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Introduction

Welcome and congratulations on joining Post Office Counters Ltd. (POCL), the largest retailer in Europe. As a newly appointed subpostmaster, it is important that you quickly feel part of Post Office Counters Ltd.

The purpose of this booklet is to:

- give you an overview of the Post Office Group, and Post Office Counters' part within it;
- help you familiarise yourself with POCL, our structure, the products and services we offer, our mission and objectives, how we work and what we expect from you;
- provide information on the support you can expect;
- give you general information on the training you will receive.

We appreciate you may find the early days of your appointment challenging, but have no doubt you will find it interesting and fun. As Post Office Counters' success depends on your success, please do not hesitate to make use of the support and expertise on offer.



The Post Office

The Post Office was formed in 1635 when King Charles opened his Royal Mail service to the public. Postage was originally paid by the person receiving the letter. We have been around for over 350 years, therefore that makes us one of the longest established businesses in the UK.



Now the Post Office is owned by the Government and is responsible for providing postal and counter services throughout the country. Up to the 1970s, it received a subsidy from the Government, but over the last 20 years the Post Office has been run as a commercial business, and currently makes an annual profit of well over £500 million.

The Post Office Group consists of four businesses:

- Post Office Counters Ltd.
- Royal Mail
- Parcelforce
- Subscription Services Ltd.

Post Office Counters Ltd

Post Office Counters Ltd. (POCL) operates a network of over 19,000 post offices nation-wide, making it the largest retail chain in Europe. It is bigger than the four major banks and main building societies put together, and is the largest handler of cash in the UK.

Every week around 28 million customers visit our network of offices, which offer over 170 products and services on behalf of both Post Office businesses and external clients.

Post Office Counters has 14,000 employees and over 18,000 subpostmasters and franchisees. It handles over £140 billion in coins and notes each year, and has a turnover of around £1.2 billion a year.

Royal Mail

Royal Mail collects, sorts and delivers mail and packets within the UK and overseas, and delivers around 67 million letters every working day to 25 million addresses. In addition to first and second class letter services, it offers a range of priority, insured and specialist business services.

Royal Mail is recognised as providing one of the best postal services in Europe. Over 90% of all first class letters reach their destination the next working day after posting.

Royal Mail employs about 160,000 people, including 80,000 postmen and women, and has a fleet of 30,000 vehicles.

Parcelforce

Parcelforce is the UK's leading carrier of time-critical packages, parcels and small freight. It offers a wide range of services for business and private customers. As well as delivering to every single address in the UK, Parcelforce provides a world-wide distribution service.

Heavy investment in technology allows Parcelforce to track around 140 million parcels every year, so that it can provide customers with complete delivery information.

Parcelforce has some 100 delivery depots, 13,000 employees and a fleet of 9,300 vehicles.

Subscription Services Ltd

Subscription Services manages television licences on behalf of the BBC. This represents around 90% of Subscription Services' turnover. Over recent years, it has set up a number of new ventures, such as its telebusiness centre. This handles around 100,000 customer calls every week in response to advertising from businesses such as home-shopping companies, gas supply companies, charities and the Department of Social Security.

Subscription Services employs some 1,600 people and manages over 21 million television licences.

and Objectives

All businesses need to have a clear focus and direction. Post Office Counters has a mission statement, which was launched in 1995, to ensure that staff and subpostmasters have a clear understanding of our future direction.

Our mission statement is:

We are dedicated to making our service a growing success commercially and one for everyone to be proud of.

We aim to offer all our customers outstanding personal service in every one of our thousands of post offices throughout the United Kingdom.

We care for all our employees, subpostmasters and other agents and we cherish our place in every community.

Every year we set top objectives to help us all focus on those things that will enable us to achieve our mission and longer-term goals. From the top business objectives the regions and business units develop their own objectives, which help support both the mission and the top business objectives.



Image

Post Office Counters Limited requires subpostmasters and their staff to set and attain high standards. You must at all times consider the image you project. For example, we expect:

- Those serving on the counter to wear a name badge, or display one in a prominent position.
- You to display the corporate sign outside your office.
- Your office to be clean and bright.
- Space allotted to the Post Office part of your premises to be adequate – especially on the customer side.



What Makes a Good Post Office

Research by POCL has identified that good quality premises create more business and greater customer loyalty. It is therefore in your own interest to ensure that you offer the highest standards of accommodation and advice. Here is a list of important attributes for any post office outlet:

- Good uncluttered and regularly cleaned premises (both interior and exterior).

- Good access for people with disabilities (level entry or ramp and wide doorway).
- A substantial retail offer which can capitalise on post office footfall (by ensuring customers pass the retail offer on their way to the Post Office counter).
- Good visibility (prominent fascia and lozenge) to maximise passing trade.
- Maximum opening hours so that your post office is a centre of convenience for the local householders.

We are also able to offer you access to:

- Post Office equipment sourced from our equipment catalogue.
- Post Office career wear for staff serving customers.

If you are considering a refurbishment of your premises, please bear in mind the following:

- Any alteration to the accommodation needs the approval of your Retail Network Manager before commencement.
- All accommodation must ensure sufficient security for all Post Office monies, you and your staff. Your Retail Network Manager can arrange a review of your arrangements with the regional security teams.
- That your premises allows you to fully comply with the relevant Health and Safety legislation. Your Retail Network Manager can advise you on the key areas that need consideration.

Customer first

Customers are vital to the survival of the business. We need to ensure customers are given outstanding personal service. That is why Post Office Counters has developed a business philosophy called 'Putting the Customer First.'

Putting The Customer First ensures we continually focus on the ever-changing needs of our customers.

As a new appointee you will be required to attend Putting the Customer First training, which is a series of training sessions normally delivered face-to-face by your Retail Network Manager. This is generally carried out once you have settled into your job, at agreed times and dates, however, it could also be covered as a part of your Induction training.



organised

Structure

POCL is organised into 7 geographical regions, each with its own Regional General Manager, and a team of support staff to enable the region to deliver its overall business plan. The regions are:

- **Midlands** based in Birmingham
- **North East** based in Leeds
- **North Thames & East Anglia** based in St Albans
- **North Wales & North West** based in Manchester
- **Scotland & Northern Ireland** based in Glasgow
- **South East** based in Tunbridge Wells
- **South Wales & South West** based in Bristol

There are also central business units located in London and Chesterfield, which provide various functions such as the strategic direction for the business and policy development. They also provide support in marketing and new product development to help all outlet staff sell 'financial' products and services, such as personal and corporate banking, benefits distribution, savings



and investments and bill payments for our external clients, and 'branded' products such as stamps for Royal Mail, lottery products and foreign currency.

The Retail Team in our Head Office, whom you may have already been in contact with, ensures that all post offices present a consistent image, and helps subpostmasters to improve the private retail side of their business.

In Chesterfield, Transaction Processing handle all transaction information for the network of post offices, and is responsible for settling with clients for the work Post Office Counters carries out on behalf of their clients.

Types of Post Offices

We run a network of over 19,000 post offices, and these can be broadly divided into two main types:

- Branch offices directly managed by Post Office Counters and run by our own staff — of which there are around 600. They are usually large and situated in busy shopping centres.
- Independent offices operated on our behalf by business men and women like yourself, or large retail chains such as Safeways and ASDA.

Products and Services

Post Office Counters offer a huge range of products and services on behalf of more than 30 clients, including the Benefits Agency,

the Department of National Savings, British Telecom, Girobank and Royal Mail.

With 28 million customers a week, we deal with a wide variety of customers, who all require different services and products. For example, parents with their children cashing their child benefit, and customers paying gas and electricity bills and cashing personal cheques. Holiday makers who require passport forms can also purchase their travellers cheques, currency, travel insurance and continental motor insurance. Businesses can send parcels and letters by guaranteed services, as well as stocking up on stationery.

Automation

Post Office Counters is embarking on a £100 million programme to automate all of our offices. This will involve installing new computer equipment at every one of our 40,000 serving positions. This new computer network will be one of the largest in the world.

You will receive more information on automation as the programme is implemented.

will be doing

As a subpostmaster these are some of the things you can expect to be doing:

- Handling letters, packets and parcels for delivery by Royal Mail and Parcelforce.
- Selling postage stamps, postal orders and philatelic items.
- Paying pensions and allowances.
- Accepting payment of public utility bills like gas and electricity.
- Issuing television, fishing and game licences and, at certain offices, motor vehicle licences.
- Selling foreign currency, travellers cheques and travel insurance.
- Selling Littlewoods lottery scratchcards and, at selected offices, national lottery scratchcards and tickets.



Remuneration

The remuneration that you receive, and the way in which that remuneration is calculated, depends on the type of office that you run.

Smaller offices which have Annual Product Payment Calculations have remuneration based on:

- Assigned Office Payments, a stable sum not affected by traffic variations.
- Product Payments, which are traffic related and are assessed annually, using 12-months data.

Larger offices which have Monthly Product Payment calculations have remuneration based on :

- Assigned Office Payments, a stable sum not affected by traffic variations.
- Product Payments, which are traffic related and are assessed monthly, using one-month's data.

Community Office and Restricted Hours Office payments consist of a core payment, annual hourly rate and special cash allowance.



The level of these payments are fixed, and you are notified on appointment what the level of these payments are for your office.

Minimum Payment Offices receive a fixed amount or remuneration, including a special cash allowance.

Your Retail Network Manager and Agency Remuneration Manager will be able to help with more details about these payments.

Contract

As a new subpostmaster, you have entered into a contract with POCL which states what we as a business expect from you, but also what you can expect in return.

You will have received the full contract (on your day of appointment at the latest), which is a very 'live' working document for both you and Post Office Counters Ltd. You should read and understand it in its entirety.



Training

Training for new subpostmasters is usually delivered by an agency trainer. The duration and content of the training varies from office to office to meet your particular needs. However, as a basic guide, the training available is outlined below.



Transfer Day

On the day of transfer, the cash and stock from the outgoing subpostmaster will be transferred to you. Regional personnel (usually an auditor) will be on hand to assist in the completion of forms/records associated with the transfer.

On-Site Training

On-site training takes place at your office and is undertaken with an agency trainer. It covers a full range of transactions, accounting procedures, security and customer-care issues.

The duration of the training varies from office to office, and is tailored to individual requirements.

Ongoing Training

Further training is provided at timely intervals as necessary. This will be assessed by your Retail Network Manager.

The training programme for new agents after the on-site training is generally as follows (this may vary according to your own Regions requirements):

When	What
3-6 months after initial on-site training	Quality of performance
3-6 months after initial on-site training	Overnight cash holdings
3-9 months after initial on-site training	Putting the Customer First programme
3-9 months after initial on-site training	Security training
9-12 months after initial on-site training	Transactional knowledge events

All training is complemented by workbooks which are designed to let you learn at your own speed and in your own office. You should receive the basic transactional books during your first few days of appointment.

If you feel you need further training, please do not hesitate to contact your Retail Network Manager in the first instance.

Other Training Issues

In addition to transaction processing your training will fully cover:

- pay, contract and terms of appointment;
- managing cash and stock;
- managing staff;
- all work;
- security;
- dealing with problems.

Support

In order to help you make your business a success, a wealth of support is available for subpostmasters.

Retail Network Manager Network

Each office is assigned one of the 350 Retail Network Managers to support and help make improvements to both the post office and retail side of the business. Your Retail Network Manager will visit you on a more formal basis and carry out an outlet review, which will identify any areas where you need to make improvements.

Customer/Subpostmaster Helpline

A Helpline exists to enable Post Office Counters to provide an excellent service at all outlets by:

- Providing speedy, accurate information and support to staff, agents, clients and the public on all Post Office Counters enquiries and services.
- Handling complaints in an efficient and unbiased manner.



The Helpline is open between the hours of:

08.15 to 18.00 hrs Monday to Friday

08.30 to 16.00 hrs Saturday

The number is paid at local call rate, so wherever you are in the country you only pay a local rate call charge.

The number to call is **GRO**

When contacting the Helpline you should give your name, office and the nature of your enquiry. On most occasions they will be able to answer your enquiry immediately, but if they are unable to do so they will be able to connect you to the relevant department, or forward your enquiry on your behalf.

All calls to regional departments or your Retail Network Manager should be made via the Helpline.

Communications

As a new subpostmaster you have entered into a contract with POCL, which states what we as a business expect from you, but also what you can expect in return. Like many large organisations we have many ways of communicating with staff and subpostmasters.



The communications you will receive are:

Counter News

This is a national weekly bulletin containing all transactional and accounting procedural changes. On occasions, supplements are issued which may cover a new business transaction.

Brief Encounter

This document is issued every two months to train you and your staff on new transactions, or to improve your knowledge and awareness of current transactions within the business.

Regional Newsletters

These are issued weekly, and cover regional and local requirements in addition to the national Counter News.

Courier

Courier is a national monthly newspaper for staff and subpostmasters. It is designed to keep you abreast of 'what is going on' in the business, regionally and nationally.

Talking Shop

Talking Shop is a monthly publication distributed to sub post offices, and covers regional and national issues.

Cascade System

The cascade system is used to relay messages of urgency throughout the network of outlets. You will be given full instructions on the system during your initial training.

The National Federation of Subpostmasters

The National Federation of Subpostmasters is a registered trade union and represents subpostmasters, negotiating remuneration, etc. with Post Office Counters.

Further information on the National Federation of Subpostmasters can be obtained from their headquarters:

The Secretary
National Federation of Subpostmasters
 Evelyn House
 22 Windlesham Gardens
 Shoreham by Sea
 West Sussex
 BN43 5AZ Telephone: **GRO**

Conclusion

We hope this induction guide has been helpful in your understanding of Post Office Counters Ltd. However, we cannot hope to cover everything, therefore if there are any further queries you may have please do not hesitate to call our Helpline.

Telephone

GRO

