



Postmaster support guide



Foreword



Amanda Jones
Retail and Franchise
Network Director

Dear Postmaster,

Welcome to the second edition of the Postmaster Support Guide.

We first published this guide in summer 2020, so that we could detail the range of support available to you and your teams and how and where you can access it.

Since then, we've listened to you and have reviewed many of our processes and the way in which we support you, implementing improvements along the way. For example, we've improved our investigations process and now provide additional support for investigating discrepancies in branch.

This updated edition reflects the changes that we've made, and also incorporates a new Postmaster Guide to Policies too. Our policies detail how our Post Office teams will support you and your teams in running your Post Office branch, ensuring that we treat you and your staff fairly, professionally and are transparent in everything we do.

I hope you find this Postmaster Support Guide useful. If you have any feedback about it or any suggestions for future inclusion, please do let us know through the 'Feedback and complaints' button on Branch Hub.

Thank you for all you continue to do, serving and supporting customers in communities across the country.

Amanda Jones



Contents

- 04** **Section 1:** The purpose of this guide
- 05** **Section 2:** The relationship
- 06** **Section 3:** General support
- 11** **Section 4:** We're listening
- 13** **Section 5:** Training
- 16** **Section 6:** Customer experience
- 21** **Section 7:** Managing cash and stock and branch balancing
- 27** **Section 8:** Branch security
- 28** **Section 9:** Remuneration
- 29** **Section 10:** Accounting dispute resolution
- 31** **Section 11:** Contract performance
- 34** **Section 12:** Communications
- 35** **Section 13:** Postmaster guide to policies



SECTION 1

The purpose of this guide

This guide has been written to share the support that is available from Post Office for postmasters and their staff.

It is not intended to be a guide to everything that is available to you as a postmaster, but is intended to help signpost key support routes. References in this guide to 'postmaster' and 'you' should, where applicable, be read to mean branch managers and other branch staff. Nothing in this guide alters any of the terms of the contract between Post Office and postmasters or introduces any new operational procedures, it is simply a guide to the available support.

Why has this guide been created?

Post Office has changed – and continues to change. The support Post Office offers postmasters has been significantly increased, both in the network and in the support centres. This guide shares what that support looks like, so every postmaster can access support when they need it and to ensure postmasters are aware of the most up-to-date support available to them.

We also recognise that sometimes things go wrong, and when they do we'll work with the postmaster to resolve things as quickly as possible through the support processes we have in place. We know Post Office hasn't always got things right and we hope this guide gives you confidence that Post Office continues to change, with postmasters at the heart of everything we do.



SECTION 2

The relationship

You hold a unique position at the heart of the community you serve.

A position of trust. A position of respect.

You have chosen to invest in the Post Office brand and in the local community.

With all this, we share an obligation to the thousands of customers who use Post Office branches to ensure that we are providing the highest quality service and standards. It is beneficial for both Post Office and postmasters to work together to achieve this, and Post Office is committed to supporting you as a postmaster and resetting the relationship with any postmaster where we have got things wrong in the past.

The contract between Post Office and postmasters requires both parties to act in good faith. Post Office will behave fairly and professionally when working with postmasters, and as a postmaster we know you will do the same in return. This guide has been written to support the relationship between Post Office and postmasters, outlining the expectations of both parties to ensure we collectively deliver for the customers and communities we serve.

If you don't think we are getting it right, or don't think a member of the Post Office team is behaving in the right way, we want to know.



SECTION 3

General support

What we'll do for you and/or your team

We provide several direct sources of support for postmasters, including face-to-face support, telephone support and digital support and continue to build on these options to give you access to the support you need.

Digital support

Branch Hub <https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh> provides a digital platform for many tasks that used to be done over the phone. Information to help you troubleshoot issues is available on Branch Hub. More useful tools are being added regularly to make Branch Hub a one-stop shop for postmasters. We see Branch Hub as an important tool to provide even better support to postmasters and welcome any ideas for more things we can make digitally available for you.

Branch Hub also contains the Digital Service Desk, an online version of the IT Service Desk, to report IT issues. If you have an IT issue and are unable to use the Digital Service Desk, we also provide a phone number to contact the IT Service Desk on **GRO**

You will see throughout this guide that where digital support exists we have highlighted it with the arrow icon to the right so you know you can use a digital option whenever it is available.



Support with day-to-day transactions

We provide information on Horizon about how to transact products and services and topics such as branch balancing and discrepancies. To access this Help resource on Horizon, please press the Help Home button and then press the appropriate button for the topic you need.

What we ask of you and/or your team

Please use the support available to you as soon as possible if you experience an issue. Keep in touch with your area manager and please join events and meetings you are invited to as these are designed to benefit you and your business. Joining regular meetings or support calls can benefit you and your team.



Section 3: General support

Face-to-face support

Your area manager can be contacted by telephone, email or WhatsApp. They provide tailored support for an individual branch's needs and can share performance data and discuss operational issues with you. Area managers and regional managers also hold events and meetings for postmasters, which are valuable networking opportunities. You can add your area manager's name, phone number and email address below for reference.

Area Manager:

Telephone:

Email:

Please remember there are other support options available including training advisors, business support managers, security managers and audit advisors. They are all available to support you in the successful running of your business. For any support needs, please contact the Branch Support Centre on **GRO** or visit Branch Hub <https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh> in the first instance.



Section 3: General support

Service and Support

One of the key business areas that is here to support you is the Service and Support function whose role it is to continuously improve the experience of the support we provide to you.

Service Centres

The team supports branches through providing issue resolution through our two contact centres – the Branch Support Centre and the IT Digital Service Desk.



Branch Support Centre

IT Digital Service Desk

Network Monitoring & Reconciliation

Supports branches to maintain accurate branch accounts and ensure transactional errors are dealt with quickly and effectively. The team can be contacted at **branchanalysisteam**

Network Support & Resolution

The team supports branches through providing fast and effective resolution on any accounting issues raised. You can reach them via the Branch Support Centre.

Security Team

Supports branches by reducing risk of crime against Post Office Ltd to protect you and your team.

Grapevine



Section 3: General support

Telephone support

The Branch Support Centre can help if you experience an operational issue and should be your first port of call if you need any support but don't know how to get it. The Branch Support Centre can be contacted on **GRO**. If you need support with any of the following issues, the best number to call is listed below:

Arranging to resolve a discrepancy	Postmaster Account Support Team
ATM issues	Bank of Ireland ATM Helpdesk
Branch balancing	Branch Support Centre
Cash ordering	Inventory Support Desk
Fit and Proper declarations (You can also use Branch Hub to make a Fit and Proper Declaration)	 Branch Support Centre
IT issues (The Digital Service Desk on Branch Hub is also available to log an incident)	 IT Service Desk
Missing posters or leaflets	Branch Support Centre stock queries
Remuneration queries	Remuneration Support Centre
Reporting a security incident (For example robbery, burglary and sleight of hand incidents)	Grapevine
Reporting suspicious activity, fraud and suspicions of money laundering	Grapevine
Safe repairs	Insafe
Security equipment	Post Office Equipment Team
Signage replacement	Futurama (approved signage manufacturer)
Smart IDs	Branch Support Centre
Transaction Corrections (TCs)	For an explanation of the TC, call the number on the TC notification To dispute a TC it's the Disputes Team

GRO

You can find a full list of contact numbers at www.onepostoffice.co.uk/telephone-directory



Section 3: General support

The NFSP (nfsp.org.uk)

The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters (NFSP) is the trade association of those who own and operate Post Office branches around the country. As postmasters themselves, they are acutely aware of the challenges postmasters face on a day-to-day basis.

Mission

The NFSP is a membership-led organisation, supporting members to operate Post Office and retail outlets. It represents their interests at every level of policy and decision-making. It offers an opportunity to belong to, and take part in, a community working together for a more successful future. Membership is free.

The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors are either postmasters themselves or representatives of owner/operators of Post Office branches and provide a national reach for networking and support on all issues relating to Post Office branches. They work with Post Office on behalf of members to enable a positive and productive relationship between the network and Post Office.

Networking

Split into 10 regions, there are regular seminars that are open to postmasters with guest speakers from across Post Office, Royal Mail and other stakeholders, with the aim of informing postmasters of the latest product information and retail trends.

Retail Support

The NFSP offers free advice, help and support to postmasters to improve the business and help drive sales. This covers store layout, preferred suppliers, commercial property and finance.

Mails Support

A key component of every Post Office is mails segregation. The NFSP Mails Segregation Team offers support to enable postmasters to collectively achieve the agreed targets with Royal Mail.



SECTION 4

We're listening

We want you to be confident that if you have a complaint or feedback, you have the appropriate channel to escalate your concerns and that you have the confidence these are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner.

Insight from any complaints will help us identify trends and aim to fix the root cause of reoccurring issues so we want to hear from you:

Branch Hub – You can share your feedback at any time by following this link <https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh> and clicking on the 'Feedback and complaints' box. This will escalate the complaint to our Issue Resolution Team.

Area Managers – Where possible your Area Manager will aim to resolve the complaint or issue themselves but if unable to do so will escalate to our Issue Resolution Team.

Branch Support Centre – You can also contact the Branch Support Centre on **GRO** where a Branch Support Advisor will take ownership of your complaint and escalate, where necessary, to the Issue Resolution Team.

What we'll do for you and/or your team:

- When your complaint reaches the Issue Resolution Team, we will acknowledge it within 24 hours
- We will endeavour to resolve the complaint within ten business days and keep you informed of progress
- We aim to identify any wider trends in issues and complaints to fix the root cause of reoccurring issues
- We invite feedback on satisfaction to improve the service we provide

What we ask of you and/or your team:

- Please raise any complaints or feedback through Branch Hub, Area Managers or the Branch Support Centre; and
- Please respond to any requests for additional information as required.



Section 4: We're listening

Whistleblowing

We are committed to conducting business with the highest standards of honesty, integrity and openness. The term 'Whistleblowing' refers to the act of exposing potential or actual wrongdoing, misconduct and/or dangerous practices by reporting it. We want anyone who is aware of, or suspects, wrongdoing which affects others to raise their concerns safe in the knowledge that those concerns will be taken seriously and treated confidentially.

We want you and your team to feel able to tell us about any issues you feel have not been resolved, especially where they relate to failure to comply with the law, Post Office policy or procedures, miscarriages of justice, criminal offences, endangering someone's health and safety, damage to the environment, and covering up wrongdoing associated with these areas, or others.

What we'll do for you and/or your team:

- We support anyone who raises a genuine concern, even if it turns out to be mistaken
- We will fully investigate your concern and you will not be treated unfairly or liable to any contractual action as a result of raising issues
- We will send you an initial response within five working days

What we ask of you and/or your team:

- You can use the 'Feedback and complaints' button on Branch Hub to report any issues you are having in branch. If you don't have access to Branch Hub or believe that an issue you have raised on Branch Hub has not been fully resolved, you can raise the issue with your Area Manager
- If you don't feel able to raise an issue with your Area Manager or on Branch Hub, you can raise issues directly with the whistleblowing team by emailing GRO
- You can raise concerns anonymously, but this can limit the effectiveness of any investigation if we can't contact you to obtain additional information



SECTION 5

Training

Early days support

The support we provide as you begin your journey with Post Office is key to helping you build a vibrant Post Office. We start with the basics and build your confidence to help you realise the commercial opportunities that a Post Office brings.

What we'll do for you

- We'll ensure that we fully support you during your early days of appointment to guarantee you have the best possible start as a postmaster
- We'll reinforce and embed our training and build on the basics brilliantly to make sure you are proficient in Horizon navigation, balancing and cash management. To help you achieve this, we'll deliver to you a comprehensive package of training which includes eLearning, classroom training and delivery of up to six days of on-site support by highly skilled training professionals. This support will be supplemented by a minimum of one repeat balance visit, ensuring that you are comfortable with the preparation of the weekly accounts
- The completion of on-site training is not the end of the early days support relationship; after this period we pass the baton to your personal business support manager. Their goal is to tailor their support to help you and your team move from being good to great during the early months of appointment

What we ask of you

- Make best possible use of our skills, knowledge and experience – it really is that simple. Please arrange for you or your nominated team member(s) to be on site and available during the six days of initial training
- On completion of your six days' training, please be honest about any areas you and your staff require greater support on and make sure you use the experience our business support managers offer. They are highly skilled retail professionals and some have been postmasters themselves – they know just how you feel
- Above all, never be afraid to shout out for additional support. We recognise that we all learn in different ways and we have the willingness and flexibility to meet your needs



Section 5: Training

We also appreciate that training support is not just about those early days. It is important that you and/or your team continue to feel confident when conducting Post Office transactions and processes using Horizon.

What we'll do for you

- We'll provide a comprehensive operational training package to you and/or your team. We want you to feel you can complete the basic transactions and processes brilliantly
- We have a blended learning approach, which means we provide a combination of online learning programmes, in-branch training, face-to-face classroom courses and operational guides and work aids. There really is something for everyone who needs to operate in branch using Horizon
- Our Postmaster Operational Training Catalogue is available and has details of all the different options available. You'll find details of how the training can be assigned or booked, how long it is expected to take and where to go for further help with your learning needs
- We'll monitor and review changes in regulations for products and services and we'll provide you with the training you and your staff need to complete regularly to make sure your branch remains compliant and your customers are protected

What we ask of you

- Please take advantage of the learning available to you and your team. This will give you the confidence and skills to deliver great customer service
- Remember operational training is available to any new or existing members of your team so please browse the catalogue and take advantage of the learning options available. The catalogue is available at www.onepostoffice.co.uk/secure/postmaster-training-catalogue/new-postmaster-training-catalogue
- Please make sure everyone completes the required compliance training on time. If the need arises, please work with our Branch Standards team to address any compliance issues
- Remember to register all assistants and make sure each individual working on the Post Office counter has their own Smart ID

Did you know?

We ask for feedback on all our courses. Here is what some postmasters had to say:

"I've gained better understanding of how to investigate discrepancies."

Investigating Discrepancies pilot

"Amazing training pack, brilliant training, every question asked was answered confidently and explained in depth."

One-Day Basic Balancing classroom course

"Trainer was very professional and knowledgeable, the training exceeded my expectations."

One-Day Basic Transactions classroom course



Section 5: Training

Knowledge Articles

Did you know there is information on Branch Hub:

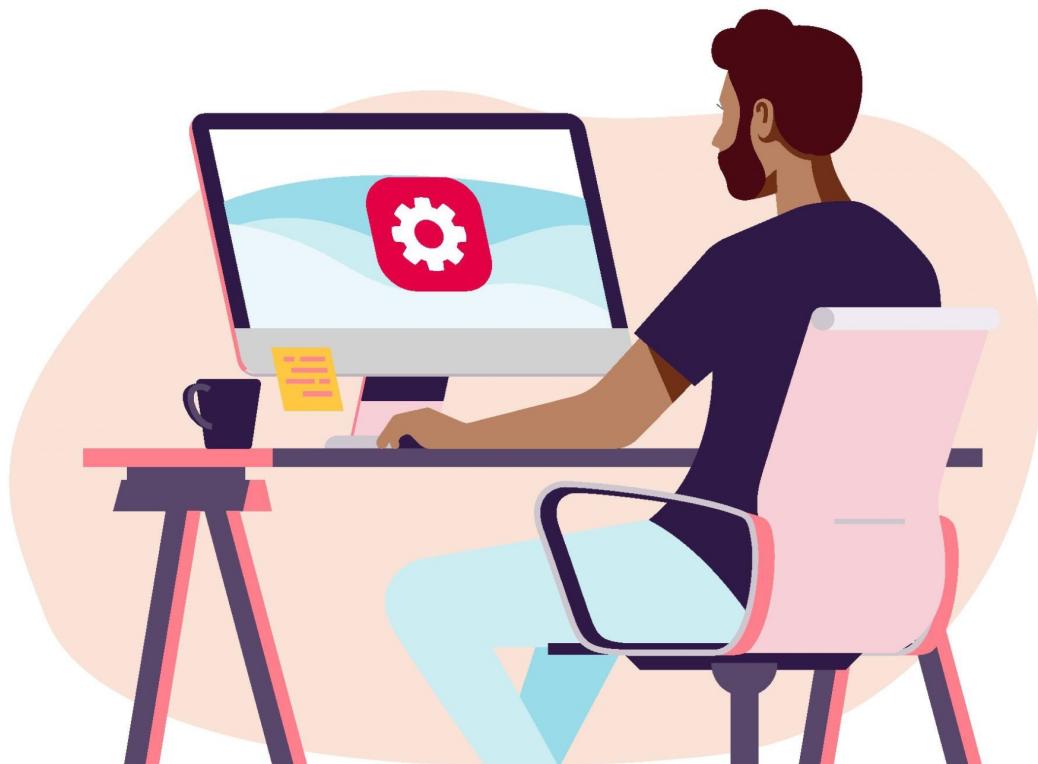
<https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh> to help you troubleshoot common issues and to boost your knowledge about Post Office processes, products and services? Frequently accessed examples include:

- Help with Transaction Correction processes
- Help with completing and monitoring reversals
- Help with weekly and monthly stock unit processes
- Help with IT issues

You can also raise your IT incident there if you can't resolve it using the information provided.

More documents are being added all the time. It's worth checking there first if you experience an issue or want to find out more information – it could save you a phone call to the Branch Support Centre.

You'll find the information on Branch Hub at <https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh>



SECTION 6

Customer experience

Customers visiting your branch want to have the best possible experience. Obvious aspects such as keeping your premises clean and tidy, having well-stocked shelves, being open when the customer information says you will be open and friendly, knowledgeable staff all contribute to the overall experience.

Not only does this ensure the customer enjoys their visit, but it is also likely to have financial benefits for your business. Acting on customer feedback, both positive and negative, can make a real difference and mean customers will want to come back. When there is a consistently good customer experience in the Post Office network, the Post Office brand is strengthened and both Post Office and postmasters alike benefit from that strong brand.

Standards

It is important to keep the branch safe, clean and accessible so customers can enjoy the branch experience.

What we'll do for you

- We provide advice and feedback on branch standards through your area manager. We can also help you with any further understanding of what is required to meet the Post Office branch standards through your area manager if you think you need it
- We provide branches with a customer feedback tool through Qualtrics (<https://postoffice.eu.qualtrics.com>)
- We have provided a simple and easy-to-follow Display Standards Guide that outlines the Post Office display standards for each area of your branch, including checklists, and contact details of where to find more help. Please ask your area manager for a copy

What we ask of you

- As a minimum, please keep the outside of your branch clean and well-maintained and make sure the entrance is accessible to everyone and your business complies with the Equality Act 2010
- Inside, please keep the branch clean, tidy and well-kept and the aisles clear and accessible. Please keep all counters and counter screens free from clutter



Did you know?

Postmasters regularly win awards and recognition for their high standards and customer service. Read their stories on the **One** website.



Section 6: Customer experience

Opening times

It is important branches open for their advertised opening times as it gives customers confidence they can access Post Office services when we've said they can. Making sure we have the correct opening hours for your branch also means we can accurately reflect this in your safe access and security monitoring times, keeping you and your staff safe and secure.

What we'll do for you

- We advertise the opening hours for your branch on our online Branch Finder tool accessed by customers at postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder. We aim to make the customer-facing website as informative as possible for customers
- We will consider any changes to opening hours you wish to make and work this through with you

What we ask of you and/or your team

- Please make sure your opening hours match the ones advertised to customers on Branch Finder so customers can access Post Office services during those times
- If you wish to make a permanent change to your opening hours, please contact the Branch Support Centre on [GRO](tel:0800138000) in the first instance, and please wait for confirmation that the request has been accepted before making any changes to your opening hours
- If the store is open longer than the Post Office, please keep the Paystation™ on the retail counter so customers can access certain services such as energy payments out of hours
- If you have a combi counter, please ensure it is available during your retail opening hours with trained staff available to serve customers



Did you know?

Google My Business is a free and easy to use tool for businesses to manage their online presence across Google Search and Maps.

To help customers find your Post Office you can simply verify your business and edit your business information online or with the Google My Business app.

50% of all local searches on a mobile lead to a store visit within 24 hours!

To learn more about how Post Office can help you manage your Google My Business account effectively speak to your Area Manager or contact the GMB team at [GRO](tel:0800138000)



Section 6: Customer experience

Health and safety at branches

Like anyone operating business premises, postmasters have a legal duty of care to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of your employees, customers and members of the public at or outside your premises. There are specific duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984, such as making sure your premises are safe, including external signage.

What we'll do for you

- We can direct you to the guidance available about your health and safety management obligations, including guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/>
- Employers who have five or more employees should undertake a risk assessment and you can find a tool for this at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/retail/index.htm>. Examples can be found at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/>
- Your area manager has been provided with accessibility guidelines and can give advice

What we ask of you

- Please regularly inspect your premises, fixtures and fittings (including external signage) to ensure you meet the necessary legislation and identify any potential issues that might need maintenance or repair
- Please familiarise yourself with and follow the guidance available to you such as the Health and Safety Executive guidance above

Signage

Having clear and strong signage outside your store makes a big difference in attracting footfall by shouting out that your Post Office is there, communicating the main services on offer and letting customers know you're open for business. Inside your branch, strong signage helps the customer find the service counters more easily, communicates when a position is open or closed and tells them what services you offer.

What we'll do for you

- We provide advice and feedback on signage requirements and standards through your area manager
- We also have a useful shopfront guide available to help you create a highly visible, attractive and cost-effective shopfront that will help you attract new customers. Please ask your area manager for a copy

What we ask of you

- If you are planning a major refit or refresh, our Branch Design team can help with advice and can be emailed at GRO



Section 6: Customer experience

Marketing material

Marketing material helps you promote products, services and offers to your customers, to help you grow sales.

What we'll do for you

- Periodically, new marketing material will be sent to you, according to the size of branch and products available, along with detailed display instructions so you know what to place where

What we ask of you

- Please display the material following the display instructions and remove any other older marketing material that isn't current
- Let us know, via the contact details in the display instructions, if you are receiving too much or too little material and we'll adjust this to meet what you need



Did you know?

Social media when used the right way could help grow your business.

We have a mobile phone app to download called #WeArePostOffice, which allows you and/or your staff to schedule and publish posts, compare performance with other branches, and also easily track the branch performance. You can register for this by speaking to your area manager or emailing [GRO](#)

In addition to this we have a Social Media Resource Library available via One (https://www.onepostoffice.co.uk/secure/social-media-resource-library/social-media-toolkits) which includes the standards to follow when using social media and also wider training on how to create a presence.



Section 6: Customer experience

Products

We need to show our regulators and customers that we are following the rules around promoting, introducing and arranging certain products including Financial Services, money laundering compliance and data protection rules. It's also important that all the products and services we offer are transacted correctly, for example mails items following pricing in proportion guidelines.

What we'll do for you

- We work with the relevant regulators and suppliers direct, saving you both time and cost. We provide you with products and services that are easy to transact on Horizon, with clear operating guidelines and training and support when needed
- Our website has a customer chat and contact function so we can answer customer queries on your behalf

What we ask of you

- Please make sure everyone working in the branch completes all their necessary compliance training within the required timescales and applies the learning from this training
- To ensure the best possible customer experience, please make sure all staff know how the products and services should be transacted



Did you know?

We offer Customer Experience University (CXu), a free training programme designed to coach an improved level of understanding of customer experience, why it is important to your customers and how to improve. CXu consists of two workbooks (Foundation and Advanced) that you can complete at your own pace and help you consolidate your existing skills and learning.

If you are interested, please speak to your area manager. They have worked through CXu and been accredited themselves to be able to really support your learning and help you get the benefits from the programme.



SECTION 7

Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

Getting cash and stock levels just right is an important part of running a Post Office branch. Keeping too much cash and stock is not only a security risk to you, your staff and customers, but it could also mean there is not enough cash and stock for other branches.

Too little cash or stock and you may not have enough for customers. There are also major productivity benefits in managing the levels of cash, stock and currency at the correct levels in that less cash, stock and currency makes it easier for you to count.

Accurate transactions

Getting the basics right and ensuring customer transactions are processed accurately helps reduce potential mistakes in branch, makes sure the customer gets the service they want and limits any financial losses to you.

Some top tips:

- Please check the amount on screen after you enter the customer's transaction and make sure the Horizon online basket is empty before serving the next customer
- When completing chip and PIN transactions, please make sure the correct withdrawal or deposit icon is pressed
- Remember to double-check the physical cash or stock that's being transferred to or from the customer before the transaction is completed
- Please ensure any staff serving at the counter concentrate on the transaction in hand as this makes sure customer transactions are dealt with accurately and it also helps protect against sleight-of-hand incidents

Cash declarations and overnight cash holdings

Cash in branch needs to be accurately checked and recorded on a regular basis to ensure the right levels of cash can be delivered and returned. It will also help you or your staff identify and resolve any discrepancies quickly or ask for our help in doing so. Holding too much cash is inefficient for you, but also presents a security risk that could impact your personal safety and that of your staff and customers.



Section 7: Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

What we'll do for you

- We make sure you have enough cash to meet customer demand, with notes and coins provided at no cost to you, and we plan and carry out cash deliveries and pick-ups from your branch
- We'll work with you to establish the appropriate levels of cash to hold if circumstances change
- We can provide you with information on what we think your cash holdings are at any time
- We'll provide support in investigating any cash discrepancies you may experience
- We provide you with the appropriate security equipment to store the cash and stock required in your branch

What we ask of you

- Please complete an accurate cash declaration on Horizon for all the stock units used every day as close as possible to, but no later than, 7pm. This should include any stock units that may have only been used to accept Transaction Acknowledgements or to transfer cash/stock/currency. If a stock unit is not used, or if the branch is closed on the next day, please make sure the cash declaration is the last transaction on Horizon that day
- During the declaration, please declare notes and coins against the correct denomination, any damaged or mutilated notes should be declared as 'unusable'. Your cash declarations need to be accurate and a true reflection of the cash held in branch – otherwise it's difficult to plan cash for your branch and to provide support if any discrepancies are identified. After you've completed your declaration, use the variance check function – this makes sure you are identifying any potential discrepancies on the day they happen
- Please check the planned order on Horizon before each remittance day to find out how much cash the branch will receive or will have to return on the next remittance. Any cash return pouches should be prepared ready for collection by the CViT driver by the appropriate time on your remittance day
- You can keep reviewing the level of cash by looking at the balance snapshot and identifying the level of payments against receipts. Please let the inventory team know or **GRO** if there are any major changes to circumstances for your branch, such as a new business customer



Section 7: Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

Balancing

All branches need to complete their Trading Period once a month within their designated group. Best practice is to balance weekly so any discrepancies can be identified quickly and over a shorter time frame.

What we'll do for you

- If a branch discrepancy arises, we provide support and assistance over the phone to help identify and fix the cause of the issue. If the reason for the discrepancy cannot be found, a dedicated branch support case handler will work with you to investigate the discrepancy

What we ask of you

- Please complete an accurate Trading Period each month, and a weekly balance whenever possible, declaring and settling any discrepancies. If a discrepancy is settled to cash, please make sure the corresponding physical cash is put into the account
- If you need help with a branch discrepancy, please call the Branch Support Centre on **GRO**



Section 7: Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

Remittances of Cash, Stock & Currency

Please follow the correct process for preparing and receiving remittances to reduce the likelihood of errors in branch.

What we'll do for you

- We ensure that any remittances sent to postmasters are prepared accurately to minimise errors in branch. We'll issue a Transaction Correction if there is an error
- We'll investigate any discrepancies in remittances and highlight any issues in branch, for example stock not being booked in, as soon as possible

What we ask of you

- When preparing a remittance, it's worth having two members of staff on hand to double-check the contents of the pouch before sealing it, if possible
- Please record the amounts being returned accurately and when receiving remittances check the amount received matches the delivery note
- Please input a delivery of stock items into Horizon within 24 hours of delivery and double-check manually when inputting quantities
- If there is an error in the remittance received, please contact the Branch Support Centre on **GRO** as soon as possible



Did you know?

Our cash centres use Bank of England-approved equipment including High Speed Note Sorters to identify discrepancies and counterfeit notes. The note sorters are tested regularly to ensure only authentic, good quality notes are recirculated to branches. Bank of England carries out regular announced and unannounced audits to ensure we are complying with procedures, especially on how the equipment is used and to ensure we are adhering to the strictest of security standards.



Section 7: Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

Transaction Corrections

Transaction Corrections should be kept to a minimum in an efficient branch, and following the guidelines on managing cash and stock will help you ensure this for your branch. However, occasionally a Transaction Correction will need to be issued. If you keep getting Transaction Corrections for the same reasons, it would be worth checking your operational processes, and please don't hesitate to ask us for support if you need to.

What we'll do for you

- We always explain the reason for a Transaction Correction and answer any questions you may have about it
- We always try to process Transaction Corrections as quickly as possible
- If you dispute a Transaction Correction, we'll work with you and/or your team to investigate it

What we ask of you

- It is up to you how you manage Transaction Corrections in your branch. For example, you may only want to accept or dispute them yourself and for staff to leave them for you to deal with – if this is the case, then please make sure your staff know what to do with Transaction Correction messages on Horizon
- If you don't understand a Transaction Correction or require more information, please call the telephone number on the Transaction Correction notification for further support
- If you don't agree with a Transaction Correction, please contact the Transaction Correction Disputes Team or **GRO** or email **GRO**
- Please note you won't be able to complete your monthly balancing until all Transaction Corrections are accepted



Section 7: Managing cash and stock and branch balancing

Branch Monitoring

To ensure the accuracy and integrity of branch cash and stock across the Post Office network, the accounting and transactions completed by branches is monitored remotely by Post Office to provide you with the best support.

What we'll do for you

- If we identify a potential issue with branch accounting or transactions, we'll complete a desktop investigation to understand the potential issue in more detail
- If the cause of the issue is simple, we'll telephone the branch to explain how to resolve the issue
- Where the cause is more complex or the branch requires more support, we'll arrange to visit the branch and work with you to try to resolve the issue
- If we can't identify the cause of the issue, we'll arrange for an audit at the branch. The aim of an audit is to ensure the accuracy and integrity of cash and stock at the branch and to provide support to the postmaster with any accounting and compliance issues. An audit will always be conducted by at least two Post Office staff and we will always explain the reason(s) for conducting the audit at the start
- If the audit identifies an issue with the accuracy and integrity of cash and/or stock, then we will carry out further investigations into the potential causes of the issue

What we ask of you

- Please follow the processes for managing cash and stock. Meeting the expectations around cash management, cash declarations, balancing, remittances and Transaction Corrections helps us to identify any branches that may need additional support to achieve this
- If you experience any unexplained discrepancies in your branch, please notify us as quickly as possible, whatever the size of the discrepancy. We can then provide you with the right level of support to try to resolve the situation
- If we contact you about any issue identified in your branch, please work with us to help rectify the issue or provide additional information



SECTION 8

Branch security

Your safety and the safety of your team and your customers is very important to us. Full guidelines on branch security for your particular branch format can be found in the Security Operations Guide – please follow the guidelines at all times. This can be found on Branch Hub by searching for Security Operations Guide or you can request a copy by contacting Grapevine on **GRO**

What we'll do for you

- Where applicable, we supply security equipment to every branch according to each branch's circumstances and contract type
- We work with the police and other external authorities on your behalf to help protect the network from crime
- We provide support to promote security compliance
- We have a zero tolerance approach to issues of violence and abuse towards you and your team
- We provide support in the event of any security incidents at branches

What we ask of you

- For your safety, please follow the correct procedures for opening and closing the branch. When entering the branch, make sure the door is locked before the alarm is turned off
- Please formally identify all visitors, including contractors, and record their details
- Always keep your working cash to a minimum and never have more than the maximum your branch format allows
- Please store bulk cash in the safe, with any time-overlocks on at all times, and please keep all safes locked with the key removed from the safe lock
- Please secure the keys to the cash funding units (e.g. BidiSafe) and drop safes in the main safe during business hours
- Please make sure you use appropriate security equipment
- If you or your team experience any abuse or violence at the branch, please call Grapevine on **GRO** as quickly as possible
- You can register with the Grapevine service by calling **GRO** to receive proactive security alerts for your area and for the network



SECTION 9

Remuneration

When running a business that includes a Post Office, you'll need to understand the revenues and costs of that part of your operation. We provide a monthly advice or invoice that breaks down your branch's revenues by product type and sales volumes, so you can look at your branch sales performance and identify opportunities for growing income and margin.

What we'll do for you

- We remunerate you for transactions that take place in your branch and any that take place online or through our direct channels that are linked to your branch
- We make sure those fees are accurately calculated and paid in line with our obligations, as set out in the contractual remuneration booklets. We occasionally update those remuneration booklets and provide all interim notifications of contractual changes to the remuneration booklets through the monthly remuneration advice/invoice inserts, or by personal letter to your registered contact address
- We provide a Remuneration Support Centre that you can contact by phone on GRO or email at GRO if you have any questions about remuneration

What we ask of you

- If you haven't already, please check whether your business should be VAT registered – information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/vat-registration>. Please inform us if you should be VAT registered so we can ensure your contract and remuneration are set up correctly
- Many postmasters already have, but if you haven't done so please register on the online portal at <http://www.opustrustweb.co.uk/pol-agents/> to download and review each monthly remuneration advice/invoice. Where VAT is paid, please use these monthly invoices to complete your quarterly VAT returns. If you identify any discrepancy with your own records (or with reference to a Horizon Remuneration Report) please contact the Remuneration Support Centre above as quickly as possible. You can also contact this team if you forget your password for the online portal above or if you need a temporary password to register on the portal
- Please read and make sure you understand your remuneration booklet and any interim changes we let you know about. If in doubt, please contact your area manager
- If you make any changes to your company, your contact email address or personal address, or your bank account details, please tell the Remuneration Support Centre as soon as possible



SECTION 10

Accounting dispute resolution

If things do not quite go to plan, we want you to be confident that if you report the issue to us we will be there to support you. By working together to find a solution, we hope to be able to work out reasonable and practical steps to resolve any issue. By taking this approach, we want to be able to give you the confidence that Post Office will resolve the matter without it taking too long to reach a conclusion.

We ask that as far as possible you or your team undertake your own investigations in branch and we can provide support for you to do this. The Branch Accounting guide sets out the support available and can be found on One at <https://www.onepostoffice.co.uk/media/48740/investigating-discrepancies-in-branch-12052021-pdf.pdf>

Top Tips for investigating discrepancies in your branch:

1. Please check the cash you have counted has been entered into Horizon correctly
2. Recount the cash and remember to check drawers for forgotten cash
3. Check bulk coin – a full bag may have been opened or obscured from view
4. Check bundled notes – they might not be full bundles or the denominations may have become mixed together
5. For a shared stock unit, check the correct number of cash declarations have been made. Could a cash declaration have been missed or completed more than once?
6. If you have Lottery or Paystation™, has the physical cash been removed from your retail side and included in Post Office cash?
7. If you have an ATM, have the correct amounts been entered into Horizon daily?

When you complete a monthly trading period balance, any branch discrepancies for that trading period will need to be accounted for so that you can start the new trading period afresh, with zero discrepancies. Depending on your branch type, before rolling over into the new trading period, you will have the following option available on the Horizon Online screen:

Review or Dispute: You can select this option for all discrepancies. The system derived figure won't move, but the branch will return to balance. The discrepancy amount will move into a centralised holding account at the end of the trading period, awaiting dispute, further investigation, a Transaction Correction or payment to Post Office. If you choose Review or Dispute, please call the Branch Support Centre to let them know what you would like to do with the amount moved, as they will be able to provide support and assistance.

How to dispute a discrepancy

Whichever option you use to settle a discrepancy at the end of the trading period, you can still dispute the discrepancy with Post Office. To do this please contact the Branch Support Centre. If you can evidence the reason for the discrepancy or if you firmly believe the discrepancy will be resolved through a transaction correction, please call the Branch Support Centre with all the details you have.



Section 10: Accounting dispute resolution

What we'll do for you and/or your team

- We will investigate any accounting dispute properly, fully and fairly, and ensure that it complies with its contractual obligations
- Once you make that initial call into Branch Support Centre, we will support you through your balancing issue and if we are unable to resolve your issue we will pass your case over to the Investigations team
- Your case will be picked up by an Investigations Advisor who will notify you by phone and/or email to let you know your case has been picked up
- At the end of the investigation, the Investigations Advisor will inform you of the outcome of your discrepancy and they will offer you an associated report of the findings
- If you disagree with the outcome of an investigation, we have set up a Review Committee to consider the case

Transaction Corrections

You may still receive a Transaction Correction for the discrepancy. If so and you need any support, please call the number on the Transaction Correction notification – the team will be able to explain why we sent it and answer any questions. If you disagree with the reason for a Transaction Correction, please contact our Transaction Correction Disputes Team at **GRO**

Whichever option you choose to settle a discrepancy at the end of the Trading Period, you can still contact the Branch Support Centre for support to investigate the discrepancy or to dispute it.

Current issues with Horizon

We have a process in place to proactively identify issues that have the potential to impact branches. We also have a process in place for Fujitsu to investigate potential issues raised by postmasters. We inform branches about issues that affect their operations through Branch Focus or, for more urgent issues, through a Memoview.

What we'll do for you

- We make sure we address any issues we are aware of that have the potential to impact branch accounts or operations
- If you have any balancing discrepancies that you cannot explain, we'll check for current issues we're aware of to see if this could be the cause
- If you think there is an operational issue with Horizon that may explain a balancing discrepancy, we will ask Fujitsu to investigate and we will keep you updated. If Fujitsu does identify that the issue raised could impact branch accounts or operations, we will follow our processes to resolve the issue

What we ask of you

- If you experience any branch discrepancies, please follow the guidance set out in the Branch Accounting – Discrepancies and Dispute Resolution Support document. As a reminder you can find this at <https://www.onepostoffice.co.uk/media/48740/investigating-discrepancies-in-branch-12052021-pdf.pdf>
- Please notify the Branch Support Centre on **GRO** if you experience an operational issue with Horizon



SECTION 11

Contract performance

Contracts

There may be times when you want to refer to your contract with Post Office. We understand that postmasters may not always be able to easily find their contract in their own records, but if you can, referring to it may be enough to answer your query. However, if this doesn't answer your question, please contact **GRO** and we'll be in touch to answer your query and provide a copy of your specific contract where required.

Contract performance

There may be occasions when the obligations as set out in your contract are not being met. If this is the case, Post Office will take steps to ensure performance of the contract, while also supporting you in this process.

What we'll do for you

- If there is an issue, we ensure that all necessary steps have been taken by our teams, including your area manager, to support you and address the identified issue. We'll investigate the issue fully and fairly, gathering as much information as possible relating to the issue that has come to light, working as appropriate with both you and other Post Office teams, before taking any formal contractual action
- We'll act on any contact from you, written or otherwise, as quickly as possible

What we ask of you and/or your team

- Where reasonably possible, please work with us to resolve any performance issues through the available methods
- Once any investigation has been concluded, please comply with the terms of any letter (including a written direction) issued by us



Section 11: Contract performance

Suspension

There are rare circumstances where it is necessary to suspend the postmaster from operating the branch. Any period of suspension should be as short as possible and any suspended postmaster will receive appropriate support throughout this time. A specific contract advisor will be assigned to keep any suspended postmaster up to date with developments during their suspension and will act as a single point of contact through this process.

What we'll do for you

- We only carry out a suspension where absolutely necessary and when all alternatives have been considered
- We'll keep in contact with you throughout the suspension period, and respond to any contact from you quickly as possible
- We pay remuneration during the suspension
- We'll keep the suspension under regular review and bring it to a conclusion as soon as is practical

What we ask of you and/or your team

- If a suspension takes place, please comply with the terms of the suspension and be open and honest with us so the situation can be resolved as quickly as possible
- Please respond to any written correspondence and telephone calls from us as quickly as possible and please remain flexible and available for meetings with the contract advisor to minimise the length of the suspension



Section 11: Contract performance

Termination

Termination is an extremely serious step and it is vital that the termination process is as clear as reasonably possible so any potential misunderstandings between the postmaster and Post Office can be avoided. There may, however, be circumstances when termination of a postmaster's contract needs to be considered and a decision to terminate made following a full and fair investigation by Post Office.

What we'll do for you

- We'll gather as much information as possible relating to the issue that has caused termination to be considered, working as appropriate with you and other Post Office teams
- We'll treat you fairly throughout the termination procedure
- We'll act on and respond to any contact from you as quickly as possible
- We'll give you the opportunity to dispute any decision taken to terminate the contract and ask that the decision be reviewed

What we ask of you and/or your team

- Please be open and honest with us and please respond to written correspondence and telephone calls as quickly as possible to support the decision-making process
- Please remain flexible and available for meetings with the contract advisor if required



Did you know?

The postmaster contract contains certain termination rights meaning that the contract can be terminated without notice (i.e. effective immediately). This may only potentially occur in circumstances where the postmaster has committed a breach that is so serious and fundamental to the contract that it cannot continue. The following are examples of why a contract may be terminated without notice:

- Where the postmaster no longer holds a valid property interest (a freehold or leasehold demonstrating exclusive control of the basic business)
- Where the postmaster no longer operates the basic business (the business carried out from the branch premises, for example selling the associate retail business)
- Where the postmaster has admitted theft of Post Office funds
- Sustained non-compliance in the operation of the branch

It's important that you are familiar with your contract and the Contracts Team **GRO** can provide advice if you have any questions.



SECTION 12

Communications

We provide the One website at www.onepostoffice.co.uk for all news, resources and business updates.

For you and your team

- We send pop-up memoview updates that appear on the Horizon terminal for urgent operational information. You can also sign up to our memoview text service.
- We publish personalised operational updates and change information each week in Branch Focus that branch teams need to know, such as product updates. This is published on Horizon, by email and on One
- We send out regular printed guides to update you on all our in-branch marketing campaigns and how to display the point of sale materials provided

For you

- We send business announcements when we have something important to share, and a weekly One News email that summarises key issues or changes and explains how we will support you
- We hold regular events for you to share your views and hear from our Executive team, led by CEO Nick Read
- You will be supported by local communications via your area and regional managers, such as regional Facebook groups which are available for you to connect with us and with other postmasters

Operational tasks

What we'll do for you

- We provide Branch Hub as an interactive tool for you and/or your staff. Branch Hub provides a digital tool for several tasks that used to need a phone call to us
- Online tasks include: – ordering stock and cash and coin – reporting an IT issue – telling us what marketing materials you need for your branch – completing your annual Fit and Proper declaration – finding information to help you troubleshoot issues – giving feedback or submitting a complaint
- More useful features such as accessing your branch sales performance and being able to access local marketing support will be added to help make Branch Hub a one-stop shop for postmasters
- Sign up here if you haven't already: <https://branchhub.postoffice.co.uk/bh>

What we ask of you

- Please read and use the communications channels we provide for you to ensure you keep up to date with Post Office news and developments. We welcome your feedback and questions
- Please make sure you and your team are aware of and implement any changes to products and services or ways of working that we let you know about
- Please keep us up to date with your latest contact details so we can make sure you get communications the way you want to receive them
- Sign up now if you haven't already: www.onepostoffice.co.uk/signup/



SECTION 13

Postmaster Guide to Policies

1. Introduction

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.

What areas do the policies cover?

2. Setting branches up for success (Page 36)

- Postmaster Onboarding
- Postmaster Training

3. We're listening... (Page 37)

- Postmaster Complaint Handling

4. Branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support (Page 38)

- Network Monitoring and Audit Support
- Network Cash and Stock Management
- Network Transaction Correction
- Postmaster Account Support
- Postmaster Accounting Dispute Resolution

5. Our agreement with the postmaster (Page 42)

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

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, area managers and the Branch Support Centre. We'll take any complaint raised with us seriously.



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

2. Setting branches up for success

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.

Principles set out in each policy

The Postmaster Onboarding Policy

The Postmaster Onboarding Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- Managing postmaster applications
- Supporting new postmasters before and after 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
- We'll provide early days support, via a dedicated Onboarding Support Manager

The 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

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 and work aids, including via Branch Hub and Horizon Help and we will provide 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



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

3. We're listening...

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.

Principles set out in each policy

Postmaster Complaint Handling Policy

The Postmaster Complaint Handling Policy sets out 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
- Updating branches on key issues

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

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
- We'll seek agreement before we close any complaints
- On a monthly basis, we'll share issues that concern branches, explain how quickly we've been able to resolve them and what we are doing if they haven't been resolved
- Our front line teams, such as area managers or the branch support centre, will triage any written or verbal complaints to identify any concerns that should be treated as whistleblowing and passed onto the Whistleblowing team

Whistleblowing concerns can be raised anonymously, but we encourage the person raising the concern to provide their details. If we can't contact them to obtain additional information, due to there being insufficient details within the report, 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 contact the relevant area manager or Grapevine on **GRO**. If this doesn't answer the concern, anyone can raise issues directly with the whistleblowing team via the email: **GRO**



4. Branch monitoring, cash and stock management and account support

Several teams, including Network Monitoring and Audit Support; Postmaster Account Support; Branch Support and Cash and Stock Management, ensure that any support branches need to manage cash and stock, or help with accounting practices and discrepancies, is available.

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

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



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

Principles set out in each policy**Postmaster Transaction Correction Policy**

The Postmaster Transaction Correction Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- Issuing Transaction Corrections and Transaction Acknowledgements
- Providing information and supporting evidence to the branch
- Investigating disputed transaction corrections

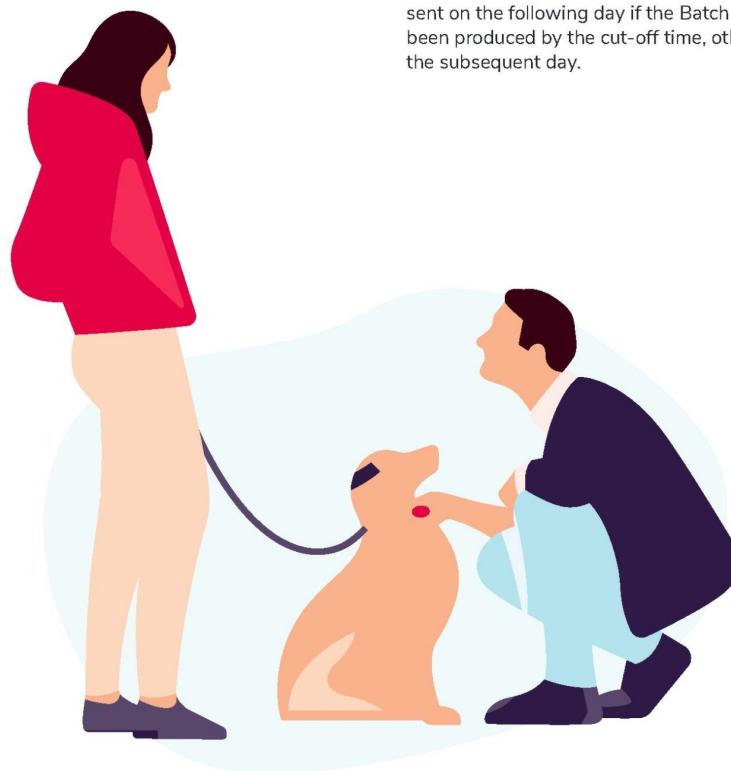
Following Post Office guidelines on branch accounting processes should help branches reduce the need for transaction corrections to be issued. However, sometimes branches will receive a transaction correction or transaction acknowledgement.

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 days, keeping the branch updated if it takes longer

We'll arrange for a transaction acknowledgement to be sent each morning for the transactions carried out during the previous day on the lottery terminal or Paystation™¹, so cash and stock will be correctly adjusted on Horizon.

¹ 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.



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

Network Monitoring and Audit Support Policy

The Network Monitoring and Audit Support Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- Monitoring the network
- Scheduling supportive visits and audits
- Carrying out an audit
- Involving the Contracts team
- Performing closure audits
- Performing post Security Incident audits
- Assuring quality

We carry out network monitoring and audit support activity to maintain the accuracy of branches' accounting records of cash and stock. We also monitor branches' compliance with accounting practices as it helps us 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, audit support 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 closure audit
- We'll aim to keep branches fully engaged with any audit support provided and invite questions and give feedback

Postmaster Account Support

The Postmaster Account Support Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- Understanding contractual obligations
- Monitoring accounts
- Notifying about discrepancies in the centralised holding account
- Supporting branches with discrepancy disputes
- Arranging payments
- Managing refusals to pay

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.



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

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

- We'll aim to contact the branch by telephone, where we can, and follow up with a letter and account statement to see if we can help the branch understand the reason for the discrepancy
- 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
- After a branch has contacted the Branch Support Centre, or the transaction correction issuing team and if, between us, we can't agree on the reason for the discrepancy or transaction correction, the branch can dispute it and request an investigation
- If the branch understands and accepts the discrepancy, or transaction correction, knowing it's an error caused 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

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 raise a dispute and we'll investigate.

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

- We'll start by pointing the branch to the Branch Support Centre or the contact details listed on the transaction correction, if different. They'll talk through basic steps to explain the transaction correction or help the branch staff find the discrepancy
- If there is no resolution of the matter at this point, it will be escalated to a Tier 2 team who can carry out more detailed investigation. We'll aim to reach a resolution within two weeks and keep the branch informed on progress
- In the event that a branch discrepancy or transaction correction matter could not be resolved by the Tier 2 team, the issue will be escalated to a Tier 3 team for resolution
- When the dispute is resolved, we'll let the branch staff know the outcome and explain why we reached the conclusion we did

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



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

5. Our agreement with the postmaster

The Contracts Team and area managers will use these policies to ensure that postmasters are treated fairly and professionally in relation to the agreements held with us.

Collective principles

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

- Contact a Contract Advisor, by emailing [GRO](#)
- Request information and evidence from us about any contract performance issues identified and the investigation process
- Contact the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters (NFSP) representative for support
- At the postmaster's own expense, arrange legal or other representation for written correspondence or meetings with us

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 the contractual basis, of any formal action taken, clear

Principles set out in each policy

The 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.

The 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



Section 13: Postmaster Guide to Policies

- 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) or the person in charge, 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 the previous six-month trading period, excluding Christmas trading)
- 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
- 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

The 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.

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

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.

The Postmaster Termination Decision Review Policy

The Postmaster Termination Decision Review Policy sets out our principles for these processes:

- Notifying postmasters of the right to have a termination decision 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 termination, 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 termination correspondence
- We'll assign the review to a Review Panel, within two working days. The members of the Review Panel 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, so we can establish whether we had the right to terminate the contract
- The Review Panel will make their decision and inform the postmaster what it is and the reason for it



POL00028027
POL00028027



Version 2.1 October 2021

