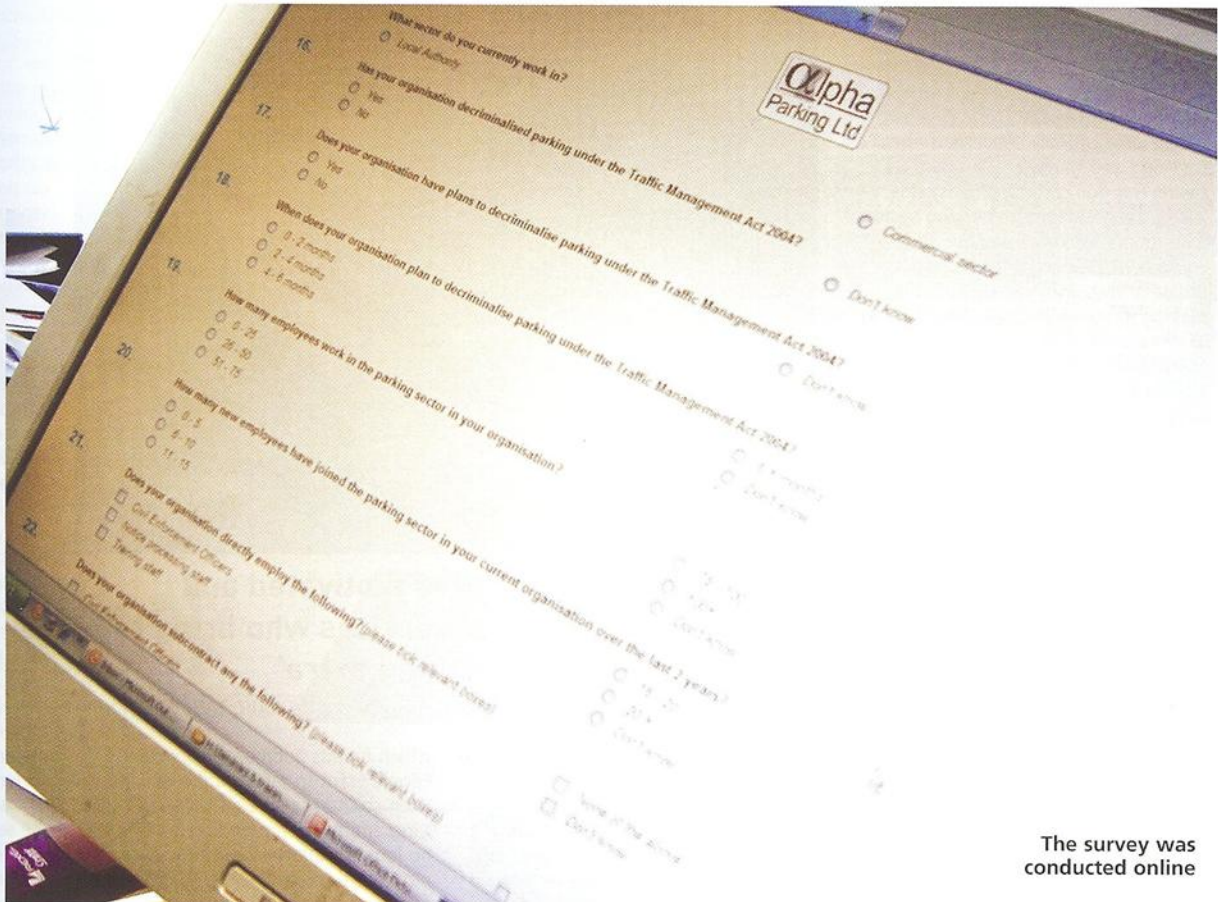


Understanding knowledge



The survey was conducted online

The 2009 Parking Sector Training Survey is an important phase in the campaign to improve training for staff at all levels across the industry. Alistair Turk reports on a comprehensive study of parking skills, qualifications and professional development.

The UK decriminalised parking industry is a relatively new sector and, as a consequence, does not yet have the established training and regulatory framework of many other professions. Much has been done to address the challenges in recent years but most parking practitioners recognise that significant effort is still needed to establish the sector in its own right and professionalise its activity. One of the key building blocks is the development of a Sector Skills Strategy, along with nationally recognised qualifications for the workforce.

Parking Sector Training Survey

About three years ago the British Parking Association (BPA) carried out the first Parking Sector Training Survey (PSTS) largely within its own membership. The objective was to establish a benchmark of views about training issues.

Last year's implementation of Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act (TMA) places an emphasis on both staff training and continuous professional development. After a year of operation under the TMA it was appropriate to carry out a second Parking Sector Training Survey to assess current views about training and establish whether the

economic downturn affected the adoption of continuous professional development within the parking sector. The operational guidance introduced by the Department for Transport (DfT) in March 2008 states: "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. The training needs to take place before they start work and at regular intervals — perhaps every other year — during their career. This requirement applies whether the authority employs CEOs directly or through a contractor. It is the authority's responsibility to ensure that an appropriate training programme is in place."

Alpha Parking, an independent training provider, took responsibility for developing and administering the national survey, the results of which are detailed below.

Methodology

The survey was carried out in accordance with the MRS (Market Research Society) code of conduct. To encourage participation across the industry, the survey was promoted in the professional journals, *Parking Review* and *Parking News*, at BPA regional meetings and via e-shots to local authorities. An on-line questionnaire was used for the primary data gathering plus personal interviews undertaken at Parkex and face to face at a number of local authorities around the country. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality.

Overall, 100 participants completed the survey during Spring 2009. Although researchers might consider this a small sample for statistical purposes, it equates to just under 50% of the total number of English and Welsh local authorities operating civil enforcement. Scotland and Northern Ireland were excluded from the survey this year as they do not undertake civil enforcement under the TMA.

The results

Of those participating, 94% work in the public sector and 6% in the commercial sector. The regional breakdown is as follows:

Regional breakdown	
East	6%
East Midlands	12%
North West	10%
North East	12%
South East	26%
South West	17%
West Midlands	15%
Wales	2%
Job title breakdown	
Parking manager	33%
Supervisor	20%
Civil enforcement officer	6%
Notice processing/ back office assistant	19%
Other	22%

Overall, 90% of respondents enjoy working within the parking sector and 57% of those who expressed an opinion plan to have a long-term career in parking.

While this would appear to be good news for the industry it is worth noting that 64% of respondents also say that there is no clear career progression for them within the parking sector. At civil enforcement officer (CEO) level this is more acute and is also the area where work dissatisfaction and turnover of staff is highest.

These results lend further support to the need for development and articulation of the Sector Skills Strategy and implementation of staff training and continuous professional development.

Parking training

The Department for Transport's operational guidance emphasises the importance of initial and ongoing training to provide "accurate, fair and consistent enforcement". It is therefore surprising that 61% of respondents have no parking accredited qualifications.

To understand why such a high proportion of staff still do not have any relevant qualification we examined responses to other questions. It is not a lack of interest from staff; quite the reverse. In fact, 89% of respondents indicate they would be interested in studying for a parking related qualification and 85% believe that parking related training would help them develop their career within the sector.

In all, 93% of respondents expressed concern that more standardised industry qualifications are not currently available and 75% are frustrated with the slowness in developing such qualifications.

Parking qualifications currently available

The British Parking Association (BPA) has worked with City and Guilds to establish a Level 2 qualification for CEOs. This began four years ago as C&G-1885 for parking attendants.

A further Conflict Management module (C&G-1884) has been added to the CEO qualification (now C&G-1889). This was introduced in 2008 to coincide with the implementation of Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Further qualifications are needed, with the most pressing requirement being for a notice processing qualification. The BPA has been working with City & Guilds on this for some time, with an original target launch date during 2008 but due to various delays it is looking more likely that the qualification will not be in place before 2010.

Independent of the BPA, Alpha Parking has worked with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), which is part of City & Guilds, to establish qualifications for parking team leaders, supervisors and managers and most recently launched an ILM level 2 qualification for Notice Processing Development and Management.

Predating both the City & Guilds and ILM qualifications the NVQ Parking Control and Business Administration have also been introduced and slot into the training framework as the progression from the initial City & Guilds 1889 qualification.

Continuous professional development

The survey examined the level of commitment to

recommendations within the DfT's operational guidance for organisations to embrace the concepts of continuous professional development and training plans for staff. 65% of managers say there is a long term training strategy in place for employees.

These results are encouraging and suggest that the industry is embracing the concept and introducing the necessary measures. Unfortunately staff responses paint a somewhat different picture as only 27% of respondents say they have an individual training plan and only 33% think their employer provides sufficient training.

It is not clear if the difference in response is due to a general lack of communication within organisations across the industry or a desire by some managers to give the 'right' or 'politically correct' response, but more needs to be done to resolve the differing perceptions.

Sector skills

The development and launch of the BPA's Sector Skills Strategy is a key tool to professionalise the industry. Just over half of the respondents (54%) have heard of the Sector Skills Strategy but only 44% claim to fully understand what it is trying to achieve. Clearly, more work within the sector needs to be done to increase understanding of its aims.

Information about training and sector skills comes from a variety of sources, the survey revealed. The main sources are:

British Parking Association	84%
Parking Review	54%
Independent training company	44%
Institute of Parking Professionals	35%
Other parking professionals	58%

Some 40% of respondents consider the BPA should be leading the development of training for the sector, 30% think it should be the Institute of Parking Professionals and 30% say it ought to be 'other' training providers.

This year's survey has been a useful litmus test for the sector. We are encouraged that the importance of training is almost universally recognised but concerned that less than 40% have a parking related qualification. The universal adoption of training plans is a government objective and will do much to increase the sector's professionalism.

Every organisation needs to do more to agree and implement training plans for every member of staff.

Alistair Turk is a director of Alpha Parking

