

- London's French foreign legion

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One Frenchman who knows a thing or two about his country's paternalistic employment attitudes is Hamid Senni, 34. Born into a French-Moroccan family, the promising student was frozen out of French jobs despite good qualifications but eventually wound up in senior positions at Sony Ericsson and BP in Britain (during a hiatus, he returned to France, only finding work as a vacuum cleaner salesman).

In 2005, he launched management consultancy firm, Vision Enabler. "It took me three hours to set up the company in London," recalls Senni. "But to do the same thing in Paris, it would take two years. You spend so much time on the paperwork, by the time you've started, you've lost money already."

It's a malaise which has prompted the French media to churn out stories about <la fuite des jeunes> ('the flight of young people'), bemoaning empty boulevards, bars and restaurants, while hordes of young Parisians seek hedonistic thrills at the other end of the Chunnel.

AND LATER...

When asked to describe why they live in London, most expats invariably utter one of two words: "freedom" or "openness". "The French love the way Londoners accept foreigners," says Connell. It's a view echoed by Senni: "When you arrive in London, you start with a blank slate. How successful you are depends on what you do. This shocks many French people when they arrive, and is why so many move here."

AND LATER STILL...

Keeping with the football analogies, Senni cites the example of French players, who moved to foreign clubs to become successful. "Nobody in France took any notice of Thierry Henry or Zinedine Zidane when they played for domestic clubs – they both had to move abroad to make it. It's exactly the same in business – French people move to London to be free and get on with their lives. Otherwise, it's like being stuck on the substitute's bench forever... "