finally a nationally recognised qualification that recognises their achievements", adds Portsmouth City Council's Parking Office Manager, Denise Bastow.

The City and Guilds course has been a great start but more could be done. There are a number of other areas that the back office role encompasses where training could be invaluable. One such area is traffic orders.

The growth of the internet and the Freedom of Information Act has fuelled the public's readiness to challenge parking enforcement, especially by questioning the validity of traffic orders. It is, therefore, essential that staff on the frontline of dealing with representations and appeals have a good understanding of the appropriate structure, types and uses of traffic orders, their signs and lines connections and their impact on notice processing evidence. This is something that Slough Borough Council parking services were interested in as part of the departments drive towards continuous professional development.



The council is responsible for the enforcement of all waiting, loading and residents' parking controls in Slough with all notice processing done in-house. Their six strong notice processing team, handle representations, appeals and parking development, and in November 2010 underwent Alpha Parking's one day workshop in Traffic Orders for the Parking Department. The one-day workshop is designed to provide a good basis for parking department staff to understand the necessities of how traffic orders affect notice processing evidence.

“A good understanding of traffic orders is vital for our staff to carry out their role effectively” says Kam Hothi, Team Leader for Parking Enforcement and Development at Slough Borough Council. “Slough Borough Council is committed to providing an exceptional service and this workshop helped us to maintain our high standards.”

“This workshop allows notice processors to gain a deeper understanding of traffic orders and how they affect their role” adds Alpha Parking's Tara Gabriel. “Though the new City and Guilds 1916 Award in Notice Processing covers the subject, there is no formalised training available that solely concentrates on this important area”.



The Slough Team



It is areas such as traffic order training that need to be next on the agenda for national qualifications. The parking industry has done well to promote a professional image of an unpopular sector but needs to make sure that further qualifications are available. This will instil those working within it a good solid basis to provide the consistent and fair parking service that is expected of them.

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