

CIRCULATION: NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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## National Federation of SubPostmasters

4th August 1998

The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling Esq.  
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*Alistair Darling*

I write to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for Social Security.

I would also introduce myself and our organisation to you and to put our views about the importance of the Post Office network in the delivery of Government services in the future.

Clearly Post Offices feature highly as being central to the way people receive their pension or allowance and we are looking forward to the day when the delivery of these services is automated using the Horizon platform. The platform will also be crucial in the development of other products and services resulting from Welfare Reform and Social Banking.

Because of recent press rumours that the Horizon programme is about to be aborted we were extremely pleased to have had the rousing endorsement of Frank Field MP to the automation platform and confirmation that the payment card will only be usable at Post Offices. I cannot stress how important those reassurances are as I have been coming under considerable pressure as General Secretary to "raise the profile" of what is at risk for Sub-Postmasters. As I am sure you are aware, if the Horizon project or the payment card were to be cancelled, the effect would be dire on Sub-Postmasters and their £1 billion investment in the network. They would reasonably conclude that despite all the promises of the past, the Government had given up on them. They would see their livelihoods as being on the line, and could not be expected to take this lying down. So reassuring statements such as those of Frank Field MP are very helpful at the moment, although given Sub-Postmasters' current mood, and until they see Horizon rolling out in their post offices, we should not be surprised at occasional outpourings of concern.

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I have, of course, submitted to your Department a full response to the wider points, but I thought that you would like to be aware of our view. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you at first hand.



**GRO**

**COLIN BAKER**  
General Secretary