

CATEGORY B LICENCES & ALTERNATIVE FUELS: **AN UPDATE**



To help promote the adoption of alternative-fuelled vehicles (AFVs), the UK changed the law relating the permitted gross vehicle weight for light commercials of this type driven on a Category B licence, increasing it to 4.25-tonnes providing a range of operational conditions were met.

However, in a bid to clear up some common confusion surrounding their use, a public consultation has been held, resulting in the majority of the original conditions being scrapped.

Given this recent update, are you fully up to speed with how these changes could affect your business and its use of AFVs?



WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL CRITERIA?

Initially, the government laid out a range of criteria for the weight exemption, which were:

- ▶ The vehicle was not driven outside of Great Britain
- ▶ Drivers were exempt from EU drivers' hours rules within a 62 mile (100km) radius of base
- ▶ The vehicle was used for the transportation of goods
- ▶ It was not towing a trailer
- ▶ The driver had completed a minimum of five hours of training

HOW HAS THIS CHANGED?

Two of these criteria are still in force – the vehicle still cannot be driven outside of Great Britain, while drivers remain exempt from EU drivers' hours within 62 miles (100km) from their base. However, **the remaining conditions have now been scrapped entirely.**

In addition, the exemption now **only applies to zero emission vehicles (ZEVs)**. These are defined by the government as electric, hydrogen or range extended-electric vehicles, whereas previously both natural gas and biogas vehicles also qualified.



WHY THE CHANGES?



VEHICLE TYPE

The move to only include ZEVs in the new licence flexibility legislation is designed to support the government's drive towards all new cars and vans being zero emission at the tailpipe by 2035.

Previously, the licence exemption only applied to commercial vans, but with more ZEV options coming to market, this has now been extended to cover all vehicle types, for example minibuses.

As an additional caveat, drivers can operate ZEVs weighing up to 5-tonnes if they have been modified with specialist equipment for disabled users, such as a wheelchair ramp.



TOWING

With an increasing number of ZEVs coming to market with improved towing capabilities, the Department for Transportation now states that qualifying ZEVs should be subject to the same towing rules as their equivalent fossil fuel counterparts.

Mirroring a change made in December 2019 to the rules for fossil fuel vehicles towing trailers with a combined weight of up to 7-tonnes, Category B licence holders operating ZEVs will now be granted the same allowance, providing all other towing conditions for drivers are met and that the ZEV in question does not exceed 4.25-tonnes.



TRAINING

The consultation did not reveal any evidence to demonstrate a material safety risk by rescinding the need for the additional five hours of training. In fact, the cost to businesses of sending their drivers for the required training was cited as a key factor in the decision to make this change.

WHAT HAS REMAINED THE SAME?



TACHOGRAPH RULES

For 4.25-tonne ZEVs, drivers are exempt from EU drivers' regulations when carrying goods within a 62-mile (100km) radius of their company base. However, drivers still need to be aware that they would come into the scope of EU drivers' hours and tachograph rules if they exceed this distance.



TESTING REGIMES

A common misconception is that qualifying 4.25-tonne ZEVs are treated in the same way as their ICE 3.5-tonne equivalents. This is still not the case. As with any other vehicle over 3.5-tonnes, all 4.25-tonne ZEVs will still have to adhere to the goods vehicle annual testing regime.

HOW CAN MY BUSINESS BENEFIT?

Though these changes will make it easier for businesses to introduce ZEVs into their operation, at Fraikin we're acutely aware that making this move still poses a challenge for many fleets – which is why our expert team is here to help.



For more information on how you can kickstart your transition, and then ensure your operation remains compliant, call on Fraikin's expert industry knowledge to guide you through the process.