

Campervans: many UK drivers will need to sit French driving test

People living in France will lose right to drive larger vans, campervans and minibuses when they swap licence if they did not sit a specific test in the UK



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Campervans: many UK drivers will need to sit French driving test Leonid Andronov / lapetitelumiere / Shutterstock

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Drivers who obtained so-called 'heavy' categories on a UK car driving licence without sitting a separate test for them will not be able to maintain these if they swap to a French licence.

The ruling relates to 'C' and 'D' categories to drive vehicles such as larger vans, minibuses and campervans. Many drivers will need to pass a French test if they want to keep the related licence categories when swapping to a French licence, the British Embassy told *The Connexion*.

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The British Embassy has been in contact with French officials concerning issues reported by UK drivers trying to swap to a French one.

Anyone living in or moving to France and holding a UK licence will eventually be concerned by this requirement to swap.

The obligation occurs when the UK licence is approaching expiry (they are issued for 10 years), or in some other cases, such as if the holder commits a driving offence in France that would usually involve loss of points from a French licence.

However, French officials said that under the French driving rules, *la Code de la Route*, they can only exchange licence categories that were awarded following a specific test.

Pre-Brexit ‘grandfather rights’

In the UK, licence holders who passed a car driving test before 1997 were automatically given categories C1, C1E, D1 and D1E for ‘heavier’ vehicles.

These are known as ‘grandfather rights’ and the Embassy reports such rights as being recognised and exchangeable within the EU.

However, as the UK is no longer part of the EU, France is free to decide which categories it will exchange.

The UK and France signed a deal on exchanges in 2021 that sees UK licences treated like EU licences in some respects – if the holder passed their test before 2021 – but, it appears, not all. No copy of the agreement is publicly available.

These UK licences do not, for example, have to be swapped within a year of moving to France, as is the case for other licences issued by non-EU countries.

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The Connexion recently [reported on a reader who has bought a €100,000 campervan](#), which he is now unable to drive, as he did not realise the swap would not be possible.

Heavy motorcyclists

The Embassy, however, confirmed that it has negotiated to clarify the situation for UK licence holders who passed large motorcycle tests before 1974, who have faced losing their entitlements to the large bike 'A' category.

Read more: [UK motorcycle licence deal reached with French authorities](#)

The problem arose because, due to technical issues, their UK licences appeared to show they obtained the category automatically along with their car licence, even though this was not the case.

The Embassy says if you lost the 'A' category under previous rules, you can apply to rectify this via ants.gouv.fr.

It is advisable to include supporting evidence from DVLA that your UK licence had included the 'A' category (see gov.uk/contact-the-dvla).