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**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SUB-POSTMASTERS**

**REPORT OF THE  
MEETING OF THE  
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

**held on  
30th & 31st July 2001**

**at**

**THE GRIMSTOCK COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL  
WARWICKSHIRE**



# Report of a Meeting of the National Executive Council

Held on 30th, 31st July 2001  
at The Grimstock Country House Hotel, Warwickshire

*Present* Mr A Butlin - National President and Chairman

Mr M Baker	Mr D Milner
Mrs I Bethell	Mr J Morris
Mr M Challinor	Mr J Peberdy
Mr M Darvill	Mrs S Reeves
Mr J Jannetta	Mr M Roger
Mrs P M Jenkins	Mr J Willshaw
Mr C Jones	
Mr M Jones	
Mrs J Kendall	

<i>In Attendance:</i> Mr C Baker	General Secretary
Mr K Davis	Assistant General Secretary
Mrs K Davis	Assistant General Secretary

THE PRESIDENT opened the meeting and hoped that everyone had had a pleasant trip in the heatwave. He apologised for the fact that they would not use the air conditioning because it was too noisy.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY reported that upon his arrival at the meeting, he had received apologies from the newly elected Executive Officer for Northern Ireland, Norman Ferguson, who was not able to attend the meeting.

THE PRESIDENT then asked for a minute's silence to pay respects to the passing of Jim Elder.

## A/1 REPORTS AND RESOLUTIONS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Special Executive Council Meeting held on 13th May 2001  
Post Conference Meeting held on 16th May 2001  
Executive Council Meeting held on the 4th and 5th June 2001  
Resolutions passed at the Executive Council Meeting held on 8th and 9th January 2001  
Resolutions passed at the Executive Council Meeting held on 18th, 19th and 20th March 2001  
Resolutions passed at the Special Meeting of the National Executive Council held on 13th May 2001  
Resolutions passed at the Post Conference Meeting held on 16th May 2001  
Resolutions passed at the Executive Council Meeting held on 4th and 5th June 2001

- The Minutes of these meetings had been circulated and were approved.

DECISION

**A/2   MATTERS ARISING FROM THE REPORTS**

MR PEBERDY suggested it might be useful information to the Council that in a) the Resolutions, and b) the Minutes of the Post Conference Executive Council Meeting held on the 16th May 2001, under Item 8 a – Appointment of National Representatives to the Board Of Benevolence, he did not believe that anyone in that meeting actually proposed, seconded or agreed that MR JANNETTA should be elected as Scottish Representative. Officially, each region, at its AGM, elected the member of the Council to the Board of Benevolence, so officially the Council did not make the proposition of the appointment of a person to the Board of Benevolence. This had arisen because Mr. Jannetta made the point that he did not seem to get listed as the appointed delegate for the Scottish Region because he held the role of National Treasurer.

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THE CHAIRMAN then continued as follows:-

**1.   POST OFFICE GROUP****PO PC****1. (a)   Post Office Limited Blueprint****PO PC 03**

Work was currently taking place to create the company that was going to be called Post Office Counters Ltd. There had been a number of recent announcements, in particular that Stuart Sweetman would not be heading up Post Office Limited and that there was a vacancy. THE CHAIRMAN thought this would be good for the Federation in dealings with the Post Office, as they had returned to something similar to Post Office Counters Ltd instead of sixteen segments of the Business. He felt that as the work progressed, each of the people there, mainly Basil Larkins and Dave Miller currently, were people that the Federation would be very much involved with in the future shape of the Post Office Counters Network.

MR CYRIL JONES said that the plan indicated the intention to deliver £700 million of new revenue streams. If this was compared to the money that was going to be lost, how did the new plan impinge on plans for network re-organisation and compensation.

THE CHAIRMAN replied that the Business, before Post Office Limited was conceived, had put forward a 5 year business plan to steer the business back from its negative future to some form of profit by the end of year five. The Plan was confidential. THE GENERAL SECRETARY had seen it but had never been able to have a final copy of it. He would raise it at the next Strategic Involvement Meeting because, at this stage, they did not appear to have any firm plans, although they talked about bridging the £400 million loss gap of ACT, figures of 60% being recoverable from Your Guide.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY reported that creating POL in principle had to be the right thing, because the focus was back from under Consignia. They still had their own management team and hoped for something more professional. He read from page 22 of the booklet on how it was going to be delivered but which was totally unclear. He also said that the loss of £400 million was the nightmare scenario. There were other things like the Manchester Bus Pass Scheme and the Smart Card, but there was no substance at the moment. He was hoping that Allan Leighton might be able to clarify where he thought they were going.

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## 2. GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

PO PZ

### 2. (a) Cabinet Reshuffle

PO PZ

THE CHAIRMAN reported that information had been circulated to the Council. After the General Election the Government had started off with a new team. The Government was the main shareholder in the Post Office. Patricia Hewitt was now head of the DTI. She has a Treasury background, and was formerly an e-commerce Minister, technology versed. Alan Johnson, whilst remaining in the DTI, was no longer responsible for the Post Office. His replacement for that position was Douglas Alexander.



In response to MR CYRIL JONES' request for an insight into what contacts had been made in the new regime and their attitude to the Federation, bearing in mind their Treasury background, THE CHAIRMAN advised that this was covered later in the meeting. However, some information had already been circulated.

THE CHAIRMAN reported that THE GENERAL SECRETARY had written letters to all 659 MPs and had received a response from Patricia Hewitt suggesting a meeting in the autumn. He gave some background on Patricia Hewitt, who happened to be the Leicester West MP with whom he had met on several occasions. She was a good champion of post offices and THE CHAIRMAN had met her previously over the campaign and the lobby. She had had a lot to do with the department of National Savings, and was very tuned. He was hopeful that she would take the battle forward, despite her Treasury background.

2. (b) Report on Meeting with Douglas Alexander MP

PO PZ

THE CHAIRMAN reported that THE GENERAL SECRETARY had written to Douglas Alexander who had rapidly responded to arrange a meeting. THE CHAIRMAN and THE GENERAL SECRETARY met him the previous Wednesday afternoon for an hour and a half. He had delayed an appointment at a Buckingham Palace Garden Party especially to facilitate the meeting. Although he had only been five weeks in the job he had been briefed to an exceptionally high level. THE GENERAL SECRETARY opened up for the Federation to ask him to make a re-statement on where he was with Universal Bank. He did not pull any punches and they had a fairly good session on Universal Bank. THE GENERAL SECRETARY told him of the fears of the Federation, the stories about capping etc and re-quoted statements made previously. Mr Alexander's response was judged to be good. He was asked to put the Government's commitment in writing, confirming they were not platitudes, and that he was aware how important post offices were to the country and to the Prime Minister. He was fairly robust. THE CHAIRMAN suggested that this part of the Executive Council meeting discussed Universal Bank, Your Guide and Network Reinvention in the same segments as had been discussed with the Minister.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY said that he could not add much to what THE CHAIRMAN had said other than Mr Alexander had begun by saying, "Your Reputation Goes Before You". THE GENERAL SECRETARY assured him that if things did not go right, the Federation would be back in Westminster en masse with what had become known as "The Wat Tyler Syndrome". The Minister was very well briefed. He kept on stressing that his success would be a successful network and that was what they were working towards. He responded to all the "trick" questions by saying that they would not do anything that would harm the network. His intention was to have a strong and viable network. Although he had not expected to be THE GENERAL SECRETARY was impressed.

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5. HORIZON

PC NW 06 01

THE CHAIRMAN reported that the Negotiating Committee had visited Dearne Valley. It had been agreed that a sub committee would be formed to resolve some of the major Horizon issues. Don Grey had suggested meeting once every four months in either Dearne Valley or London. Attendees from Post

Office Network were to be Don Grey, Mark Haynes, Julian White and Liz Tuddenham and from the NFSP Colin Baker, John Peberdy and Jean Kendall. The initial meeting is scheduled for October. They were continuing to progress the eye test issue, which was in the Action Points under the Overview of Meetings.

MRS BETHELL said that she had three items to raise under this section. The first was a request for a progress report on bar-coded hand pouches, as a number of pouches were still going missing. MR DAVIS replied that he had not been advised when bar-coding of pouches was to start but he would endeavour to find out.

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The second item was about the Benefit Agency linked to Horizon. MRS BETHELL was receiving a number of complaints from subpostmasters who were having letters from the Benefit Agency accusing them of paying out on books, which had been impounded. Subpostmasters had acted on the instructions on the system and the Benefits Agency did not believe them. It was going on subpostmasters files that they were paying on impounded books although it had been agreed back in week 5/2000 that there was a problem with the system. This information would remain on Subpostmasters' files despite requests that it be removed. It had been suggested that there should be a print out when a book was impounded. It could then be proved that the subpostmaster had done as the system instructed.

THE PRESIDENT asked whether records were kept of those books that had been returned to be impounded, to which MRS BETHELL replied that offices did, but it was apparently not any proof that books were not impounded on the system.

MRS KENDALL spoke about a print out from Ray Martin in Gateshead with exactly the same problem. MR JANNETTA said that the problem was that the books took forever to get back from the DSS. MR DARVILL did not see any value in barcoding pouches.

MRS BETHELL continued with the third item. This was in respect of people who, in the future, might be transferring their offices to other premises. Apparently there was an eight-week run-in required by ICL Pathway to transfer to another premises. Problems were arising because the eight weeks did not commence until the new Subpostmaster had been appointed, even though the existing Subpostmaster had given three months notice.

MRS KENDALL agreed that even if the subpostmaster wanted to stay in the premises and refurbish, there was a eight week notification if he wanted to make alterations, and a further eight week notification when ICL were required to return.

THE CHAIRMAN responded by saying that he would take the losses point and deal with it as soon as possible. He went on to say that the Negotiating Committee went on a joint trip to see the Network Business Support Centre in operation and were extremely impressed. The opportunity had been taken to raise Horizon issues because Don Grey was still Head of Business Service

ACTION

Management. The centre were working extremely hard to reach their objectives. Mark Haynes is re-writing the training and looking after implementation. A lot of work was currently being put in place to re-train people and achieve solidarity, to establish stability of staff.

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(c) Training

FM MS 04

MR CYRIL JONES said that the Federation had made a commitment to training some time ago. It had been decided to invest a considerable amount of money to train MRS DAVIS to identify the training needs of the Federation and to design courses to satisfy those needs, and to implement the required courses at all levels of the Federation. He reported that MRS DAVIS completed her course some time ago and in doing so achieved extremely high marks.

The Federation was now beginning to reap the fruits of MRS DAVIS' efforts. The first course, which had been decided by the previous P&D Committee, entitled "Reason to Urge Interviews" had been put together and tested in four presentations to Branch Secretaries. At each presentation, revisions and alterations had been made where necessary and the course could now be rolled out nationally.

MR MARK BAKER commented that it had been an extremely well-presented course. Everyone went away having gained knowledge and had benefited from it. He believed that Branch Treasurers should be encouraged to make the investment for their Branch Officials.

MR CYRIL JONES said that was just the response hoped for. There was a questionnaire on the courses and the responses had been excellent. He said

that the Federation had been an untrained organisation and a lot of Branch Secretaries did not know what to do. He went on to say that at the last Executive Council meeting the P&D Committee had promised to explain about training and what its role should be within the Federation.. The training needed to be for Branch Secretaries and for Executive Officers and should be ongoing.

MRS DAVIS then made a slide presentation to talk through in brief some of the content of the Training Course that she had been on. This would give a flavour of the current training environment, and she would then talk through how that applied to the Federation and what happened with the first course.

The definition of training she was using was giving people the right skills, the right knowledge and the right behaviours to do the job. The training was to make sure one met one's business objectives, look at the people and the organisation. There were assumptions to be made about the organisation and assumptions about people. Training could be used in bringing about organisational change. Training needs had to be identified. The next stage in the cycle was training design and delivery. The final stage was evaluation.

In terms of the Branch Secretary training programme, the previous P&D Committee had looked at training in more detail about what they wanted to achieve. Then they looked at measures of effectiveness – what made Branch Officials effective and what their key tasks were. Out of that they came up with a number of training priorities. MRS DAVIS ran through the training programme aim and objectives of the first course. In terms of delivery she detailed the options. Finally she discussed evaluation. MRS DAVIS was congratulated on her presentation.

MR CYRIL JONES said that a commitment to training had been made. Money had been spent on getting a Training Officer who could design and produce courses to ensure that everyone within the Federation could improve on what they were already doing. The next step was how to keep it going. It was the future and it was essential to make sure that everyone was good at their jobs.

He was proposing that they would implement the training programme. One course had already been produced which was the Reason to Urge. The next one would be Running a Successful Branch, which would be even more important. Each course module would be written and tested initially by MRS DAVIS. Then the courses would be rolled out to Branch Secretaries. That would be implemented by those Executive Officers who would volunteer to be Training Officers for their Region. There would be no compulsion on Executive Officers to volunteer. Any Executive Officer who volunteered would be trained by MRS DAVIS to present the course, which would involve learning the course content and presentation. It would not include discussion of the contents of the course. The course must be presented as it was written to ensure standardisation. To ensure consistency of approach and appropriate content, MRS DAVIS would periodically attend Branch Secretaries' training courses. Executive Officers would be contacted shortly to check if they wished to volunteer.



If the Post Office decided to do their RTUs in a different way in the future, the RTU course would need to be amended. Similarly, how a Branch was run. There were a lot of things that an Executive Officer did not know. He believed that they should be the best trained.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the training programme as presented should be implemented.

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## A/6 SPECIAL MATTERS

### (A) FINANCE

#### 1. Treasurer's Report

FM AC 02

The Treasurer's Report had been previously circulated. MR JANNETTA reported that there had been no substantial changes to the income of the Federation since the last meeting because the new subscription rates had not yet come in. He did have a concern about a drop in advertising income, which appeared to be decreasing monthly. Since the beginning of the year the Federation was £8,500 down comparable to last year. Over the year the loss of advertising income to the Federation was expected to be £20,000. He felt that it was time the contract with Beverley Wright was reviewed to decide if she was the right person to be doing the work. The P&D Committee had mentioned Beverley Wright and her relationship with the Federation. He suggested that THE GENERAL SECRETARY, in his capacity as Advertising Manager, should review this sooner rather than later.

Turning to other income of the Federation, the commercial income seemed to be coming in at the normal rate. He had reservations about the direction of the management of the commercial income. As National Treasurer he had a concern that the major commercial income came from advertising revenue of the Subpostmaster and commercial income from Zurich/Eagle Star. He mentioned that in Nadeam Butt's report on the commercial activities of the Federation, the income from Eagle Star had been subsumed into the report. He felt the whole of the report was speculative and he did not want to see the existing income jeopardised by speculation.

THE CHAIRMAN thanked MR JANNETTA for the Treasurer's Report. It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the Report be accepted.

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