

Relief as licence deal is signed

by Liv Rowland

A UK-FRANCE deal has been signed on driving licences – and it includes the good news that thousands of drivers will not have to swap their UK licences at all. There is also a solution for drivers with expired licences.

A *Connexion* poll in May found that at least 70 readers could no longer drive legally in France as their UK licences had expired.

The problems arose because the EU right to use a valid UK licence in France or to swap one for a French licence ended with the Brexit transition period.

France decreed that a valid UK licence could be used for a year but there was no mechanism in place for an exchange.

Key points of the deal are:

■ If you have been driving on a UK licence that was issued before January 1, 2021, it will be recognised in France as long as it is within its validity date.

You cannot exchange it without a valid reason, such as imminent expiry, loss, theft or deterioration, obtaining new driving categories, a driving offence requiring withdrawal of points, or suspension or cancellation.

■ If your licence has expired, or is due to within six months, you can exchange at ants.gouv.fr.

After applying, you will receive an *attestation de dépôt*, which you can use to drive in France until the licence arrives.

■ If your UK licence was issued on or after January 1, 2021, you will be able to continue using it for up to one year from the date of issue of your residency permit.

If you wish to stay longer, you must swap it for a French licence. ■ Pending swap applications made online in 2020 will only be honoured if the UK licence has expired, or will do in six months. Other drivers should continue to use their valid British licences.

■ UK licence-holders in France can apply to ANTS for an International Driving Permit to drive on holiday in certain countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Canada and Australia.

The *Connexion* recently learned that thousands of applications from Britons in the latter half of 2020 have been on hold pending special arrangements being agreed for these, as described above.

Reader Kate Thomas, who is diabetic and whose licence expired in March because it must be renewed every three years and cannot be renewed from France, told of her delight at the news.

She had been considering selling her rural home in eastern France as she was “petrified” of the difficulties of taking a French driving test.

She said: “I hope they do honour our expired licences. Thank you for raising awareness of the issue. This is a great relief to us all.”



I gave up waiting and took the French test: not easy

WRITER Edward Sheen, from the Alpes-Maritimes, has been living and driving in France for more than 20 years.

He never expected to have to take the French test, but decided to do so after uncertainty dragged on over his right to exchange his UK licence (*now clarified, left*).

He wanted “control over the situation”, he said.

He had to sign up to take a €30 written exam on the French highway code and first aid, involving 40 questions and a pass mark of 35.

He could then apply to take

the practical test. Having tried test papers, however, he realised “serious study was needed”, he said.

He felt nervous about joining youngsters for his first exam in 33 years and struggled to operate the tablet computer he had to use.

However, weeks of “intense studying” paid off as he made just one mistake.

“Bravo, monsieur, it’s impressive,” his examiner said.

Mr Sheen said: “An immersive experience with the French language has been of benefit, as has actually learning the rules of the road.”

Brexit means new hassles for French living in the UK

BREXIT has affected the lives of Britons in France – but also those of the French in the UK.

Liv Rowland spoke to **Christèle Biganzoli** (*right*), founder of fintech firm *ritchee*, which gives financial advice to the French abroad. The UK is one of the top three destinations for them.

Biganzoli said. “And there aren’t many fiscal reps, because it involves a lot of res-ponsibility.”



She said many in the UK at the time of the Brexit vote were very worried and returned immediately to France.

This mostly concerned some 20% – around 130,000 – who were living outside London and felt more isolated. Out of those, perhaps 15-30% went back to France, she said.

“At work, they felt like people looked on them as immigrants, not colleagues, and they were afraid. The deals were slow in coming and they didn’t know how things would work out.”

The French mostly feel more reassured today, she said, and most have secured residency and healthcare rights.

Those still looking at returning now are more influenced by the pandemic and wanting to be closer to families.

“However, the lives of those who stayed in the UK are changing,” she said. For example, from October they can no longer come and go with their French identity card, and visas will be required for long stays.

“You will have to prove a certain level of studies, language skills, and an income of at least £26,500, which excludes young people who used to come in the wine and restaurant sector.”

“The aim is to have an American-style immigration and only take high-flyers, but I think in the future, depending on the birth rate in the UK, there will be a lack of workers if that is maintained.”

Just like British residents with second homes in France, the French in the UK will have to use a fiscal representative if they are selling a French property and pay higher social charges on capital gains or rents.

“It’s a pain in the neck,” Ms

Biganzoli said. “A capital gains tax exemption when they sold their former main home in France also no longer exists.”

“Plus, if they have British shares in French share savings plans [PEA], they have to get rid of them. I am sure there will always be French people who want to move to the UK – it’s a country we’re attached to and many also want to reinforce their English language skills – but all this does not help.”

Ms Biganzoli cited the cost of visas as another problem, especially for students who can no longer use Erasmus and will have to pay £348. “It’s a tragedy, because it opened people’s minds and today’s students became tomorrow’s expatriates.”

“There were many exchanges with UK universities, which will now be harder to maintain.”

She has heard of *saucisson* sandwiches or cheese being confiscated on the way back from France. “Import-export is affected, including buying clothes from France, as there are customs declarations and extra tax.”

“Also, there will be customs declarations when you move home, with tax if it’s a second home, and there are new costs and paperwork when you travel with your pet back to France.”

One “surprising” aspect is that there is no restriction on transporting edible snails.

“Snails don’t seem an indispensable food to me. I know the British see us as snail-eaters but if you ask a young French person not many will have tried it.”

“Overall, though, I think the French in France and the UK feel very sad to see the UK leave the EU, because it is a country we are fond of. We feel closer to the British than, for example, Lithuanians, an EU country.”

Carte de séjour deadline is deferred

THE DEADLINE to apply for a Withdrawal Agreement residency card has been extended from June 30 to September 30, the French Interior Ministry says.

A decree is awaited, updating the one which set the June 30 date – unless good reasons for applying after were given – and said Britons must have a card by October 1.

The extension is to give late-comers extra time, officials told *The Connexion*. However, see also British Ambassador’s column, Page 15.

More than 147,000 adult Britons have applied – a lot more than the 142,000 Britons

in France estimated by statistics body Insee last year, based on censuses. The British in Europe coalition had asked for an extension, as true numbers are unknown and many Britons report meeting people who did not know their responsibilities.

British Community Committee of France vice-chairman Christopher Chantrey said: “This is good news if it means getting as many applications in and processed as possible.”

However, people must not put off applying due to this and feel “the pressure is off”, he said. The problem still remains of how to reach those deeply immersed in French life

and not on social media. French media advertising would have helped, he said.

France was one of the few EU countries to opt for the earliest-possible June 30 deadline.

Readers say the process (made at tinyurl.com/59229c7n) has been easy. They have not reported any rejections and the British Embassy and Interior Ministry have not provided data on any.

Residency applications have closed in the UK for EU citizens. As of May 31, there had been 5.27 million concluded applications, including some renewed ones, and 241,000 were refused, withdrawn, void or invalid.



READER Lin Brown, 56, from Brittany, was thrilled to receive her card after years of court appeals. Her application for an EU citizen’s *carte* was rejected, linked to low gardening income after illness. A court process was cancelled once she was no longer an EU citizen. “It is a relief, but I will never forget the freedom of movement rights lost and the stress caused. I’m sad for those that will not have the opportunities we had.”

Brexit news in brief

Honours for campaigners

SEVERAL campaigners for rights of Britons in the EU were recognised in the Queen’s Birthday Honours. British in Europe coalition co-chairs Fiona Godfrey and Jane Golding were made OBEs, while Debbie Williams of BHOV was made an MBE, along with two campaigners from groups for Britons in Spain. World War Two veteran Harry Shindler was made an OBE for his work on issues including votes for life (see page 3). No French-resident campaigners won an award.

VAT change on French moves

A PROPOSAL to levy VAT on the value of belongings of people moving to France from the UK in the second half of 2021 is

not now expected to go ahead. It had been considered possible under a strict French interpretation of EU rules, officials said earlier in the year. VAT, and potentially other charges, may, however, still be levied on items above certain values (starting at €300 per carload) brought in from the UK to a second home.

Young charged wrong fees

BRITISH in Europe (BiE) campaigners have written to the UK’s universities minister highlighting that some young Britons from families based in France are being quoted international fee rates for courses at British universities. These can be twice as high as fees charged to young Britons in the UK. This is contrary to what the UK has agreed, post-Brexit, which was that

young people from expatriate families may go to UK universities at ‘home’ fees for courses starting by 2027.

Campaigners appeal for help

BiE has appealed to the British community for donations – preferably on a recurring basis. It wishes to maintain its work representing Britons abroad in the EU in years to come, but has no funding from the EU or the British government (see britishineurope.org).

EE brings back roaming fees

UK mobile phone firm EE will from January charge £2 a day roaming charges to new customers using phones while travelling in the EEA. This is possible as the UK is no longer bound by EU anti-roaming fee rules.

New duty-free shop allowed to open at Le Shuttle terminal

A NEW duty-free shop could open as early as this summer at the Eurotunnel terminal in Coquelles, Pas-de-Calais, after permission was given by French MPs.

The shop would benefit those taking cars through the tunnel on Le Shuttle. It would allow travellers going, or returning, to the UK to buy goods at significantly lower prices than usual because they will be exempt from French VAT (TVA) and excise duty. VAT alone is usually 20%.

It will sell traditional duty-free products, such as wines, spirits, beers, tobacco, perfumes and cosmetics. These usually have excise duty – tax levied nationally on manufactured goods – on them. If there is enough demand, lines could be extended to other products that can be sold VAT-free, such as clothes and sunglasses.

Tabac owners in the area have said it will be unfair competition, but Eurotunnel said it is justified as duty-free shops already exist on the UK side of the tunnel, and on both sides of the Channel for ferries and air travel.