

Private & Confidential

Ben Foat  
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Cc David Bickerton  
Amanda Burton

Dear Ben,

**SPEAK UP COMPLAINT**

I wish to make a formal complaint about the treatment that I have received from Post Office, but particularly from the Group Chief Executive Officer, Nick Read. I am writing to you directly, as my previous letter and complaints outlining whistleblowing complaints, raised whilst in employment with POL have been to date been ignored and not treated in line with POL's Whistleblowing Policy.

**In summary:**

I have been recklessly dismissed from the organisation as a direct result of me raising several significant protected disclosures and have suffered discrimination from the start of my employment. Despite raising these matters directly with Nick Read, these issues were either ignored or perpetuated by him. The issues were again not investigated after I sent a whistleblowing complaint letter to the Chairman in May. In my experience, coming from private, mainly FTSE 250 organisations, where a business is out of control to the same extent as the POL is, the Board typically steps in to closely monitor the CEO, the GE operating board, the risks, the governance & compliance processes, the behaviours and ethical practices. There is far too much autonomy in POL, unchecked behaviours and poor levels of accountability. The negative PR and issues in the public domain, are all borne out of internal decisions, whether it is approving RemCo papers, appointing inexperienced execs, allowing poor practices to prevail, mis-managing public funds, or perpetuating the 'boys' club etc.

**Background:**

After over 30 years of an unblemished record, I have been unfairly dismissed, as a result of the disclosures I have made and / or based on my gender. Nick Read has pinned my dismissal on the unsubstantiated allegations from a disaffected group of individuals who wanted me out of the Post Office. He knew very well that these were disruptive individuals with significant performance and behaviour issues. When I started to manage these individuals, they took the opportunity to shout about allegations of bullying or intimidation, which seems to be the default position for many employees within the POL (and across the civil service). It was obvious to Henry Staunton and others, that the allegations being made were by (in his words) a 'lynch mob' who were being deliberately vindictive, to hide their own shortcomings. My lawyers have concluded that the allegations are unfounded and have now been used as a convenient excuse for Nick Read to remove me from POL, as a result of me raising serious complaints over the course of 6 months. Many such complaints constitute protected disclosures and sex discrimination.

The scope of the investigation was to establish if I displayed a "pattern of behaviour", to make a recommendation for a disciplinary, if needed. It is clear from the conclusion of the investigation, that there was not sufficient evidence to find that there was a pattern of behaviour nor was there any recommendation to take disciplinary action against me and whatever the claims put forward, these needed to be considered against the significant mitigating evidence submitted as part of the investigation (including that Nick Read personally encouraged me to performance manage these individuals). However, in May, Nick Read extended my probation for one month, without any justifiable reasons to do so, and then at the end of June, without any consultation

or follow up meeting, I was instantly dismissed by letter (for the reasons set out below), and I was not given the right of appeal. No one else has been treated in this way at POL other than the Postmasters that were wrongly accused in the past. This was an extreme and unethical reaction to the weak allegations being made and it is obvious that the true reasons are that I have raised whistleblowing concerns over the course of my employment, that Nick Read has found it uncomfortable having someone in his team raising such concerns and challenging him. My intention in raising these matters during my employment, was to seek Nick Read's support in rectifying them.

**Nick Read:**

Nick Read's sole reason for recruiting me, was not to do what was in my job description i.e., to transform the culture, to deliver organisational effectiveness, to commercially grow the business (and to deliver/support the Postmasters), the only priorities (apparent from day one), were to continue on the same ridiculous quest of my predecessor, Angela Williams, to a) ensure Nick Read received a significantly enhanced remuneration package and b) to remove Al Cameron, the Group CFO, from the business. The latter issues are well documented from December 2022 onwards. I was unable to deliver on either and felt the subsequent decisions made by the Shareholder and UKGI, not to support either a substantial increase to Nick Read's package and/or the 'unfair' dismissal of Al Cameron, were both the right decisions for Post Office. This resulted in a complete shift in behaviour from Nick Read towards me in January 2023; he was clearly very angry and disappointed, as per his follow up messages and bullying demands. I also sent Henry Staunton a note in January and had a follow up conversation, to say Nick Read had changed his behaviour towards me and was effectively shutting down on me. The latter was the foundation, along with me raising several other significant complaints and concerns from early December and throughout my employment, which constitute protected disclosures, and is the true basis upon which I was dismissed. The latter claim(s) are fully supported by documentation, witnesses and unquestionable evidence (unlike the unsubstantiated and blown out of proportion verbal allegations of bullying which have been unfairly used against me).

In summary, my complaints centre on:

**Protected Disclosures made in respect of breaches of legal obligations:**

**1: Pay & Benefits of Nick Read**

1. One of the protected disclosures made concerned Nick Read's desperate desire to have a substantially increased pay and benefits package. From the start of my employment, the key priority was for me to obtain significant improvement in both his fixed and variable income. There was significant correspondence on this topic, with meetings held and recorded about his dissatisfaction with his current package, including threats from him of raising a formal grievance, negative PR and potentially leaving POL and claiming constructive dismissal should his remuneration package not be increased. Such conversations involved the chairman, the POL Remuneration Committee, the POL Board, UKGI and at the time, BEIS and the Secretary of State.
2. In my first few weeks, I felt bullied by Nick Read's messages and behaviour (which were delivered over Teams messages, mainly on a Friday evening, ruining my weekends) concerning his dissatisfaction with his pay. Furthermore, the bonus schemes for the whole organisation were held in abeyance and neglected, whilst attempts were made by the Remuneration Committee and Chairman (along with all the government bodies) to secure Nick Read's own increased pay and bonus plan via the Secretary of State.
3. The failed attempts to get Nick Read these increases resulted in him turning against me, refusing to acknowledge my work and contribution on critical areas such as GE behaviours, Succession Planning, OD, risks, poor governance and compliance matters, breaches of law, financial controls, culture, engagement, people strategy etc.
4. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023, Nick Read claimed in front of a parliamentary select committee that he recognised he was "well paid" which is not how he felt at all and was untrue. It did not go unnoticed that the letter to terminate my employment with POL, came shortly after this hearing.

## 2: RemCo Governance

1. The reports and approval papers supplied to RemCo over the last year, formed the basis for the decisions on bonus payments. All papers to RemCo received Nick Read's approval prior to submission. It was known that Lisa Harrington, the RemCo Chair had limited RemCo experience, and as such Angela Williams, a direct report to Nick Read, had a significant and influential role; she constructed all the papers to confirm bonus payments, which Nick Read would approve, particularly the paper in relation to the Inquiry metrics. She was supported heavily by a Reward Director and external consultant.
2. She put forward a paper which recommended that Nick Read had a multiplier added to his total bonus calculation, yet the multiplier should have only applied to his personal element. This resulted in at the time in a significant over-payment to Nick Read in 2022, which was challenged by the Shareholder, resulting in the RemCo chair personally apologising to the Shareholder. The Rewards Director resigned and complained that Angela Williams, the then interim and part-time CPO orchestrated this, and it would seem totally feasible that Nick Read was fully aware. It took months of deliberating before the Shareholder finally (and reluctantly) agreed to approve this element of his bonus (mainly because the bonus had already been paid to Nick Read, and because he was already threatening to leave over his package). It was also brought to my attention that Angela Williams financially benefited from this additional 'multiplier' (along with Ben Foat) who, as GE members, should be subject to RemCo scrutiny, however, I understand this was not declared. I raised this with Nick Read, but no action was taken.
3. Angela Williams worked full time as the interim CPO, and then in April 2022, secured another full-time executive position in a different business, but continued working part-time, 16 hours per week, until December 2022, as a GE member, and CPO, whilst earning c£180k pa from Post Office. She asked me to keep her position quiet as she said it was not widely known at Corsearch, her new employer, where she had started in April 2022. I am unsure if this was disclosed and approved by RemCo, however, it was clearly constituting a breach of the company policy on employment and specifically does not conform with the contractual terms of Execs to be 'fully dedicated' to POL. This arrangement caused extreme unrest across the organisation, but particularly within my direct reports and is the basis for a small group of them being unmanageable with ongoing disruptive behaviour and resulted in this awful situation I find myself in.
4. I understand that Angela Williams was also granted 'good leaver' status (and she will receive a payment for LTIPs over the coming year). I raised concerns with Nick Read that this reward for fixed term employment contracts, and specifically Angela Williams, contradicted what an LTIP should stand for. Nick Read seemed comfortable with this position, so ignored me (yet strangely, he was vehemently opposed to one of the Executives (Owen Woodley) receiving Good Leaver Status who after 8 years' service, was genuinely retiring). Lisa Harrington, the RemCo chair In March, asked for confirmation that Angela Williams would not receive any benefits after leaving, as agreed. Nick Read responded to Lisa Harrington's question, without including me and leads me to believe the response may have been inaccurate.
5. It was clear that RemCo papers, decision making, bonus scheme proposals were extremely wordy, unclear and complicated. I raised this with Nick Read on my first week and said that I had not seen a RemCo run his way, that Angela Williams played a too large a role than is normal, that the papers she submitted were not precise or fully transparent, that there was very little listening or networking with the Committee before papers were submitted (apart from with Nick Read), that her work and role in RemCo was the basis for a lot of the confusion and the many 'open' remuneration issues. He was unwilling at the time to acknowledge this, instead he blamed Lisa Harrington and/or Tom Cooper (the UKGI board member, who asked the awkward questions, but from what I saw, was the only one pointing out the pitfalls and shortcomings of the papers or RemCo decisions, and tried to prevent the nonsense, particularly concerning Nick Read's pay).
6. I found it surprising to see Angela Williams appear in the short list candidates for the RemCo Chairman position from Green Park in January 2023. Nick Read denied recommending her, however, others have confirmed that he did in fact support her application. It felt to me he wanted to keep the key orchestrator of his enhanced pay efforts within POL.

7. Nick Read initially laughed at the bonus errors and made comments such as Lisa Harrington has got herself into trouble again. He specifically emailed me to say he felt the lawyers were creating a 'drama' over the Inquiry bonus metric. He was in my opinion, showing contempt for the remuneration committee, the process and procedures.

### 3: Poor management of public money and spending

- I have made disclosures on numerous occasions about the controls on spending, the wanton disregard for public money and non-compliant decisions, resulting in some cases, in breaching POL policy and the law. These are all documented, but in summary:
1. We had several people 'flipping' from permanent employment status to contracting in IT, moving from modest salaries to exorbitant daily rate or 'retainer' costs which I complained to Nick Read about, but no action was taken e.g.:
    - Ben Cooke was a senior IT manager who had been with POL for 7 years, on a salary of c£120k pa (to be verified), his employment was terminated at the end of January (without my knowledge) for a settlement figure of £30k (which is non-compliant and highly unusual). He was then brought back on 1<sup>st</sup> February as a £1500 per day contractor (£30,000 per month or £360,000 pa). His role and deliverables were not clarified. Nick Read denied knowing anything about this, however in an email from Zdravko in April, he confirmed that Ben had found a new job and would be leaving later in the year, it surprising to notice on that email trail, Nick Read was informed and supported the decision to move Ben in November 2022. I am still unclear what this 'deal' with Ben entailed and why Nick Read would support the decision, but suffice to say, for 5 months, he earned c£150k with no clear accountabilities or deliverables.
    - Nick Read approved Zdravko Mladenov decision to set up his own recruitment function, moving an existing 'Talent/Recruitment Managers' who was earning c£70k and placing her on a consultancy contract which provided her with a £20k month retainer/£240,000 pa. HR did not approve this or see the engagement contract and what other 'placement' fees would be paid. The latter appointment resulted in a formal grievance from Juliet Lang, the Director for Talent & Development, for constructive dismissal and breach of POL procurement policy, and was largely the basis of her resignation in December when I joined. The claim was that this contract was not compliant with our procurement policy, created significant divisions between the IT and HR teams, and frankly, was non-compliant with our responsibilities on Public Spending. I made Nick Read aware of the detail, but he refused to step in or take any action. He told me on one occasion 'I do not want us to challenge spending in Zdravko's area'. I understood the sentiment, but the reality as documented in my emails to Nick Read (and aired/documentated by Al Cameron) was that Zdravko was out of control with spending and decision making.
    - There are many more examples of people moving from permanent contracts, on moderate salaries, onto significant 'consultancy' agreements, which breach the Recruitment Policy and the redundancy policy, which prohibits the re-employment of POL staff within a certain time frame. It also presented us with huge amount of work to mitigate the HMRC risks on employing contractors.
  2. I spoke to Nick Read on many occasions about the costs in IT, the spiralling costs for the NBIT programme, where it seemed a free for all (Al Cameron had also raised this on numerous occasions to Nick Read and was extremely worried about what will come out). I sent Nick Read details and questions that came through from Zdravko's update to his department, where many were complaining that the truth on delays (and costs) was being withheld from them and the wider business. There were some very serious allegations being made about the governance and transparency of the programme. Nick Read did not follow up or address these allegations.
  3. I raised with Nick Read the fact we were spending £35m on contractors (mainly within IT) and the fact there was very little executive oversight, governance, clarity on employment status, the assessment

and suitability of individual skill sets, the fact that most of the contractors were employed through 'referrals' i.e., a friend, the comments that were being raised that the contractors had their own 'culture' and were defensive and not willing to integrate into POL. There was no interest in following up on this, and in fact I was told by Nick not to focus on costs (despite a high-level review on contractor costs revealing that we were over-spending by c£7m on resources we did not need).

4. I talked to Nick Read about HQ costs, that in my view, we were spending c£50m above where it should be. I put together an OD paper, highlighting savings that we should make, Nick Read was not interested in seeing this, it was only Al Cameron that was interested in reviewing this and had some clarity on how we could achieve this saving.
5. In February, I met with Nick Read to discuss the bonus structure/outline for the upcoming year. I suggested the metrics should be focused on business performance e.g., turnover, profit, cost reduction (in HQ) and postmaster engagement (focus on Rem and delivery of new services). Nick Read dismissed my suggestions, saying that we are a social organisation not a commercial business and that he didn't want to see revenue growth or cost reduction targets (this was documented in a follow up note). Neither did he want to see targets for Postmaster engagement or employee engagement. It was a frustrating meeting. I felt he was being deliberately obstructive; he had just returned from 2 weeks holiday and was behaving very differently following the decision from SoS on his pay.
6. I also spoke to Nick Read about the budget controls, the fact that ALL SLG have £250k approval threshold, and that in my experience, this was excessively high (in previous FTSE 250, spending approval at this level, was capped at £25k). This was again ignored. There are many examples which demonstrate this lack of control and governance, contributes towards the unchecked and unnecessary spending in POL and the associated behaviour that goes with this 'free for all' on spending.
7. There were many other issues raised with Nick Read over spending; such as internal UK flights being expensed to POL, POL employing 2 IT Directors costing c£500k F/L each, the costs relating to discretionary bonus payments, fabricated redundancies and excessive ex gratia payments made, the out of control in-year salary increases (which added up to £m's of additional in-year cost), £1m of ad hoc bonus payments in December with little governance or sign off (no visibility at RemCo or Board level), exorbitant consultant/ coaching day rate costs (or hourly rates) and many more which are documented. No interest or action was ever taken to address the poor management of spending public money.

#### **4: Failure to formally investigate poor conduct or behaviour:**

- Nick Read reported to me in a 121 meeting in March, that one of the senior commercial directors, had been extremely drunk the previous night, in front of customers and was effectively challenging and embarrassing Nick Read. He said that he had to leave early, at 10pm, because he was extremely angry with the Director "I am the CEO, how dare he speak to me like that and embarrass me in such a way. I don't know who he thinks he is". Nick Read confirmed also that the customer had emailed him at 1am and complained about the director's unprofessional conduct. He said he'd handled the matter informally through his GE line manager. When I suggested (in writing) we investigate the matter, Nick Read closed me down and said he did not want this. I have never been asked to turn a blind eye to such misconduct and I felt quite compromised and that I was being asked not to do the right thing for POL. I also felt we had a duty of care to understand if the director had personal issues that might be affecting him and/or his work. I asked one of my team whether there would be a reason that Nick Read would want to protect this person, and they informed me that the two are close friends and both have summer houses near to each other in Cornwall.

#### **5: Discrimination on the grounds of sex: Sex discrimination and favourable treatment of men**

1. There is a distinct unfairness in how men and women are treated. For instance, there were several formal and informal complaints and grievances raised against the Group Chief Finance Officer, Alistair Cameron, by members of his direct reports, the SLG, the PLT and from 3 female NED directors, all of

which pointed to his aggressive, intimidatory and/or bullying behaviour. Such complaints and grievances required formal investigation, with a view to either taking disciplinary action and/or supporting Al Cameron's turnaround in behaviour. The latter was my recommendation, a [REDACTED] and that of UKGI. However, Nick Read was vehemently opposed to this on the basis that he felt that Al Cameron 'would fight like a rat in a sack' and would raise numerous SAR, grievances and complaints about Nick Read's own conduct and behaviour. He simply wanted to pay Al Cameron off a large sum, to make him go quietly, which the Shareholder was not prepared to support. This is of course a stark contrast to the treatment I have received, as a woman, where minor and clearly unsubstantiated allegations were investigated to an incredibly disproportionate level and have resulted in my dismissal from POL.

2. Further, four new GE members have been recruited during Nick Read's tenure, all white male, I understand from feedback across the business, that all were appointed by Nick Read without following an open recruitment process. Two were cherry picked from the existing team, Ben Foat and Zdravko, because it was well known at the time, that Nick 'liked' them. The other two (Richard Taylor and Martin Roberts) were recruited externally but it was well known that Nick knew these / had worked with these individuals previously. This is where the phrase 'jobs for the boys' came from (which was said many times whilst I was working there and more recently, following the internal appointment/promotion of another white male Executive) and directly resulted in women and those from a different ethnic background being excluded from senior positions. These are also people who Nick felt he could control. This is why, apart from me, all the GE were white men. It was also why I challenged and changed the Recruitment Policy to make it mandatory to advertise all vacancies at senior level, to open opportunities. I communicated this change at the SLG and at the conference in April. The policy itself was changed in June.
3. I felt from the beginning of my employment Nick Read was patronising and showed a deep lack of respect towards me. He clearly did not want to hear any of my input or thoughts on how to manage critical aspects of POL culture, executive behaviours, the cost base, governance etc (as explained later). Most of our 121's were taken up by some drama or another, when he did make time to listen, he would make all the right noises, but then not follow up or mostly ignore me. I was having to work too hard to pin him down on decisions and for reasonable time to discuss important people and culture matters. There were many occasions where Nick Read would send me a request and he'd typically add one of the male execs to the request and ask us both to handle it; this felt I was being 'man-marked'.
4. I am shocked that the Board have not intervened in this investigation nor taken the time to listen to the allegations that I raised with the Chairman in May, which were based on the many recorded complaints I made to Nick Read from the day I joined. That the Board have not looked objectively at Nick Read's behaviour towards me as the only woman at the Exec level. It is unfortunate that I have heard one of the Board members refer to women as 'pains in the arse' (this was said in front of a third party) and I can imagine that I have also been labelled with this term, rather than being taken seriously.

The above, as well as some of the examples of protected disclosures, are a few examples on how the senior men were being treated differently and were provided with privileged positions. There was also a lot of commentary on Nick Read's army background, which was said to influence his need to be surrounded by white 'yes' men and resulted in his unconscious and conscious bias towards women.

**6: Significant and fundamental unwillingness to address the Post Office Culture, transform leadership and deliver the much needed organisational effectiveness, which both the Shareholder and the Inquiry expected following the Horizon scandal:**

- I was recruited, according to my Job Description, to deliver cultural transformation, commercial growth, organisation effectiveness and engagement with Postmaster / Colleagues. From early days Nick Read failed to actively or appropriately engage, sponsor, direct or respond to ANY of my ideas, thoughts or suggestions on these critical subjects for Post Office Limited.

As documented below, he deliberately ignored too many key emails where I was sharing presentations and content to deliver meaningful change to the Post Office. It was obvious to me, that because I had failed to get him his pay increase, and/or had not been able to remove Al Cameron, that he rendered my role irrelevant and insignificant. I asked in (in front of others) in April, why he had been ignoring my work and he said, 'you will get used to me, if I don't respond, I am not really interested in what is being presented'. I felt this showed huge contempt for both POL and me and disregards the challenges POL faces today. It presented a complete contrast to the public image of Nick Read, the persona of genuine care, the platitudes of 'transforming and making amends of the past' as publicly communicated in parliamentary hearings etc.

It became clear to me, that he only cares about himself, his pay and bonus, his ambition to be knighted, his hubristic and entitled approach. The list below is not exhaustive but proves the extent to which he has ignored all my input/suggestions to improving Post Office culture. These emails and written communications start from 1<sup>st</sup> December, through to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023:

1. **A comprehensive OD & Succession planning document sent to NR** (following RemCo request/HS to review GE talent, succession and structure). In response to issues, whether Legal/IT/Operations etc., there was almost a weekly change of heart by Nick Read on which Exec needed to improve behaviour, be managed out, restructured or reduce/change their roles but **No structured response or follow up meeting held, despite numerous requests.**
2. **Emails introducing Lane4;** I made several attempts to introduce Lane4 and set up GE Workshops, to focus on culture and team building. **Nick Read refused to meet with them and cancelled all planned GE workshops.**
3. **Framework for leadership behaviours sent to NR** (following engagement feedback on senior leadership behaviours, 39% had trust and confidence in senior leaders. In my experience, this is a red flag and warrants an immediate response. However, the results of the survey had come out in October 2022, and when I joined, no action had been taken. Many of the verbatim comments highlighted the ongoing lack of accountability, siloed working, lack of trust and integrity, lack of vision, poor compliance, reflecting that the current culture and behaviours at the top had not changed at all over the last 10 years. **No response from Nick Read.** Equally, the Board had not asked to see the engagement results and/or the anecdotal feedback; Amanda Burton was the first Board member in April who asked me to see this feedback.
4. **As part of the letter to the Secretary of State requesting** a significant increase in NR package, I asked for further contextual information on NR performance, the 3-year plan, the 5-year forecast etc; to support HS in his discussions with Grant Schapps over the request to significantly increase his pay. **Response: I was made to feel it was wrong to ask for this data and made me feel that this supporting evidence did not exist. I was told by Nick Read that my input was no longer required and was ostracised from the process until after Henry Staunton meeting with the SoS had taken place. Following this 'unsuccessful meeting, Nick Read began to send threatening notes to me, as indicated above.**
5. **Detailed document on proposed new Leadership Behaviours: No response**
6. **Concerns raised relating IT legal compliance, recruitment, costs and lack of compliance NR -No response.**
7. **18-point email / updating and seeking clarity/direction on key people issues: NR - responded to one point, no further follow up**
8. **Email raising serious concerns over our investigation process and 'accusing' people of wrongdoing without any formal or informal discussions taking place: NR - No response** (in a discussion he said 'bizarre' that he would pick up with Ben, but no support or further feedback).
9. **Transforming Culture Strategy email and ppt: NR - No response**
10. **Leadership Behaviours and Engagement Plan ppt – Nick made a comment to one of my team, that he didn't want his 'nose' rubbed in it, that we should temper the work on leadership. Whilst I had several meetings with the GE members, Nick Read refused to get involved: NR - No response.**
11. **Emails on the head-hunter selection process, interims CV's and CVs for new Execs for COO/CFO; NR: No response** and very difficult to pin down on providing any direction or clarity. The lack of engagement from Nick Read became embarrassing with the head-hunters, had to keep apologising.
12. **Emails requesting urgent meeting following Nick Read undertaking random interviews with candidates from his own network and not involving me** (one candidate had already been submitted

by the selected head-hunters). From January through to April, NR continued to meet people from his own network rather than engage with the formal process. I would normally expect to be included by the CEO, but Nick Read excluded me.

13. **Update on IDG Culture Change approach (and 7 points on people issues):** NR - No response
14. **Emails on Engagement Plans and Leadership Behaviours** (including conference update): NR - No response.
15. **121 email with 13 points:** NR – no response
16. **Email submitting the POL HR Strategy:** NR – no response.
17. **Conference update:** no comment, no input, no encouragement, from Nick Read. At the end of his speech at the conference, he delivered a final message about ‘the power of 3’ which directly undermined the 4-leadership behaviour framework that I delivered, neither did he attend the Leadership/Culture workshop in the afternoon which I ran (most of the SLG were extremely positive and keen, but many asked me and doubted that Nick Read was aligned with me/behind the programme).
18. **Relationship with Henry Staunton/NEDs;** it became apparent in March/April, that Nick Read had a real issue with my relationship with Henry, the Chairman and other members of the PO Board. He made several comments about the fact I got on with Henry, which left me feeling disturbed and concerned that Nick Read felt threatened (he made similar comments about Amanda Burton and Saf Ismail). Equally, I felt the Board was allowing Nick Read too much space to run the business unchecked and unaccountable for his actions. The many risks, governance and poor behaviours /ethical practices, which I was witnessing, were not being understood or effectively addressed by the NEDs.

#### **7: Poor management in respect of Remco governance**

- During conversations with Nick Read following the departure of Angela Williams, he admitted that he ‘was played’ by her. Several GE members i.e., Martin Roberts, Owen Woodley and Al Cameron felt she was a ‘disaster’ and had also told Nick that he was being played by her. I personally felt that I was being set up to fail by her and she was working against me. I emailed Nick Read on this within 2 weeks of joining, however, he did not intervene or support me.

#### **8: Poor management in respect of NED’s / GE**

- Nick Read continually criticised the Chairman, NED’s, UKGI and the GE. He was charming when face to face, but he was critical behind their back, sometimes laughing at mistakes and mocking them. He was particularly critical of Al Cameron, Owen Woodley, Martin Roberts (the latter three were in my opinion, the stronger and more experienced team members), and with the others, who were less experienced Executives, would be in or out of favour (or their roles) depending upon whether there had been any issues, mistakes or negative PR made by them. There was no coherent exec succession plan, the Board had never asked for one either, despite my many requests to look at this. His feedback on the GE team was only exposed when his PA made a mistake by submitting his private & personal notes on them, into their performance appraisals. The latter feedback was not focused on how to build their exec capability/contribution/performance but was based on his own personal ‘feelings’ of liking or not liking them. The latter note on Richard Taylor said his performance was extremely poor, and had been so for over a year, that his response to fixing some of the engagement issues with Postmasters was ‘glacial’, yet Nick Read failed to appropriately investigate or manage him. When I asked him why he did not want to performance manage Richard, Nick Read said because he felt ‘protective’ of him/and said he couldn’t explain it any further. It felt he was protecting the men in the team, even where there are clear performance issues which need addressing.

The above summarise just a few of the concerns that I have raised. I have seen how Nick can manipulate and deliver outright untruths in front of significantly important audiences. There is a clear public image which Nick Read portrays, as him wanting to transform the culture of Post Office and make amends for the errors of the past. This is clearly not the case as he simply ignored all efforts by me, an experienced transformation director, to put plans in place to address these important matters, which clearly are of great public interest. This lack of integrity and honesty is something that needs to be taken very seriously. He is fully aware of how I feel and having made such disclosures to him, he has treated me less favourably, not least by the way in which the investigation against me was carried out and the resulting wrongful dismissal.

**Wrongful dismissal**

I also strongly contest the three reasons for which Nick Read justified dismissing me, as follows:

**1. There may be a case to answer that my behaviour met the definition of bullying:**

- I. Nick Read was aware (in December, when I arrived) that POL was facing a serious Race and Sex discrimination claim, where [IRRELEVANT] was the key manager being accused of such behaviour. [IRRELEVANT] was advised [IRRELEVANT], 17 days after [IRRELEVANT] resigned. She notoriously treated her subordinates and those from a different ethnic background in a derogatory way. [IRRELEVANT]
 

**IRRELEVANT**

 [IRRELEVANT] [IRRELEVANT] was very aware that the outcome of this case and her behaviour would have been subject to a subsequent conduct investigation.
- II. [IRRELEVANT]
 

**IRRELEVANT**

 [IRRELEVANT] One SLG member at an NBIT governance meeting in January 2023, confirmed to the Executives present that [IRRELEVANT] was resigning due to the toxic culture and cited [IRRELEVANT] as responsible for a culture of ‘passive hostility’, being difficult and challenging in meetings and ‘sitting on the side line waiting for her and the programme to fail’. This is exactly how I felt when dealing with [IRRELEVANT]. The latter resulted in Nick Read sending me a note to ‘sort my team out’.
- III. [IRRELEVANT] was very aware that a light was being shone on her behaviour, that both the departure of a senior manager and the evident racism would need to be investigated and as such, she was anxious and highly motivated to walk out when she did and she used a [IRRELEVANT] as a smoke screen to cover her own atrocious behaviours.
- IV. [IRRELEVANT]
 

**IRRELEVANT**

 This would suggest she does not particularly value long term relationships or stability in her employment. On her last day, I felt she was very well versed and prepared to ‘walk out’ in that she wiped her PC and data from POL systems, removing all trace of files, communications, Teams and WhatsApp messages etc. This raised concerns with the Data Protection team, where they reported several significant breaches (i.e., medical data was accessed, executive anonymity was accessed, data sent to home addresses etc.), which have not to date, been investigated.
- V. I complained to Nick Read in my first month, specifically about [IRRELEVANT] (but also that of 2 other direct reports), in that they had openly said that they did not want to be [IRRELEVANT]. Their behaviour and attitude from an early stage was challenging, criticising new ideas and dampening down the energy of the whole [IRRELEVANT] team etc. Each meeting was very unpleasant to manage, and rather than help educate me, [IRRELEVANT] used her knowledge of PO /processes and policies etc., to try to catch me out. [IRRELEVANT] felt the same as me, but their individual views have not been heard by the investigation. Nick Read did absolutely nothing to support me during my first 2 months, to intervene, to reinforce my role with these individuals; he did, however, continue to hold 121 meetings with them, even though I had asked him to include me. This only served to perpetuate their sense of importance, their independence and to undermine my own role from an early stage.

**Summary:** I am a person that does not tolerate bullying. [GRO] Later I became trained as a counsellor for Childline, primarily to help children who were bullied. I will always stand up for those who are being bullied and against those who are bullies, whoever they are. These latter unsubstantiated allegations, as transpired from the investigation, came from one complainant, [IRRELEVANT] who was a notoriously difficult character. I was simply asking her and others to do their jobs and accept reasonable requests from me to do so. I have had [IRRELEVANT] years of experienced of managing people and difficult people too, but nothing like this. She in particularly used the [IRRELEVANT] to turn the spotlight away from her own behaviour, and any normal organisation would have seen this and [IRRELEVANT]. The latter point is fully documented and substantiated in the mitigating evidence I put forward, and this evidence dwarfs all the unsubstantiated and hurtful allegations made by [IRRELEVANT].

**2. There does appear to be a case to answer that I have failed to follow the recruitment Policy:**

I am unclear on what part of the recruitment process/policy I failed to follow, as no-one has ever given me a clear statement on the points of the policy I did not follow. I believe this related to the recruitment of two direct report positions, both positions were already activated in the months before I joined, interviews were being held and candidates were being considered. CVs for the candidates I introduced were also submitted before I joined and had been considered and/or interviewed as part of the already progressing process. I do not think I can be held responsible for non-compliance for a process already in progress, however, I did change the positions from permanent to 6 month fixed term contracts/temporary for the benefit of POL (as we needed urgent support within both the Rewards team and Commercial team), to allow me to put a more formal process for recruiting the permanent positions (and all candidates were made aware that they would need to apply for the permanent positions). More importantly, I shared the details with Nick Read and sought his full permission and formal written consent before making any offers, which he fully endorsed.

It became clear to me during my first few weeks that the company failed to follow and worked around several of its' policies and procedures. It was my observations about the poor adherence to the recruitment policy, for instance the ambiguity on advertising open vacancies, and it was me that requested a tightening up on the policy to make it mandatory to advertise all senior roles to ensure fairness and transparency. I would still question whether POL is complying with this, in view of recent promotions and appointments within the GE.

One example (but there are many) to reinforce the disregard for the recruitment policy and appropriate process; on my first day I learned that [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT would not be considered (not even included in the recruitment process) for the full-time CPO position (my role) because he was a man and that POL needed to recruit a female to 'balance' the GE. [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT It also made me feel very uncomfortable and undermined to learn that I was someone who was selected primarily for my gender. There was a distinct lack of observations about employment law, as well as POL recruitment policy. It is worth noting that I was the 4<sup>th</sup> female CPO in Nick Read's 3-year tenure.

**There may also be a case to answer...your approach and conduct contributed to a working environment of a nature that has in turn contributed to members of the PLT resigning and/or going on sick leave:**

The statement relates to 2 individuals in my team that were under performing and/or who were demonstrating poor behaviours, who were deliberately undermining me (as mentioned before). They clearly did not want me to manage them, and continued to bypass me, to interface with Nick Read whenever they could. Upon hearing the news of one of the resignations, Nick Read could not contain himself, and updated the GE within minutes of me telling him. He was so pleased with the news (as were other senior Directors who had complained about them to me). Their departures resulted in an immediate and palpable improvement in the senior HR team morale and trust, they started to relax and smile in meetings! The overall team performance was not impacted either; despite not replacing the two individuals, performance improved, and it is worth pointing out that we saved c£500k fully loaded salary costs on the two individuals. The latter is fully explained in the written evidence I submitted, which shows my exchanges with these individuals was clear but courteous and ultimately, it was their decision to leave.

It is also simply inaccurate to imply that my approach of conduct contributed to [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT I treated [REDACTED] with utmost respect and support, which can be seen in our written exchanges/correspondence. I did show my exasperation on the [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT and some new ideas on how we could tackle [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT Those who were present and witnessed me making that [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT would say my question and the way I put it was reasonable. If this one incident resulted in him [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT then someone should be questioning his motivation. The fact that [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT reported this exchange as intimidatory suited her own argument. It is also important to note that [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT did not raise a complaint against me. The truth is, [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT started long before I arrived at POL (and many people close to him confirmed this to me) and these [REDACTED] IRRELEVANT

were exacerbated by the way he had been treated for the [IRRELEVANT] prior to me joining (as documented and evidenced); [IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT] He told me he felt that [IRRELEVANT] that he felt very [IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT] He expressed his frustration to me many times during [IRRELEVANT] that he was very angry and agitated with Nick Read, and felt he owed him an apology for how he treated / used him ([IRRELEVANT] also shared these feelings with other members of [IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT] He also made it very clear that he was [IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT] These were the underlying reasons for his absence, not an exchange between him and I, where I was making a perfectly reasonable [IRRELEVANT] request. From subsequent exchanges I had with him

in [IRRELEVANT] It is worth noting that [IRRELEVANT]

[IRRELEVANT]

**Conclusion:**

It is appalling that Nick Read has concluded that I am the one who does not 'culturally fit', based on the investigations and he instantly dismisses me, whilst I am off sick, caused by the extraordinary stress of this unjust and unique investigation, i.e., that I was singled out and treated very differently to the way my male peers were treated within POL. This is not the practice of an ethical or modern organisation. These complaints relate my first few weeks of working with POL, and it is clear to anyone objectively looking at this, including my legal team, that there are other issues at play; i.e. that Nick Read did not want me to be part of the team, because I had failed to secure his increased remuneration package, because I was unable to dismiss Al Cameron, because I had challenged him over several serious risk and compliance issues, and by making these protected disclosures to him and the Chairman, he felt threatened by me. These disclosures were then used to take retaliatory action against me, in extending my probationary period and using a clause in my contract relating to the probationary period, to terminate my employment. Importantly, I was shown very little respect as a woman and the person appointed to drive cultural change; male GE members were treated far more favourably. From my perspective I saw a lot of arrogance, waffle and ducking of responsibility. Nick Read is a 'public servant' but he is not serving the public or Postmasters or the Shareholders, his priority remains focused on himself, his own salary and bonus.

The Board also have stood too far back from a very poorly managed organisation, and they should be more diligent in challenging the plethora of idiosyncratic behaviours from POL CEO. As it stands, significant risks and governance matters are hidden from the Board and the Shareholder (and these latter issues will continue to surface in the public eye as time goes on).

Not being given a right to have a say following an investigation, and/or see the outputs, be given a right to reply, is very reminiscent of the behaviours POL displayed towards Postmasters who were wrongly accused in the past. I have been made to feel that I have done something criminal, when all I was doing was my job. This experience has been particularly damaging to my health, confidence and career.

**This is highly unethical corporate behaviour.**

I feel that Nick Read without cause, investigation or appropriate evidence acted unethically and in retaliation as a direct result of the whistleblowing complaints and sex discrimination (as previously summarised in a letter to Henry Staunton). This has impacted me in a significant way:

- His decision to extend my probationary period, as shared with me in an email / letter on the very last day of my 6-month period of work, without any reason to do so or consultation or discussion, or opportunity to appeal, which resulted in my notice period being reduced from 6 months to 3 months.
- That by extending my probation, in retaliation, against POL Whistleblowing Policy, and dismissing me as a 'bad leaver' is not only unjust, but it has also resulted in me losing other significant benefits.
- The latter is also affecting my confidence and ability to find new employment. I have two children still in full time education and have never been out of work, unplanned, without a role to go to.

Ultimately, I am seeking to have my complaints fully investigated, both whistleblowing and sex discrimination claims. As part of this investigation, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the above points in more detail with David Bickerton and Amanda Burton. Please note is this is not a full disclosure of all the issues, challenges, statements and other protected disclosures that I have raised.

I have been reflecting on whether I was naïve to take the role, as I held (and still hold) the view that my private sector and successful experience of driving organisational transformation, would be key to transforming the culture, and turning POL into a significantly more culturally harmonious and profitable organisation. I was looking forward to at least a 5-year career opportunity and joined because I genuinely wanted to give back to both the Postmasters and Shareholder, the returns, remuneration and benefits they deserve, as well as 'wean' ourselves off the government purse strings. I was convinced I could help POL achieve this. However, I could not do any of this without the support and a strong CEO behind me, and it is clear, I had neither. I could never have imagined the dreadful experience which lay ahead of me when I joined last December.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Davies