

# Guide to the postmaster support policies

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 The purpose of this guide

Post Office is committed to working with, and supporting, postmasters. Post Office has policies in place that set out principles for our Post Office teams to follow. This guide has been written to share information about those principles, and how they are linked by the policies.

The policies detail how Post Office teams will support postmasters and their teams in running Post Office branches. They ensure that all our people understand the importance of following policy principles when dealing with postmasters and their teams.

The policies have the objective of ensuring that we are treating postmasters and their staff fairly, transparently, and professionally.

This guide is a non-contractual document provided for information. It does not form part of the contract between any postmaster and Post Office.

## 1.2 What areas do the policies cover?

Setting branches up for success

- Postmaster Onboarding
- Postmaster Training

We're listening...

- Postmaster Complaint Handling

Network monitoring, cash and stock management and account support

- Network Monitoring and Branch Assurance Support
- Network Cash and Stock Management
- Network Transaction Corrections
- Postmaster Account Support
- Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution

Our agreement with the Postmaster

- Postmaster Contract Performance
- Postmaster Contract Suspension
- Postmaster Contract Termination
- Postmaster Contract Termination Decision Review

## 1.3 If we could do better...

If we are not getting it right, or a member of the Post Office team is not behaving in the right way, we want to know. We offer several channels to voice concerns, including a "Feedback and complaints" feature on Branch Hub. Postmasters can also contact the Branch Support Centre or their area manager. We'll take any complaint raised with us seriously.

## 2 Setting branches up for success

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The Onboarding and Training teams will use these policies to help support branches during the early days of each postmaster appointment with a view to ensuring that branches have the best possible start. They'll reinforce and embed Post Office training, giving branch staff the knowledge they need to run a successful Post Office branch.

### 2.1 Principles set out in each policy

#### Postmaster onboarding policy

The postmaster onboarding policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Managing postmaster applications**
- **Supporting new postmasters up to branch opening**

We're committed to working with postmasters in good faith and in a transparent and collaborative way to build a trusting relationship.

- We aim to ensure postmasters (and their directors/partners, as applicable) are satisfied with the onboarding experience by keeping them informed and updated throughout all steps of the process.

#### Postmaster training policy

The postmaster training policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Organising onboarding operational training**
- **Offering other operational training**
- **Providing guides and work aids**
- **Providing early days support through Onsite Trainers and Business Support Managers**

We're committed to providing operational training and making sure branch teams feel confident when they conduct Post Office transactions and processes using Horizon.

- We'll ensure that onboarding training for branch staff is only considered to be complete if the postmaster, business support manager and area manager all agree on this.
- We'll offer a variety of training opportunities, for example via eLearning modules, in branch and/or face-to-face classroom sessions. We will also provide additional support in the form of operational guides, work aids and 'How To' demonstration videos available on Branch Hub and our Learning Management System, access to an On-line Help functionality on Horizon, and access to a Postmaster Operational Training Catalogue for ongoing training and support needs.
- We'll monitor and review any regulatory changes to products and services so we can provide regular up-to-date training to branch staff.
- We'll evaluate training feedback received from postmasters and take any action that may be required to improve the training we provide.



## 3 We're listening...

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If things go wrong, we really do want to hear about it. The Complaint Handling policy is used across Post Office teams that could receive and handle complaints.

### 3.1 Principles set out in each policy

#### Postmaster complaint handling policy

The postmaster complaint handling policy sets our principles for these processes:

- **Providing channels for branch staff to use for raising complaints**
- **Receiving and investigating complaints**
- **Reaching resolution**
- **Informing the branch of the outcome**

We offer several channels for branch staff to voice concerns, including a "Feedback and complaints" feature on Branch Hub, the Branch Support Centre and area managers.

If we receive a complaint:

- We'll review the complaint and respond within 24 hours
- We'll handle complaints using a fair process
- We'll keep the person who raised the complaint updated on our progress in relation to investigating the complaint
- Our front-line teams, such as the Branch Support Centre or area managers, will triage any written or verbal complaints to identify any concerns that should be treated as whistleblowing and passed on to the Speak Up team

Speak Up concerns can be raised anonymously, but we would encourage the person raising the concern to provide their details as it allows us to obtain additional information. If there are insufficient details within the report and we are unable to contact the reporter, it can limit the effectiveness of any investigation and we won't be able to give them feedback on the outcome.

The Postmaster Support Guide sets out how postmasters and their teams can raise issues and concerns. In the first instance, they should contact their area manager or Grapevine on **GRO**. If this doesn't answer the concern, or they are not comfortable in raising it that way, anyone can raise issues directly with the Speak Up team by email at [SpeakUp](#) **GRO** or:

- by calling the confidential Speak Up service on **GRO**
- via our website <http://speakup.postoffice.co.uk>
- by using the QR code below.



## 4 Network monitoring, cash and stock management and account support

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Several teams, including Network Monitoring and Branch Assurance; Postmaster Account Support, Branch Reconciliation, Branch Support and Cash and Stock Management, support branches with accounting practices, discrepancies and the management of cash and stock.

### 4.1 Collective principles

In relation to branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support:

- We want branch staff to run branches without experiencing unforeseen issues, but if we discover an issue, we'll aim to let branches know about it
- If branch staff discover an issue, we'll address it after they tell us about it
- We'll offer support to branch staff, and work with them to resolve the issue and help them to avoid it happening again
- If the issue isn't easily fixed, we may carry out an investigation to understand the root cause of the issue and come to a resolution
- We'll encourage questions and feedback about our support

### 4.2 Principles set out in each policy

#### Network cash and stock management policy

The network cash and stock management policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Forecasting and planning cash supplies**
- **Receiving stock orders and requests to change cash levels**
- **Offering emergency order options**
- **Supporting branch staff with cash remittance and stock discrepancies**
- **Dealing with disputed cash and stock remittances and transaction corrections**

Postmasters have agreed to provide products and services on behalf of Post Office, and for clients of Post Office, under the agreement we have with them. The cash and stock used to carry out transactions is owned and funded by Post Office, unless the branch is one of a small number of branches which are self-funded.

It's important that branches have enough cash and stock to trade, but that they don't have excess cash and stock that will make accounting more complicated and increase security risk.

When we assist in managing cash and stock:

- Through forecasting, we'll aim to ensure that each branch has enough cash, coin, and foreign currency (where applicable) to trade and we'll aim to avoid situations where branches hold too much cash or stock

- We'll provide free cash and stock deliveries and collections on scheduled days
- We'll aim to get special stamps, such as First Day Covers and Christmas stamps, to branches in plenty of time
- We'll give branches a method to place emergency orders
- If we find a discrepancy in a cash or stock remittance that branches have sent us, we'll let branches know and support branches with the next steps
- When a branch lets us know about a discrepancy in a cash or stock remittance that we have sent, we'll follow a process to investigate

### Network transaction corrections policy

The network transaction corrections policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Issuing Transaction Corrections and Transaction Acknowledgements**
- **Providing information and supporting evidence to the branch**

Following Post Office guidelines on branch accounting processes should help branches reduce the need for transaction corrections to be issued. However, sometimes branches will receive a transaction correction.

When we issue a transaction correction:

- It will have been identified by a discrepancy in the reconciliation we do between files received from our third-party clients and the data recorded in branch on Horizon, or from us being notified about an incorrectly-keyed entry on Horizon
- We'll send the branch an explanation of the reason for the transaction correction and make it clear that branch staff can contact us for further support e.g., by answering further questions
- Branches can dispute the transaction correction, in which case we'll investigate it and aim to resolve a dispute within 10 working days, keeping the branch updated if it takes longer

Transaction acknowledgements are sent each morning for the transactions carried out during the previous day on Paystation<sup>TM1</sup>, so cash and stock will be correctly adjusted on Horizon.

### Network monitoring and branch assurance support policy

The network monitoring and branch assurance support policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Monitoring the network**
- **Scheduling supportive visits and branch assurance visits**
- **Carrying out a branch assurance visit**
- **Involving the Contracts team**
- **Performing branch assurance closure visits**
- **Performing post Security Incident branch assurance visits**
- **Assuring quality**

We carry out network monitoring and branch assurance support activity to maintain the accuracy of branches' accounting records of cash and stock. We also monitor branches' compliance with

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<sup>1</sup> For Paystation a transaction acknowledgement will only be sent on the following day if the Batch Control Summary has been produced by the cut off time, otherwise it will be sent on the subsequent day.

accounting practices as it helps us, and branches, to identify issues early and makes investigating the root cause of any issues easier.

In order to support branches:

- We'll monitor branch activity, particularly in relation to accounting of cash and stock, so we can identify branches who are experiencing issues and identify any potential concerns about accounting practices in a branch
- If any potential issues are identified, we'll contact the branch to arrange support to help staff to maintain accurate records of cash and stock through branch accounting
- On an occasion where we can't resolve an issue remotely, branch assurance will visit a branch to carry out a full count of cash and stock, supporting the branch staff throughout the process
- If a branch is closing, we'll support the branch by preparing the staff for a branch assurance closure visit
- We'll aim to keep branches fully engaged with any branch assurance support provided and invite questions and give feedback

#### Postmaster account support

The postmaster account support policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Notifying postmasters about discrepancies in the centralised holding account**
- **Supporting branches with discrepancy disputes**
- **Arranging payments of agreed losses and gains**

A centralised holding account holds details of: (i) any branch discrepancies that have been moved into it by selecting the 'Review or Dispute' option on Horizon at the end of a trading period; (ii) transaction corrections that have been moved into it by selecting the 'Review or Dispute' option; and (iii) any payments made to Post Office.

If a branch selects the 'Review Dispute CALL BSC' option on Horizon at the end of a trading period, they should contact the Branch Support Centre on GRO as soon as possible. The Branch Support Centre will ask for information, so they can provide support in understanding and resolving the discrepancy.

When a branch moves a discrepancy into the centralised holding account at the end of a trading period:

- If the branch needs support to find the reason for any discrepancy, the Branch Support Centre will help to investigate it in the first instance – for transaction corrections, the issuing team can help to explain the reason for it
- If a branch contacts Branch Support Centre or the transaction correction issuing team for support and we can't agree the reason for the discrepancy or transaction correction between us, the branch can request an investigation
- If the branch understands and accepts the discrepancy or transaction correction, knowing it's due to an error made by the branch team, and the postmaster is contractually responsible for it, we'll help the postmaster to make payment arrangements



- If the discrepancy is a credit, we'll give the postmaster the choice to either have it paid back to the postmaster, as soon as reasonably possible, or wait to see if a corresponding debit is issued to the postmaster's account
- If the branch does not contact the Branch Support Centre, or the contact details listed on the transaction correction if different, we will attempt to contact the branch by telephone. A letter and account statement will also be sent to the branch.

### Postmaster accounting dispute resolution

The postmaster accounting dispute resolution policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Helping branches to find the reason for a discrepancy or transaction correction**
- **Managing discrepancy and transaction correction disputes**
- **Investigating the dispute**
- **Escalating the dispute**
- **Reaching a resolution to the dispute**
- **Informing branches of the outcome**

When branch discrepancies occur, or transaction corrections are issued that the branch does not understand the reason for, the branch can report this to us and we'll provide support. We'll work with the branch staff to find the reason for the discrepancy or provide the branch with evidence about why the transaction correction was issued. If, between us, we can't agree on the reason, the branch can ask for the discrepancy to be investigated further.

When a branch asks us for help with a discrepancy or transaction correction:

- They should first contact the Branch Support Centre or the contact details listed on the transaction correction, if different. They'll explain the transaction correction or talk through basic steps to help the branch staff find the discrepancy
- If there is no resolution of the matter at this point, it will be escalated to Network Support & Resolution who can carry out a more detailed investigation. We'll aim to reach a resolution within 20 working days and keep the branch informed on progress.
- When the investigation is complete, we'll let the branch staff know the outcome and explain why we reached the conclusion we did



## 5 Our agreement with the postmaster

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We will use these policies to ensure that postmasters are treated fairly and professionally in relation to the agreements held with us.

### 5.1 Collective principles

During any investigation related to contractual performance, a postmaster (or the postmaster's directors or partners, as relevant) can:

- Contact a Contract Advisor, by emailing [contractsteam](#) **GRO**
- Request information and evidence from us about any contract performance issues identified and the investigation process
- Contact the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP) representative for support
- Arrange legal representation or other support for any written correspondence or meetings with Post Office

If we have to carry out an investigation:

- It will be fair and unbiased and will provide the postmaster (or representative) with the opportunity to give us all relevant information
- We'll complete any investigations as soon as we reasonably can, act on any information the postmaster (or representative) gives us and keep them updated
- We'll share with the postmaster (or representative) the supporting records and information where possible
- If a meeting is required, we'll be flexible, within reason, in relation to availability of the postmaster (or representative)
- We'll always make clear the contractual basis of any formal action taken
- Let their NFSP representative, legal representation, or other support talk on their behalf during any meeting with Post Office Ltd

### 5.2 Principles set out in each policy

#### Postmaster contract performance policy

The postmaster contract performance policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Defining contractual performance issues**
- **Carrying out the investigation**
- **Documenting the rationale behind a decision**
- **Considering alternative contractual action**
- **Applying monitoring periods**

Where reasonably possible, we will resolve any performance issues by supporting branches and working with branches and the relevant area manager.

### Postmaster contract suspension policy

The postmaster contract suspension policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Carrying out the investigation**
- **Documenting the rationale behind a decision**
- **Considering alternatives to suspension**
- **Informing postmasters of the decision**
- **Paying fees during suspension**
- **Arranging a temporary operator during the suspension period**

In certain circumstances it will be necessary to suspend a postmaster's contract. If a postmaster's contract is suspended:

- We are suspending the contract in order to investigate the cause of a potential contractual breach issue and we are not implying there has been any breach of contract nor predetermining any outcome of the investigation
- We will have carried out a preliminary investigation to establish relevant facts, in doing so liaising as appropriate with the postmaster (or its directors or partners if the postmaster is a company or partnership) before making the decision to suspend
- We'll inform the postmaster (or its directors or partners if the postmaster is a company or partnership) of the suspension by telephone and follow up by a letter
- The postmaster will continue to receive fees (based on average fees over the previous twelve-month period or, where the postmaster has been appointed for less than twelve-months, based on the average fees received since appointment)
- We'll offer to arrange a temporary operator to continue trading on the premises during the period of suspension, but will not do so without the postmaster's express agreement
- A Governance Committee will review the suspension decision to ensure that a decision to suspend was taken in line with Post Office policies
- We'll keep the suspension period as short as reasonably possible and a dedicated Contract Advisor will keep the postmaster updated throughout the suspension period

### Postmaster contract termination policy

The postmaster contract termination policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Understanding our termination rights**
- **Carrying out the investigation**
- **Documenting the rationale behind a decision**
- **Checking that we've fulfilled our contractual obligations**
- **Considering alternatives to termination**
- **Applying notice periods**
- **Informing postmasters of the decision**

There may be circumstances when termination of a postmaster's contract needs to be considered and a decision to terminate made. If this is the case:

- We'll consider the relevant facts before making any decision to terminate a contract

- A Governance Committee will review all recommendations to terminate an agreement to ensure the decision has been taken in line with the relevant contract and Post Office policies
- We'll notify the postmaster and include the reason for the termination. If the postmaster disagrees with it, a request to have the decision reviewed can be submitted

#### Postmaster contract termination decision review policy

The postmaster contract termination decision review policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- **Notifying postmasters of the right to have a decision taken to terminate their contract reviewed**
- **Carrying out the review and investigation**
- **Documenting the rationale behind a decision**
- **Choosing the right decision option**
- **Informing postmasters of the decision**

If a postmaster, or its directors or partners, believes we've failed in our obligations in relation to a contract termination decision, the postmaster can ask for the decision we've made to be reviewed.

If we are asked to review a decision:

- We'll make sure there are suitable channels for the postmaster to let us know if a review of the decision is required and these will be detailed in the relevant correspondence
- We'll assign the review to a Review Panel, who will have no prior knowledge of the circumstances which led up to the review being requested
- We'll make sure the decision review request is fully understood and investigated
- The Review Panel will make their decision and inform the postmaster what it is and the reason for it

## 6 Control

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### 6.1 Version control table

Date	Version	Updated by	Change Details
30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	1.0	Jo Milton	Final Version approved by ARC
26 <sup>th</sup> April 2021	1.1	Jo Milton	Various amendments including references to branch staff (including regarding whistleblowing procedures)
20 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	1.2	Jo Milton	Replacement of “settled centrally” language Further amendment to references of “standards” to “principles”
10 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	1.3	Jo Milton	Transfer of ownership to Debbie Johnson
12 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	2.0	Jo Milton	<b>Revision following annual policy review</b> Information added to training opportunities Revised Whistleblowing section and added reference to the Regional Postmaster Forum Removal of “investigating disputed transaction corrections” from the principles of the TC policy Review or Dispute amended to Settle Centrally in relation to TCs (Postmaster Account Support) Rewrite of Postmaster Termination Decision Review to accommodate other decisions and the renaming of the policy to Decision Review
29 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	2.1	Jo Milton	Settle Centrally amended back to Review or Dispute in relation to TCs (Postmaster Account Support)
21 <sup>st</sup> June 2023	3.0	Duncan Hughes	<b>Revision following annual policy review</b> Various amendments including replacement of audit with branch assurance and whistleblowing with Speak Up Addition of ‘Providing early days support through Onsite Trainers and Business Support Managers’ to training policy principles (removed from onboarding commentary)  Removed ‘updating branches on key issues’ from the complaint handling policy principles as this process is under review

Date	Version	Updated by	Change Details
21 <sup>st</sup> June 2023 continued	3.0	Duncan Hughes	<p>Removal of 'managing refusals to pay' from PAS policy principles, as this process is under review</p> <p>Removal of 'monitoring accounts' from PAS policy principles. PAS review accounts with discrepancies, Network Monitoring monitor the Network</p> <p>Removal of 'understanding contractual obligations' from PAS policy principles, this comes under section 5 (Our agreement with the postmaster)</p> <p>Removed 'person in charge' wording from Section 5</p> <p>Amended 'legal or other representation' to 'legal representation or other support' in Section 5's collective principles, following NFSP feedback</p>
21 June 2024	4.0	Duncan Hughes	<p><b>Revision following annual policy review</b></p> <p>Removal of references to the lottery.</p> <p>Addition of NFSP, legal representation, or other support to '5.1 Collective principles'</p> <p>Automatic review of suspensions moved from postmaster contract termination decision review policy to postmaster contract suspension policy</p> <p>Addition of a termination review by a Governance Committee to the postmaster contract termination policy section</p> <p>Revision of suspension payments based on an average of 6 months fees to 12 months.</p>



## 6.2 Reviewers

Policies	Reviewers
Postmaster Onboarding	Rhi Thomas
Postmaster Training	Ranj Jouhal
Postmaster Complaint Handling	Mat Thorley, Claire Hamilton
Network Cash & Stock Management	Jazz Chand, Doug Brown, Andrew A Stevens, Steve Howard
Postmaster Transaction Correction	Alison Clark, Colette McAteer
Network Monitoring & Branch Assurance Support	Alison Clark, Dawn Quick, Mike Lowe
Postmaster Account Support	Susan Burke, Simon Worboys
Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution	Simon Worboys, Tracey Bannister
The Postmaster Contract Performance The Postmaster Contract Suspension The Postmaster Contract Termination The Postmaster Decision Review	David Southall

