



THE SubPostmaster



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Calum Greenhow on the headline results of the NFSP member survey



Minister's response | PT1
Minister Paul Scully shares his views on the future of the post office network

Starting small



How Swanbourne Post Office has grown into a thriving business in Buckinghamshire



Forward planning | P28
It's never too early to start planning for next year's big sales occasions

GOT AN ISSUE? NEED HELP? THE NFSP IS HERE FOR YOU

NFSP HELPLINE

01273 452324

Call us for help and support if you

experience any of the following:

- Issues with Horizon
- Loss of cash or post office stock
- Issues with remittance (Rem)
- ATM issues
- A new post office opening near you (aka 'whitespace' or 'NNL')
- Any other contractual or operational issue with Post Office Ltd
- Issues with Royal Mail
- Support with managing your staff and HR advice
- Relief scheme for holiday cover when you need a break

Give us a ring for any other reason – we are here to help.

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- Landlord/tenant issues
- Damage to property (land and goods)
- Health and safety
- Accidents and injuries
- Wills, trusts and probate
- Family-related issues
- Road traffic law

Call the NFSP Helpline to be put through or, for more information and full terms and conditions, visit www.nfsp.org.uk and click on 'NFSP+' on the top banner, then click on 'advice'.



POST OFFICE SUPPORT

Expert mails segregation and compliance support available from your regional Mails Support Advisor.

Toolkits and useful information available at www.nfsp.org.uk

RETAIL SUPPORT

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Email retail@nfsp.org.uk or call the NFSP helpline (**01273 452324 - option 3**)

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- Packaging and stationery
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- Merchant services and note counters
- Waste management
- Insurance
- Energy bill savings
- Vehicle hire
- Business transfer

See p31 for a full list of NFSP retail partners, visit www.nfsp.org.uk/business-partner or call **01273 452324 – option 3**



STAY CONNECTED AND UP TO DATE

NFSP FACEBOOK GROUP

Private group exclusive to NFSP members. Share views, connect with other subpostmasters.

www.facebook.com/groups/NFSPmembers

NFSP WHATSAPP GROUPS

Join your local NFSP group chat. These groups are a great way of staying in touch with the NFSP and subpostmasters in your area, for asking questions and getting quick answers. If there is breaking news, you'll hear it first on WhatsApp!

To join your local group, email communications@nfsp.org.uk

EMAILED NEWS FROM THE NFSP – regular emails providing you with the latest news and information to help you run your post office and retail.

Not received any NFSP emails? Call the NFSP Helpline (**01273 452324 – option 5**) or email communications@nfsp.org.uk

THE SUBPOSTMASTER MAGAZINE

– the definitive publication for subpostmasters, delivered to your door. Published bi-monthly, the next edition is **February 2022**. Get in touch via thesubpostmaster@nfsp.org.uk

NFSP WEBSITE – a key resource to help you as a subpostmaster. Visit www.nfsp.org.uk

Unable to access the members' area? Call **01273 452324 – option 5** or email communications@nfsp.org.uk



YOUR REGION YOUR LOCAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Every region in the UK has a thriving NFSP community, led by Branch and Regional Secretaries who operate post offices themselves.

These NFSP representatives are there for you, providing advice and support with post office issues and life in general.

There are also regular online Regional meetings for sharing your views and experiences with other subpostmasters.

If you don't know who your local Branch or Regional Secretary is, call the NFSP helpline (**01273 452324 – option 5**) or email communications@nfsp.org.uk

DISCOUNTS

Looking to save money? Access discounts and deals for your business and you and your family by using the special offers available to members through NFSP+

Visit: www.nfsp.org.uk and click on **NFSP+**

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

Free access to health and wellbeing support services including a 24-hour helpline with qualified counsellors, bereavement support and medical information.

Visit www.nfsp.org.uk and click on 'NFSP+' on the top banner for more information.

BENEVOLENT FUND

Charitable fund to help current and former subpostmasters in need.

Visit www.nfsp.org.uk or email benfund@nfsp.org.uk

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

For general enquiries, get in touch at admin@nfsp.org.uk



THE SubPostmaster

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SUBPOSTMASTERS

DECEMBER 2021 www.nfsp.org.uk

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A reminder: The next edition of *The Subpostmaster* will be published in **February**

Production editor: Allan Norbury (allan@lewisbusinessmedia.co.uk)
Design: Sarah Crowhurst, Chrishna Othendee, Stuart Crowhurst
Contributors: Ruth Buckley-Salmon, Robert Clack, Calum Greenhow, Peter Hall, Daniel Hutchins, Simon King, Elizabeth Vessey
Members' Editor: Jon Follenfant



NFSP Headquarters:
 Evelyn House, 22 Windlesham Gardens,
 Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex BN43 5AZ
Tel: 01273 452324
Email: thesubpostmaster@nfsp.org.uk

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Helping you harness your potential to grow

As we approach the end of 2021, I am struck at how rapidly consumer habits have evolved. Customer expectations have grown and ways of interacting with businesses have changed significantly too.

Without customers, you don't have a business. In this rapidly changing environment, it is imperative to look ahead and make improvements to better meet customers' needs.

By the same token, the NFSP is looking ahead and determining our strategies for 2022/23 and beyond. As a member-led organisation, we have sought to understand what our members need from us through the member survey which took place in August and September this year.

We are still deep into the analysis of the survey results and we will share more detail with you in future, but

there are some clear messages coming through already. I want to share some of these headline messages with you here.

The first point is about the size and potential of the network. Based on the survey results, the independent sub post office network has a retail turnover of around £2.5 billion. This is huge – and it dwarfs the turnover of Post Office Ltd, which is just under £1 bn.

In spite of that huge figure, the survey identified many ways in which subpostmasters can improve and expand their retail and post office businesses. This includes: working with expert

suppliers rather than visiting the cash and carry, making better use of technology, and – crucially – marketing the business online.

The survey indicates that thousands of subpostmasters do not currently promote their business online or make use of their window displays to promote seasonal products or services. These activities can increase customer engagement significantly and drive post office and retail sales alike.

Clearly, then, there's potential to do more and to grow. I encourage you to put together a marketing plan for the coming year.

“The survey identified many ways in which subpostmasters can improve and expand their retail and post office businesses”

SIX POINTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARKETING PLAN

1 WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

The first things to consider are your short- and medium-term goals. These will depend on various factors relating to the current state of your business and your personal ambitions. Do you want to reach new customers? Do you need to fend off competition? Do you want to launch new retail categories?

2 DEVELOP YOUR BRAND

- ▶ **Brand Purpose** – what does your business stand for? For example, do you want to be the place that people come to for the services and products you provide?
- ▶ **Brand Vision** – what's your ultimate ambition? For example, do you want to be an integral part of your community?
- ▶ **Brand Mission** – how will you achieve your vision? For example, via well-trained, dedicated, helpful and enthusiastic staff?
- ▶ **Brand Personality** – What words describe your business? For example, welcoming, caring, engaging or helpful, etc.

3 CONSIDER YOUR POSITION

Never forget that unless you are the only business in your area, there is likely to be competition – so consider what they are doing. Can you do it better or offer a service that is not currently available in your area?

4 IDENTIFY THE TARGET MARKET

Take time to think on who your customers are, what their age group is and consider what type of products or services they would use or buy.

5 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING YOUR BUSINESS?

Work out what your unique selling points (USPs) are in terms of your customers' needs. Use this to help develop your marketing messages.

6 MAKE A PLAN

- ▶ Establish what your most effective channels of engagement will be. Facebook is a very effective way of engaging with local communities – most places have a local community interest group which lends itself to constructive engagement with residents. Google My Business is a free tool and can help you reach many customers – Post Office Ltd has produced guidance on how to make use of Google My Business.
- ▶ Consider your business's exterior and scope for window displays. Are you effectively telling customers all of what you do or only part of what you do? Do you need a name for your retail business that runs alongside the post office element? This is called brand synergy. If all you are promoting externally is the post office, what happens if the customer doesn't need the post office but does need the other products or services you provide? If your fascia and windows aren't telling potential customers what you do, they could walk on by.
- ▶ Determine what you are going to do and when – take the 2022 NFSP wallplanner (which came with this edition of *The SubPostmaster*) and mark on it when and how you will promote the products and services you have to offer. Crucially – make sure you build in planning time to do this.

Another survey finding is that there are certain behaviours associated with subpostmasters' positivity about the prospects of their business. Online marketing is one such behaviour, engagement with the NFSP is another. Put simply: those who engage more with the NFSP are

much more likely to be positive about their business's prospects.

I'm not suggesting that the only way you can be positive and experience growth is to engage with the NFSP – but it's clear that there are benefits from doing so. We are here to support you, we are here to

help you grow your business. The more you use us – the more you will get out of it. Make it a New Year's resolution to capitalise on the benefits of being an NFSP member!

I hope the festive period is all you hope it will be – and we will catch up in the New Year. Best wishes, Calum. ■



NFSP MAILS TEAM REPORTS SUCCESSFUL RUN OF MAILS SEGREGATION WORKSHOPS

Last month, the NFSP Mails Support Team ran a series of workshops to support members and their staff in all matters related to mails segregation.

A comprehensive range of subjects were covered – with sessions dedicated to everyone from new counter clerks just starting to get to grips with mails segregation, to seasoned subpostmasters looking to refresh their knowledge in a specific area.

The Mails Support Team received positive feedback from many workshop attendees and reported that a good number of members and their staff had attended several sessions.

NFSP Director of Operations Paul Simmonds said: "It was

fantastic being able to support members grow their knowledge and give them the opportunity to ask questions about mails segregation.

"The team will be running these workshops again in the first three months of the New Year, so if you weren't able to attend these ones you will have another chance. We will also be developing new ways in which NFSP members can access the series of workshops, so watch this space."

If you attended one or more of the workshops and have any feedback or would like to request a workshop topic not covered in the last round, please contact us at communications@nfsp.org.uk



New guidance on National Lottery products – age restrictions and 'healthy play'

As outlined in October's *The SubPostmaster*, new rules came into effect on 1 October 2021 prohibiting the sale of National Lottery products to those under the age of 18.

This also means that retailers with under-18 staff will also need to ensure any sales of National Lottery products by these staff members are approved by themselves or someone else in the team that is at least 18 or above.

This measure has been coupled with operator Camelot's new anti-gambling campaign to promote 'healthy play' among its customers. The company has called on retailers to play their part in selling National Lottery products responsibly and in line with the new age restrictions.

Further guidance on how to be a responsible National Lottery vendor has been published on the NFSP website. See www.nfsp.org.uk/news



PO and Trussell trust team up to support foodbanks this winter

Post Office Ltd (PO) is teaming up with the Trussell Trust to help support foodbanks this winter.

Due to this year's huge increase in energy costs, some families will have to decide whether to heat their homes or put food on the table.

From 29 November, for every over-the-counter cash withdrawal made at a post office, 1p will be donated to help provide and support around 11,000 foodbank volunteers across the country.

NFSP CEO Calum Greenhow said: "I will be joining in by donating an additional 1p for every withdrawal made through my office as well.

"Imagine if we all did this, what a difference we could make!"

See www.postoffice.co.uk/trussell-trust for more details



Inquiry chair Sir Wyn Williams (right) with assessor David Page. Below: NFSP Chief Executive Calum Greenhow addressed the inquiry via videolink

The NFSP view

The NFSP will continue to support the inquiry fully. We believe it is vital that those impacted by the Horizon scandal have their reputations restored and all their losses, including consequential losses, refunded. We hope the inquiry is able to address what happened in the past and to provide protection to the current and future post office network.



HORIZON INQUIRY RAMPS UP

Since the last edition of *The SubPostmaster*, there have been significant developments with the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry.

On 8 November, the inquiry held a preliminary hearing to finalise the list of issues it will explore. The hearing considered whether four additional issues should be covered by the inquiry – pertaining to: the forensic accountancy firm Second Sight Investigations Limited, reliance on legal advice in Horizon-related prosecutions, the conduct of the GLO Bates vs Post Office, and divergences across the UK.

As Core Participants to the inquiry, the NFSP provided a written submission in advance of

the hearing which, in broad terms, expressed that all four of these issues should be examined by the inquiry as they are highly pertinent.

NFSP CEO Calum Greenhow also provided a statement at the hearing by video link. In his statement, Calum focused on the decision-making within Royal Mail Group (pre-2012), Post Office Ltd (PO) and Government that led to the prosecution of subpostmasters and Post Office employees, the sudden termination of Second Sight's contract, and PO's strategy in the GLO Bates vs Post Office.

Other parties giving statements included legal representatives of Horizon scandal victims from Howe & Co and Hudgells, Second Sight, Barrister Paul

Marshall and Professor Richard Moorhead of Exeter University.

There were strong calls for the nature of legal advice given to PO to be explored and for Government and PO to act quickly to provide appropriate compensation to victims of the scandal. The NFSP strongly supports these requests.

After the hearing concluded, the inquiry Chair Sir Wyn Williams, requested that BEIS, UKGI, PO and Fujitsu “waive privilege in respect of legally privileged material relevant to the Terms of Reference as carried into effect by the Provisional List of Issues.”

Then on 16 November, Sir Wyn posted an update on the inquiry website confirming that all these

organisations have confirmed that legal privileges will be waived. In PO's case, the response to Sir Wyn's request was more complex. However, Sir Wyn was content with the response, stating that it “goes a very long way towards meeting the request I made of them. It is clear to me that in respect of many of the most crucial lines of investigation for the Inquiry PO has waived legal professional privilege.”

The inquiry has now published the list of issues it intends to investigate. This can be viewed at www.postofficehorizoninquiry.org.uk

QUESTIONS CALUM PUT TO THE INQUIRY:

■ “It has been reported that Second Sight were ordered to destroy all documentation on their investigation. If true, we need to know who ordered this to happen and why?”

■ “The question has to be asked in relation to whether Post Office Ltd (PO) corporate followed the advice

of their legal teams or whether the legal teams had to fit with the corporate strategy? In other words, what drove the end result? The victims need to know whether PO senior management acted independently of the Board or by its instruction.”

■ “One of the terms of reference of

the Inquiry is to assess whether PO has learned the lessons from the criticisms by Mr Justice Fraser. In essence – can the leopard change its spots? If those responsible for the GLO strategy remain in post, is it possible for the relationship with those who own and operate the post office network to be reset?”



Closures and cash in focus

In late October, two parliamentary debates discussed issues affecting NFSP members – post office closures and access to cash.

Both debates highlighted the vital role subpostmasters play in their communities, along with the public's overwhelming desire to ensure the post office network's protection.

Subpostmasters were praised by numerous MPs for the part they have played in supporting their local communities throughout the pandemic, and for "going above and beyond".

The NFSP contributed material to the debate and NFSP research was cited by MPs, many of whom recently met with CEO Calum Greenhow and Public Affairs Manager Ruth Buckley-Salmon to discuss the future of the network and subpostmaster



remuneration. Both debates have been published in full on Westminster's Hansard website.

The NFSP is continually lobbying elected officials on a range of issues that affect members' businesses. Any members wishing to raise a local or national issue for the NFSP to work on should contact Ruth Buckley-Salmon at ruth.buckley-salmon@nfsp.org.uk

Supporting NFSP members – the latest figures

In October and November, the NFSP provided individual support and representation to nearly 400 NFSP members*. So far in 2021, a total of 1,700 members have received individual support.

If you experience any issues in your post office, you can call the NFSP Helpline on **01273 452324** or email communications@nfsp.org.uk

*Figures cover requests for support escalated to dedicated NFSP support officers and our HR helpline. This does not include other calls to the NFSP helpline that are resolved on the spot or instances of advice or support provided through NFSP social media channels (of which there are many!)

MONTHLY PRIZE DRAW



Each month the NFSP carries out a remuneration survey to help understand how your post office and retail income is faring. The survey results contribute to the evidence the NFSP uses in discussions with Post Office Ltd (PO) and Government.

NFSP Public Affairs Manager Ruth Buckley-Salmon said: "What has stood out in the remuneration survey results are subpostmasters' concerns about footfall. Having this data helps us say to PO and Government: look at this, you need to take action to bring more customers through the door."

Each month an NFSP member who completes the remuneration survey will be selected at random to win a £50 One4all voucher.

Go to nfsp.org.uk/news

NFSP NED Christine Donnelly speaks at Rural Service Network Conference 2021

Christine Donnelly, the NFSP's Non-Executive Director for North Thames and East Anglia, was recently invited to speak on issues affecting subpostmasters serving in rural communities, at the Rural Service Network's Conference of 2021.

Christine's talk, entitled 'The Challenges Faced by a Rural Subpostmaster' highlighted how essential rural post offices are and stressed the mounting pressures they face in providing vital services to their local communities – especially when they are the last shop in the village.

Christine shared her own experience running both a rural post office and an outreach service for a village that lost its post office five years earlier.

She also emphasised the social value of rural post offices, highlighting that, on average, subpostmasters and their staff keep an eye out for 25 potentially vulnerable people in their local community. "We have a place in

the community that is unique," said Christine in her speech.

Challenges that she highlighted included, among others, the bulky outreach kits being hard to transport and assemble then disassemble; the decrease in financial support rural post offices have received over the years; the lack of holiday available to subpostmasters due to shortages in experienced staff, and the changing retail landscape brought about by online shopping and how that has impacted subpostmasters' retail income.

Christine's talk also led on her biggest concern of all, which is where the next generation of rural subpostmasters will come from.

She said: "I, like many, have my post office and home in the same building; the bricks and mortar value far outstrip the size of loan the business could support so any purchaser would need a substantial deposit or outside income."

Playing Our Part in Protecting the Environment

As IPS Retail is committed to **protecting our environment**, we are launching our range of bubble rolls **without a shrink wrap** to **reduce plastic waste**.

Available in the **same high quality** and **range of sizes** as before, these bubble wrap rolls are now held together by a single label in the middle of the roll.

Product Code	Dimensions	Outer Qty	RRP
BWP4N-16	300mm x 3m	16	£1.30
BWP2N-15	500mm x 4m	15	£2.75
BWP6N-8	500mm x 10m	8	£6.25
BWP3N-4	500mm x 25m	4	£17.00
BWP5N-9	600mm x 3m	9	£2.45



Call now or check online for our latest prices...

Each label features the following strong environmental message:

“ This roll has not been shrinkwrapped to reduce plastic waste Play Your Part in Protecting the Environment ”

CHRISTMAS OFFERS FOR ALL ACCOUNT HOLDERS - ONLY WHILE STOCKS LAST!

ParcelLite Bubble-Lined Envelopes



White Code	Gold Code	Outer Qty	Dimensions	RRP	You Pay
-	NFG/D-100	100	180 x 265mm	45p	9p
NFW/F-100	-	100	230 x 340mm	60p	13p
NFW/J-50	NFG/J-50	50	300 x 445mm	£1.15	23p
NFW/K-50	NFG/K-50	50	350 x 470mm	£1.25	27p

Ultratape FragileTape

48mm x 66m (no label/ no barcode)



Product Code
UFT-6C
Outer Qty
6 rolls
RRP **£2.75**

You Pay
£1.15

50% margin

PostBag XL Mailing Bag

410m x 500m (50 microns)

Product Code
POSTBAG4-50
Outer Qty
50 bags

RRP **35p**

You Pay
12p



MORE NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS IN THE LEAD UP TO CHRISTMAS! SIGN UP ONLINE NOW TO GET THE LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES!

MAILBOX

Your letters answered by Post Office and
Jon Follenfant, NFSP Members' Editor



Give us the right tools

I recently received an email from the NFSP which contained special offers on cash counting machines. I feel strongly that this is a resource Post Office Ltd (PO) should provide us with – rather than something we should have to pay for out of our own pockets.

My office is only open 15 hours per week and I do drop and go in spare moments. As a solo counter, when I do count cash, a queue often builds up. The only plus is that I get to have a chat with the customer while I count.

I'm sure many others would agree that this is the sort of provision PO could be making. It would help us do our jobs more effectively and reliably so that, ultimately, we can offer a better service to customers.

If I'm delivering Post Office products and services, shouldn't they provide me with all the tools I need to do it effectively?

Teresa Hudson
Bredgar PO

POST OFFICE LTD

REPLIES:

Greg Lewis,
Head of Counter
Products, Banking
Services, writes:
Thank you for your

question. Branches with an ATM who have either already moved or will be moving to the Post Office ATM offer will be provided with a note counter.

We don't have any short-term plans to co-fund further note counters as we feel we covered the demand in the earlier co-funded offer with the NFSP, which ran for a number of years. However, the SafeScan offer without the co-funding discount is still available through the NFSP along with another note counter.

Colleagues in the banking automation and equipment team are currently assessing what further automation branches could benefit from in future, from self-service deposit devices and teller cash recyclers through to basic note counting equipment, depending on the volumes of cash handled and the right approach to funding such equipment.

MEMBERS' EDITOR

REPLIES:

I do find it strange as to the kit that PO decides to provide to us at no cost, the kit we have to pay for and maintain, and the kit that they will not provide.

Currently PO provides a note counter to those post offices who have an ATM which has migrated from

Bank of Ireland to PO but did not think of providing such a machine to those post offices before – even when completing a balance meant a large number of notes had to be accurately counted.

PO requires us to update, at our own cost, counter date stamps.

They do not provide pens, staples and other items of stationery – but, strangely, they do provide sponge dishes.

PO provides some signage but when Post Office phone and broadband services were discontinued, we only received a sticker to place over the list of services provided in branch.

This sticker, which is affixed to the outside of the window over the menu option, is a target for graffiti.

At subpostmasters' expense they are willing to arrange a new sign.

With the increasing

emphasis on banking in post offices, particularly cash handling for deposits and withdrawals, surely it is in both subpostmasters' and PO's interests to ensure cash handling accuracy and to avoid counterfeit notes?

The provision and maintenance of cash counting kit, note counting in particular, would reduce cash handling errors and display a professional approach to the increasing use of post offices for banking; and, with the disappearance of high street banks, as Teresa Hudson points out, reduce the frustration of customers who have to wait in a queue behind a local business banking their cash – sometimes from multiple branches.

Paraphrasing Winston Churchill in an address to President Roosevelt during WW2: "Come on PO, give us the tools and we will finish the job".

Write to: Members' Editor
Jon Follenfant, NFSP Headquarters,
Evelyn House, 22 Windlesham Gardens,
Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex
BN43 5AZ
or email: thesubpostmaster@nfsp.org.uk

Mailbox thanks all those who have sent in letters in 2021. We enjoy reading and commenting on them. Please keep your letters and emails coming. On behalf of Mailbox we wish you all a happy and enjoyable seasonal break. Keep safe. We'll be back in the New Year.



THE VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER

Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets Paul Scully responds to October's letter from NFSP member Stuart Rogers and shares his views on the post office network in an exclusive piece for *The SubPostmaster*

STUART ROGERS' QUESTION

There's a wide range of post offices across the UK in terms of size and location. There's also a wide range of subpostmasters – and our opinions and ambitions will be varied. Besides the Post Office name on the door, what surely unites us all is the

importance of customers. Without our customers our post offices wouldn't exist. We've seen footfall decline over the years, so what practical ideas do Post Office Ltd, the NFSP and Government have to maintain and grow our customer base?

PAUL SCULLY'S ANSWER

■ Thank you, Stuart, for the question and thank you to the NFSP for giving me the opportunity to respond. This is an important issue and one I know Nick Read and his team are working hard to address. Having reflected on your question, I think you are right that post offices are united by their customers, but we shouldn't forget that they are also united by the role they play in communities.

This unique aspect of the post office network was brought home to me during a recent visit to Waters Upton Post Office in Shropshire. I was delighted to receive a warm welcome from subpostmaster Steve Bentley and we had a lively discussion with Mark Pritchard, MP for The Wrekin, about the opportunities and challenges facing rural post offices.

What was clear during my time there, and from speaking to Steve, was that his post office wasn't just any other shop. It was a hub for the local community. While I'm sure some post offices experience this more than others, I know that all post offices create meaningful social benefits for the communities they serve.

My vision for the Post Office is for it to deliver its social purpose alongside building a stable business. That is why we have provided £2.4 billion in funding to support the post office

network over the past 10 years to maintain and invest in our national network. Crucially, this has included an annual subsidy to ensure the viability of rural and community branches – since 2019 this has been maintained at £50 million a year. It is clear to me that post offices have a key role to play in high streets, helping keep town centres vibrant and playing a role in levelling up communities. It is by maintaining that role, even as we adapt to emerging consumer and technological trends, that I believe post offices can retain and build their customer base.

I can reassure you that we are not blind to these shifting trends, which can bring challenges alongside opportunities. Some of these were undoubtedly accelerated over the extraordinary past 18 months. I know many postmasters went the extra mile during the pandemic. I was moved by hearing the personal stories of postmasters working tirelessly, and delighted to see a number of postmasters recognised – quite rightly – in recent Honours for services to their local communities. Nonetheless, it is clear that COVID-19 has underlined some challenges and created many new ones both for post offices and for the country as a whole.

We need to continue working



through the implications of COVID-19 and adapting to changing consumer patterns. I know that Post Office Ltd (PO) wants to support individual branches to be successful businesses however they can – each branch is unique, and postmasters will know best how to serve their own communities.

It is clear that PO must continue to evolve to meet the challenges facing the sector. For instance, I was particularly pleased to see PO expanding its e-commerce and 'Pick Up, Drop Off' offering. While driving footfall and PO's commercial activities are within the responsibility of Nick Read and his team, this is something we discuss regularly and will continue to engage on.



FSP members will know Amanda through her weekly emails to subpostmasters. She is the corporate face of Post Office Ltd (PO) and sits on the senior tier of PO management known as the General Executive.

First up, I asked Amanda why she chose to join PO back in 2018 after a career with big blue chip names including John Lewis, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer and Conviviality.

“What I saw was the Post Office brand and its position in society and communities. It was similar to a lot of businesses that I have worked in and enjoyed the most, such as John Lewis, Waitrose and Marks & Spencer. Big brands that are recognised by most people whether you shop there or not”.

Amanda was introduced to the company by Debbie Smith, former PO Retail Chief Executive, with whom she shared the ambition to make a difference and shift the focus onto the customer. “The customer is the most important person and ultimately our job is to support postmasters and branch managers to do their best for customers”.

I asked Amanda whether she recognised that PO is different to other big high street brands in that the company is a gateway for its clients, such as Royal Mail (RM), who lay down the way that subpostmasters interact with customers. PO does not fully control its own destiny. On occasions, subpostmasters must turn away customers – for example, those who want to post goods which RM advises are restricted or prohibited or those whose large letter is in fact a small parcel. Other high street retailers can control their own proposition.

Amanda admitted that initially she did not fully appreciate the huge legal and regulatory complexity that comes with running the Post Office business, which also impacts post office branches, especially when handling the volumes of cash that many subpostmasters do.

In her previous roles, she could “influence the profitability and margins through the levers of pricing and promotions – whereas in PO you are pretty limited with the levers that you have to improve your profitability”.



THREE WAYS TO INCREASE COMMERCIAL GROWTH

NFSP Members’ Editor Jon Follenfant caught up with Amanda Jones, Post Office Ltd Retail & Franchise Network Director, for a wide-ranging conversation on some of the big issues affecting the network

Improving profitability

I was glad Amanda raised this. From a subpostmaster’s point of view we are about to face yet another round of cost increases due to National Insurance surcharges, increased utility costs, and increases to the minimum wage – with only the thought that under the

MDA2 pay structure we may see a rise in Royal Mail prices, which will lead to a trickle down of remuneration increases. This leaves us with little room to manoeuvre on paying these additional costs without selling more RM products at these higher prices and to make more from our associated

retail businesses. I asked Amanda what we can look forward to in 2022 to support against these additional costs.

"We absolutely understand postmasters' difficulties which is why Nick (Nick Read PO CEO) outlined his vision for the Post Office for 2025 early in 2021. He included seven priorities, the top one being to prioritise a strong, trusting and rewarding relationship with postmasters. He also included the need to grow the network commercially for the benefit of the network and individual postmasters." To this end we consider banking, mails and travel as the top priorities to grow the business commercially".

Banking

On banking, Amanda said that Banking Framework 3 offered the way forward with positive negotiations taking place with PO's 30 banking partners. All the indications so far are positive, and we should see smooth transition from Framework 2 to 3 in 2023.

"This gives the opportunity to look at remuneration, as we did with MDA2, to make sure the balance is right and recognise the effort that goes into selling those services. The objective is to secure free, convenient and reliable access to cash in every community across the country."

Our discussion turned to banking automation and the provision of in-branch banking technology to make banking easier and safer.

Amanda was at great pains to stress that the possible introduction of improved banking technology was not going to be an opportunity to cut remuneration, rather it was about finding a way for everybody to benefit – the customer gets a better service, subpostmasters have a more efficient in-branch process, and PO fulfils its obligation to banking clients.

Mails

Turning to mails, Amanda underlined that MDA2 had given PO the opportunity to bring on board additional mails carriers alongside RM – such as the Amazon and DPD services that began earlier in the year. Amanda was pleased that more than 3,000 branches now offer mails Pick-up and Drop-off (PUDO) to customers. It is estimated that the market could be worth £400 million by 2026 with PO hoping to capture a 30% share.

Exciting news – but under MDA2 our remuneration is based more on transaction values, rather than payments for sale and acceptance. With online postage sales accounting for 20% of the market, there is concern among many subpostmasters about earning less under the forthcoming MDA2 structure. Amanda explained that under MDA2, most subpostmasters will earn more and that the

"Easy ID offers an easier and faster way in which customers can digitally prove their identity"



Improved banking technology will give the customer a better service

monthly comparison data on remuneration advice slips demonstrate this.

Amanda also confirmed that work was in hand to improve in-branch mails label process which we all agreed was problematic.

Travel

At the time of our discussion, the new COVID-19 variant Omicron had not arrived on the scene and we were all cautiously looking forward to a gradual resumption of international holiday travel in 2022. Up to this point, in late November, we had seen surprising increases in travel insurance and foreign exchange sales, particularly a sharp increase in US dollar sales.

Talking about travel led us onto PO's partnership with HM Passport Agency. Amanda confirmed that the AEI kiosks would disappear in 2022 with the rollout of a tablet-based application solution for passports, drivers licences and security industry authority (SIA) applications.

The new partnership with YOTI, which offers the Easy ID service, has not been given much airtime to-date. Discussions are taking place to link branch codes with Easy ID applications and to explore future ID verification services. Easy ID offers an easier and faster way in which customers can digitally prove their identity rather than having to apply for a drivers licence or passport for the routine tasks of, say, collecting a parcel or buying a Lottery ticket. Amanda felt that there is scope to extend the service and generate additional sources of remuneration.

Engagement

Engaging with subpostmasters is a key part of PO's strategy for 2022 and



PO CEO Nick Read outlined his vision for the Post Office for 2025 early in 2021





▶ beyond, with Hithendra Cheetirala joining Amanda’s team as Postmaster Director. Hithendra is a serving postmaster since 2015 who has two post offices in Scotland. Hithendra, like Non-Executive Directors Elliott Jacobs and Saf Ismail, is expected to bring a subpostmaster perspective to PO’s decision-making.

Currently there are a number of different subpostmaster groups on various topics – including those sponsored by PO, and those run by the NFSP. PO wants to standardise its regional forums with clear membership and with published agendas to enable advance questions and to provide transparency. Amanda is keen to ensure that everyone is clear about what has been discussed and agreed at these meetings.

Amanda envisages that these groups would look at topics such as profitability, product innovation, opportunities for automation, and marketing. These groups will be able to influence PO’s commercial and marketing decisions.

Post Office Ltd and the NFSP

I remarked that PO is undertaking many more meetings and consultations directly with subpostmasters, an area which has traditionally been covered by NFSP meetings – perhaps with PO speakers

invited. Where does Amanda see the role of the NFSP in the future?

“The NFSP absolutely has a role in the future of the network” said Amanda. Calum Greenhow (NFSP CEO) and members of the NFSP have been engaging with Amanda and her team to refresh and improve the ways the NFSP and PO work together for the benefit of subpostmasters.

Amanda believes that Calum is supportive of PO’s planned direct engagement strategy and, like Amanda, is committed to reset the relationship between subpostmasters and PO. Amanda went on to stress

that the NFSP has a very strong record of challenging PO on the important issues when necessary.



Increasing the size of the network

Our conversation turned to PO’s ambition to create further post office outlets to improve network coverage across the UK and bring the total number of branches to 12,000.

I felt that this was at odds with the fact that there are still subpostmasters that did not convert to the new models under network transformation (NT) and have been waiting to leave the network ever since.

Despite intensive efforts to find alternative provision, no other operators have been found for these branches. Amanda advised that at the

beginning of the financial year there had been 300 such offices, but this had been reduced to 234.

The scope for finding a solution for these branches is partly tied up in the issue of Government funding for PO – which, at the time of writing, is still unresolved beyond March 2022.

Amanda also explained that some of the additional branches would be in new formats, as outlined by Nick Read earlier in the year.

PO believes that these new formats are needed to take advantage of the increase in PUDO, the closure of post offices due to subpostmaster resignations and population shifts.

Onboarding new operators

I suggested to Amanda that part of the problem in attracting new subpostmasters may be down to the long-winded ‘onboarding’ process which can take many months.

Amanda agreed that onboarding had been “excruciating” historically – in 2019/20 it could take as long as nine months for a new subpostmaster to take over a branch. It has been known for potential new entrants to drop out of the process.

However, the wait has been halved by improving the process, including the lengthy financial assessment. In addition, the time-frame for the onboarding process is now provided to applicants in advance and they are kept updated on progress throughout.

Our conversation then turned to the composition – in terms of gender and ethnicity – of PO’s Board and General Executive.

I questioned whether they reflect the composition of the subpostmaster network.

Amanda put forward that both the Board and General Executive were diverse in their membership and that “we are beginning to understand the make-up of the network, for example based on those who completed our Postmaster survey”.

PO has recently completed its first diversity and inclusion employee survey looking at the level underneath the General Executive to make sure that they are creating the right opportunities.

A big thank you to Amanda for taking time out to talk to *The SubPostmaster*.

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Earn 3.5% commission
on every One4all Gift Card sold



For every sale you make of a One4all Gift Card, you'll earn 3.5% commission of the gift card load value for your Post Office.

Scan the barcode and load with the value the customer chooses between £10-£120. It's that simple!

Number of Sales	5 x One4all Cards £50	10 x One4all Cards £50	50 x One4all Cards £50
Commison Earned	£8.75	£17.50	£87.50



SCAN THE
BARCODE



TRANSACTION IN
LESS THAN 60 SEC



3.5%
COMMISSION



ACCEPTED IN OVER
55,000 STORES

“IT'S ONLY ONE ERROR – DOES IT REALLY MATTER?”

YEAR TO DATE PERFORMANCE TARGET FOR EACH MAIL BAG: 95%



MESSAGE FROM THE MAILS SUPPORT TEAM

It's hard to believe that it's nearly Christmas again, so well done for all your hard work this year. If we continue to perform at the current level, we will achieve 95% on both 1st Class Parcel and the 2nd Class Parcel targets, resulting in a £4.5 million bonus to be shared among subpostmasters.

We are making good progress with Letter/ Large Letter performance, but we want to show you the impact of a single error and how this is preventing us from achieving all three targets and receiving the full £7.5 million bonus available.

We know how hard you are working but an extra push to eliminate the single errors will get the network across the line on all targets.

The good news is that the single errors – as detailed here – are easily remedied by following best practice.

The Mails Support Team wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous 2022!

The NFSP's Mails Support Team is made up of eight advisers, covering all 10 regions of the UK.

The team provides one-to-one support over the phone and at your post office. You can also benefit from this support through our interactive online workshops, WhatsApp groups, and a whole host of tools and guides available on our website.

The NFSP Mails Support Team

NFSP Region	Mails Support Advisor key contact	Telephone
London	Stewart Swabey	07983 042533
Midlands	Naina Ardeshana	07983 042535
North East	Helen Richardson	07984 221823
N Thames & E Anglia	Naina Ardeshana	07983 042535
North West	Alan White	07983 042613
Northern Ireland	Deirdre Drumm	07983 042596
Scotland	Vijay Lakhanpal	07983 042553
South East	Stewart Swabey	07983 042533
South West	Rita Palmer	07983 042526
Wales/Cymru	Alan White	07983 042613

In November 2021, of the 1,398 errors recorded, 917 were single errors

Of these single errors, 161 bags had no labels and 154 had an incorrect label. Incorrect items included: 160 items in the 1st Class Parcel bag, 138 items in the Letter/Large Letter bag, and 304 items in the 2nd Class Parcel bag

On average Royal Mail check 5,000 bags per month from 2,000 post offices

Always use the size guides, never size by eye and refer to the laminates – never guess what goes where

Place the parcel label side up – it's easier to spot an error this way

Check your priority mail regularly against your dispatch report throughout the day

Red X unacceptable mail which has been left unattended

Check all mail bags before use, remove any mail found inside and hand to the Collection Officer

Dispatch all mail at every collection

Red X label order code P5069C/50

Tie all mail bags (with the exception of franked/metered letters) around the neck using the correct label

Segregate all mail by size first, including tracked returns

Spot check your bags and, where possible, get different members of staff to do so

Large Letter template order code MISC 1793

If a customer presents third-party courier mail, it must be paid for or placed in the external box

If you only have one collection, tie your bags more frequently

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE NET!



The NFSP's Negotiating and Engagement Team (NET) meets with Post Office Ltd on a monthly basis to raise issues and represent your interests. *The SubPostmaster* brings you an update on recent outcomes

CHRISTMAS STOCK AND CONTINGENCY PLANS



■ The NET hope your supply of Christmas stamps was more appropriate than in previous years.

Post Office Ltd (PO) has done a lot of work to ensure the amounts supplied are realistic but please feed back any issues through your Area Manager. The NET have raised issues around Christmas stamp supplies (whether too few or too many) several times in the past and so it is good to see improvements being made.

We have raised the issue of the 1st and 2nd Class Letter and Large

Letter Christmas stamps all being the same size – something which could potentially cause mistakes and confusion at the counter. PO is reviewing this with Royal Mail to see if this can be avoided next year.

PO delivery vans should all be carrying 'contingency packs' over the Christmas period. If you are at risk of running out of Christmas stamps, please ask the van driver for a pack. These contingency packs were one of the suggestions raised by the NET in previous discussions.

NORTHERN IRELAND CUSTOMS ISSUES

■ The NET and the NFSP Northern Ireland (NI) Regional Committee have been working with PO and RM to resolve problems with mail from NI to EU countries – particularly Germany. The Northern Ireland Protocol agreed during Brexit negotiations requires that no customs forms be applied from NI to any EU country.

We were able to show the extent of the problem using the picture above, which shows the amount of incorrectly returned mail from Germany in one office on one day! This level of returned mail has had a significant impact on post offices in NI and risks reducing customer



confidence in the Post Office/Royal Mail network overall.

A number of actions were agreed as a result of discussions: RM will be speaking to their country service managers to help identify where the process has been going wrong, and to communicate to RM customer services what the agreed process is for refunds for NI customers.

Incidences of returned items have reduced significantly and reports show that the flow of mail into the EU is now smoother – but the NET will keep a close watch on the issue. If you experience any issues, please email communications@nfsp.org.uk

ICON REMOVAL

■ Work continues on the removal of unused icons from Horizon and the 'tidying up' of screens. Six icons were removed in October and November, as were Special Delivery and Signed For stamps.

The NET is aware that these stamps are still visible in the business mails suite and these will also be removed at the earliest possible opportunity. As there is a freeze on changes through December, this will take place in the New Year.

Travellers' Cheque icons will be removed after the change freeze, and evoucher screens will be tidied up – with icons moved to more logical locations.



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Puretech 130 GT 5dr Auto**

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Affinity Leasing 48 month personal contract hire agreement (PCH) base on a 9+47 payment profile with 5,000 mileage allowance per year (20,000 miles in total with excess mileage charged at 9.6ppm)

Alternative payment and mileage profiles available on request.

Offer expires 31st December 2021, the above offers are based on a 48 month personal contract hire agreement (PCH) with 5,000 contracted mileage allowance per year (figures quoted include VAT.) Alternative payment profiles and full details are available on request. *subject to terms and conditions and successful credit application. Image for illustration purposes only.

0800 060 7070



MORE TIPS FROM NFSP MEMBERS

The NFSP WhatsApp and Facebook groups are great places to pick up practical tips and advice. Join your local group and share your knowledge!

WHAT TO DO WITH SD STAMPS?

■ Quite a few questions have been asked about this on NFSP WhatsApp group chats. The answer is simple – send them back with your REM.

WHAT TO DO WITH OBSOLETE STAMPS?

■ Best practice is to not hold obsolete stamps, so return any obsolete stamp stock with your REM as soon as possible. It is easier to balance if you regularly streamline your stock. Be aware that obsolete stamp icons are removed from the system – so make sure you keep on top of sending back old stamp stock.



UNDERPAID ONLINE POSTAGE PAID ITEM

■ If an online parcel is underpaid because it has been weighed incorrectly, is the wrong format, or the because the customer wants to upgrade the service, you cannot add on the difference in postage. The customer must either reprint the label or pay the full Horizon tariff at the counter and claim a refund from the label issuer.

CAN CHRISTMAS CRACKERS BE SENT BY POST?

■ **YES – to international and UK destinations, but only in their made-up form (i.e. as whole crackers) and in their original retail packaging.**



RESTRICTED ITEMS

■ Post Office Ltd (PO) has recently updated guidance on restricted items on Horizon Help. PO has said that the 45 countries that have been updated represent 95% of international volumes. Any outstanding countries will be updated in the New Year.

The Royal Mail website has guidance on prohibited and restricted items for both personal and business customers.

STAFF DISCOUNT CODES

TRAVEL INSURANCE:

- ▶ Single trip – XO15
- ▶ Multi trip – XO25

MONEYGRAM:

- ▶ Poststaff

Christmas Opening Hours



■ You can update your opening hours on Branch Hub – but be sure to change them back after the Christmas period.

NFSP CEO Calum Greenhow said: “Every year Post Office Ltd sends out guidance on opening hours over Christmas and New Year. The NFSP believes that, as self-employed businesspeople, no-one knows your customer demand better than you – and no-one knows the right time to stay open until on 24 and 31 December better than you. That said, we suggest you do not close on 24 or 31 December until Royal Mail have performed their last collection.”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join the NFSP's Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/NFSPmembers
Interested in joining your NFSP WhatsApp group? Call the NFSP Communications Team on **01273 452324** (option 5) or email communications@nfsp.org.uk



ENJOY CHRISTMAS FOR LESS WITH NFSP PLUS

It's the most wonderful time of the year, but with NFSP+, we're about to make it even better. We've compiled the discounts available to NFSP members to help you save on everything from Christmas shopping to party season entertainment

SAVE ON APPLE PRODUCTS* INCLUDING:

Mac, iPad, iPhone, Apple Watch AirPods, Beats and Apple accessories (inc. NEW AirTags). Personalise your device with free engraving on: AirPods, iPod, iPad, Apple Pencil (2nd Generation), AirTags.

10% ONLINE DISCOUNT AT FOYLES.CO.UK:

Plus sign up to the Foyalty card to earn points on every purchase*.

20% DISCOUNT ON VIRGIN EXPERIENCE DAYS*

Save on over 2,500 experiences.

SAVE, ENJOY, SPEND TODAY WITH BLACKHAWK NETWORK PLATFORM:

From saving on your supermarket shop and Christmas presents to decorating your home and stocking fillers.

75% DISCOUNT ON OPEN FAIRWAYS GOLF CARD:

Enjoy an 18-month subscription to Open Fairways for only £22.50! Usually costing £89, NFSP members and their family will pay £22.50 for 12 months (and receive an extra 6 months free!)

DISCOUNTS ON DELL PRODUCTS:

Get up to 20% discount off laptops, desktops and

accessories. Plus get up to 5% discount off on select Dell PowerEdge servers (excludes the PowerEdge T140)

SAVE 50% ON 12 LUXURY WINES:

Virgin Wines are offering a generous HALF PRICE saving on 12 bottles of delicious luxury wines - yours today for just £65.88, including free express delivery and 2 FREE Schott Zwiesel wine glasses (worth £18).

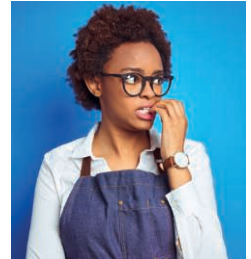
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE AND OTHER FANTASTIC DEALS VISIT WWW.NFSPPLUS.ORG.UK TODAY!

*Terms and conditions apply to all benefits. See website for details. Offers subject to change without notice and correct at time of print. Virgin Experience Days - Discount code cannot be used against their Excluded Range. Virgin Wines - For full terms and conditions, visit <https://www.virginwines.co.uk/terms> Apple - Annual purchase limits apply. Discounts are subject to availability. For the latest offers visit the Apple EPP store. For current discount exclusions, please visit the website. Foyles - Unfortunately the discount is not applicable against certain items, including but not limited to already-discounted products, events, gift cards, book tokens, theatre tickets, and A Year of Books. The discount is not applicable to postage costs. Foyles reserves the right to alter products included or excluded from the scheme, and to add to or amend these terms and conditions. NFSP Plus is managed and run on behalf of NFSP by Parliament Hill Ltd.

MENTAL HEALTH – LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AND YOUR STAFF THIS WINTER

Winter can be a difficult time of year. With the darker nights, the stresses and strains of the Christmas rush and the added pressure of COVID-19, it's important to look after your mental health during this period

The NFSP is here to help. We've compiled some tips on how to look after the wellbeing of yourself and your staff this winter, along with important information on FREE support services available – some of which are provided through the NFSP member benefits scheme (NFSP+).



1 STAY CONNECTED

Stay in touch with others through the NFSP's social media networks. Our Facebook members' group and our regional WhatsApp group chats are great ways to stay connected with other subpostmasters and to seek support from NFSP representatives and staff.

If you're not yet signed up to either of these, get in touch with us at communications@nfsp.org.uk or call us on 01273 452324.

2 SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP THROUGH NFSP+

You're eligible for **FREE** counselling sessions. Two companies, ARAG and Health Assured, can provide telephone support from qualified counsellors on any matter that may be affecting your wellbeing. Call **0344 477 1619** for ARAG or **0800 028 0199** (quoting reference number HA174638) for Health Assured.

3 DOWNLOAD A FREE WELLBEING APP

You also have **FREE** access to My Healthy Advantage, a smartphone app containing a library of resources to help you overcome mental, physical and financial wellbeing challenges. See: [www.nfspplus.org.uk/members990g/b_we_Health Assured/](http://www.nfspplus.org.uk/members990g/b_we_Health_Assured/)

4 TAKE TIME OUT WHERE YOU CAN

Whether that's taking a walk, a coffee break, doing some exercise, practising meditation, or spending quality time with family, be sure to build in time for regular self-care and relaxation wherever possible.

5 MANAGE YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS

For some, festive cheer can feel quite jarring – particularly when grappling with the most hectic trading period in the calendar.

Managing your expectations about the holiday period can help you feel a little less isolated from those in the holiday spirit around you. It's OK not to love the festivities and it's important not to be hard on yourself if you're not able to devote as much time and energy to the holidays as others around you.

6 TAKE A STEP BACK WHEN DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

As footfall starts to pick up and the pressures of the holiday period mount, you may encounter a few more impatient or unhappy customers than usual.

Remember to remain calm when encountering any customer hostility. Try not to take customer frustrations personally – even if they're unfairly directing these at you or your staff.

This does not mean you should tolerate abuse. Report any abusive behaviour to Grapevine on 0345 603 4004 and if you feel threatened or unsafe in any way, don't hesitate to call 999 and ask for the police.

7 To minimise stress, don't delay in addressing issues or errors until after the holidays. Contact the NFSP Operations Team straight away if you need help at operations@nfsp.org.uk or call **01273 452324** and press 4.

8 LOOK AFTER YOUR STAFF

Keep a close eye on the wellbeing of your team. Bupa has guidance on what to look out for and how to act if you think a member of your team may be experiencing mental health complications. See: www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/workplace-mental-health/signs-poor-mh

You can also guide employees (and family members you live with) to the counselling services mentioned.

9 IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY – GET IN TOUCH!

The NFSP has a benevolent fund that helps serving or retired subpostmasters and their dependants who have fallen on hard times. For details on what's offered, eligibility criteria and how to apply, see www.nfsp.org.uk/your-member-benefits/benevolent-fund

If you (or a member of your team) are experiencing mental health issues and you're unsure what to do, please get in touch at communications@nfsp.org.uk or call us on **01273 452324**. We can help guide you

to the support available. You can also visit the Health & Wellbeing section on the NFSP's website to learn more about the support services available to you: www.nfsp.org.uk/information-

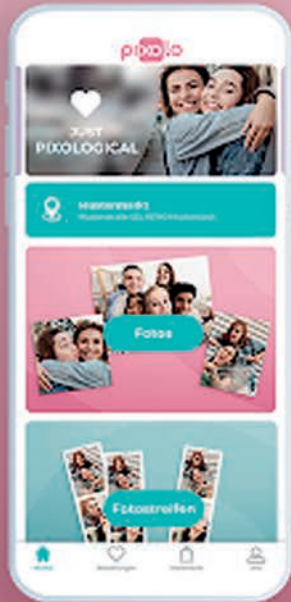
directory/health-and-wellbeing-support-services

An extended digital version of this article will also be available on the news section of the NFSP website soon.

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Jean-Claude Blanc, Julia Blanc and John Battrum



TOUR DE FORCE

Julia and Jean-Claude Blanc own Swanbourne Post Office in Buckinghamshire after taking over the branch in May 2021. **Simon King** visited the couple to see how the business is progressing

By their own admission, the Blancs had no previous experience of running a post office. Prior to taking over the post office, Jean-Claude, a chef, ran a pub/restaurant just outside Woburn for two and a half years and before that the couple were in the south of France for 15 years.

“We were in St Tropez for 10 years and for the winters we were in Courchevel and we rented out luxury houses,” Julia says.

The couple actually met in the village 22 years ago and the pandemic resulted in the pair looking for a new opportunity.

Julia says: “When we saw that this place was for sale, it was like coming home really, because we know a lot of people here. The previous owners, Jan and Magda Bos, wanted to retire – had no energy for it, yet they were actually very helpful to us in the handover.

“We already knew Marion and Roger, the owners prior to Magda and Jan. We had lunch with them and talked to

them. They told us to engage with the NFSP for help and guidance on the retail side of the business, where neither of us had any experience.

“Robert Clack (NFSP Retail and Commercial Director) was very good. We had three or four Zoom calls, because of the pandemic, with him and we’d send him photos of the shop and its measurements. He was very helpful and suddenly everything seemed to start moving.”

When the Blancs took the branch over, the shop had been dormant for months, if not longer.

“Our predecessors had two years of the pandemic, so their books were pretty depressing,” Julia says. “We knew we could only improve on it; the shop did not have much stock in it, so really we were starting with a blank canvas.”

With just four weeks to the store opening, Robert recommended Bowsher, a supplier who would advise the couple on shelving.

Julia says: “Bowsher did all the grey shelving and the islands in the middle. It fitted the shelving on the Saturday and we opened on the Monday.”

Jean-Claude says the business is best described as being a convenience store, which also sells luxury items and “really great ingredients”.

“We wanted to make it the best we could, a really quality offering,” he says. “We started as a small

convenience store and we started introducing more and more products, hoping that these would sell. I then went out and got all the culinary products, including herbs and spices. People that enjoy cooking can come here and we’ve got most of the ingredients.”

“We knew we could only improve on it”



Julia sources unusual products, some from France and some from other suppliers. "It means we have things that other shops may not have," she says. "We're trying to find something different."

"Our friend Chris helped us build the shelves for the drinks, and we said we wanted it to look like a rustic old farm shop, but with some really nice things in it, as well basics like baked beans."

"We've got to have a convenience offering, because that's what people want, but it's nice to have some other

things on top of that, which you wouldn't expect to find."

Julia admits that she found it very hard actually getting to grips with the post office.

"I had a lot of support from the Area Manager – Post Office Ltd sent three people at different times to help me because I was struggling," she said.

"I found getting things to balance – the quirks of Horizon – fairly difficult. I did find it hard getting my head around it. The cavalry has been my brother, John Battrum, coming in to

work with me – that's taking the pressure off me; I'm trying to think about the shop."

Without doubt, one of the couple's biggest successes has involved Jean-Claude.

Julia says: "Jean-Claude cooks his own food, restaurant-quality meals, which are available from 5pm on Thursdays. If there are any left, which is very unusual, they go in the freezer. What we're trying to do is build up the freezer, so that people can come in and get them any time."



GET YOUR RETAILING YEAR OFF TO A REWARDING START

■ Post Offices nationwide have been reaping the rewards of selling books using expert help.

▶ Success with selling books can require knowledge and time, neither of which are easy to come by. If you're thinking of selling books it's recommended that you engage with a team who have the knowledge and expertise to make sure you do it right.

▶ Space is often limited and success can depend on finding a compact yet attractive display that

gives both impact plus a great return.

▶ The Cut-Price Bookstore have been refining their bookselling expertise for over 30 years and have developed an easy way for busy subpostmasters to capitalise on their years of experience.

▶ Dom Rawnsley, head of national accounts with The Cut-Price Bookstore, says "the complication of choosing what to stock and how to re-order puts people off selling books. They feel too daunt-

ed." In response to this Dom and his team have developed an easy solution: "Leave it to us! We'll hand pick the best-selling selection for you and we can even pre-sticker the books. We'll even supply the space-saving display stands too."

▶ The problem of re-ordering is something Dom and his team have also simplified: "Our re-ordering process couldn't be simpler, all the hard work is taken away."

Find out more and get in touch with the team for a no obligation chat

W: cutpricebookstore.co.uk/trade E: dom@cutpricebookstore.co.uk T: 01482 866695

RETAIL SUCCESS
FOR 2022



Retail Post office of the month

Jean-Claude says that popular dishes include beef bourguignon and gratin dauphinois, fresh halibut and homemade chicken Kiev.

Julia takes up the story: "We have people that come from Leighton Buzzard to get Jean-Claude's food and that's 11 miles away. Another couple that live in Amptill used to come to the pub for Jean-Claude's food – that's 20 miles away.

"People ring and order the food. We have 100 people on the mailing list already. We send that out on a Wednesday or Thursday, then people can ring and reserve their food.

"We get people ringing up saying 'I've got eight people coming for supper, can I book eight halibut and eight gratin dauphinois'. Jean-Claude makes the best chocolate mousse in the world – customers will bring a bowl and ask us to fill it up with mousse for six or eight people."

On Thursday, if Julia feels that the food is not selling, she'll put it on Facebook.

"I've not put it on Facebook for six weeks," she adds.

"Jean-Claude's food actually brings a lot of people in for that; they come in, get their meal and sometimes get a bottle of wine. It's working very well, but food-wise, he can't keep up at the moment.

"Due to the pandemic, we're both here. The idea was that the pub and restaurant would keep going and the food would come from there. That would have been much easier because Jean-Claude had a team of people."

Julia recalls that business was hard to begin with.

"We were working long hours and we didn't have any staff for the first four weeks, it was just the two of us trying to do it all and trying to learn it," Julia says. "Once we got other people in to help us, it became easier."

Looking back, the couple said that Bowsher was very efficient and they'd recommend them. "They came in at such short notice – three or four weeks before we were due to open; I spoke to Bowsher and the contact said 'don't worry, we'll help you,'" Julia says.

"We sent Bowsher the footprint of our shop and they showed us what we



should be doing – they came in really quickly. We knew the look and feel we wanted to have."

Looking ahead, the couple plan to start building a website in January, which will enable customers to place orders for food. However, an increase in food orders will create a challenge for Jean-Claude.

He says: "At the moment, I'm

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Bowsher shelving with home-made gondola ends

cooking in a home kitchen that's 30 or 40 years old, so we're going to have to do something about it. There's a lot of potential to offer something different.

"It doesn't have to be the classic gastronomy food we produce; we cook pastries every day and they go down really well. We do sausage rolls and pasties, but they are always freshly baked, and not reheated.

"If we settle comfortably into it – we've only been here seven months – expansion to the side of the house to create a coffee shop is possible, because that's where the money is."

In an average week, Jean-Claude cooks 80 main courses, plus sides, plus desserts.

"I start preparing things on Tuesday," he says. "We're waiting for the health inspectors to come in and advise us. We're not doing any work until they've come in. We want them to say what they want us to do."

Julia concedes that she uses Facebook rarely.

"Occasionally, something new will come and we'll put it on there," she adds. "Realistically, we need to develop that side of things because we're not utilising it."

Going back to the NFSP, Julia says that the couple has already taken a lot of advice and guidance from the Federation.

"Benefits we've used included helping to get insurance," Julia says. "They advised about insurance of the post office, and they've advised about certain suppliers to use. The NFSP was just so supportive; before that, we were completely winging it."

While the Blancs are both new to retail and the post office, they've done very well to get to the level they have in just seven months – and the journey looks exciting; one to watch.

Julia says: "It's like the Forth Bridge, it's not finished yet; it's been a rollercoaster really, but in the last two months, it's started coming together really – the feedback from customers is



Customers can have a chat over a cup of coffee



SHOP TALK

Swanbourne Post Office, Mursley Road, Swanbourne, Milton Keynes

Size: 540sq ft

Staff: Four (part-time) + Julia and Jean-Claude

Opening hours: Post office: 9am-5pm (Monday to Friday); 9am-12pm (Saturday)
Shop: 8.30am-6pm (Monday to Friday); 8.30am-1pm (Saturday)

PO counters: One (Fortress)

PO services: forex, mail, DVLA, Drop & Go

Retail: Cards, groceries, gifts

very good, especially as we've never done retail before.

"The community like it and they've been brilliant, really supportive." ■

TIPS FOR SUBPOSTMASTERS

Take time to spend time with customers

Jean-Claude says the business is friendly when customers come into the post office.

"The emphasis is on greeting people and acknowledging them and chatting," he says. "The old ladies come in, and we sometimes provide them

with a chair so they can sit in front of the counter and have a chat over a cup of coffee.

"Throughout the summer, people have been sitting outside. Julia goes out and sits with them and has a chat and a cup of coffee or a cup of tea. We are a convenience community store – it's very

important to look after these people."

Give freshly baked food a go

While Jean-Claude is a trained chef, he says that post offices don't have to be that involved or specialised.

"If they look online, it's possible to get a really

good quality muffin mix or cake mix. Basically, they can cook it and serve it every day. I don't make all the Danish pastries, we buy good quality frozen stuff and we bake it every day.

"Afterwards, it's down to you to actually make sure everything is freshly done. On Saturdays, I'll make quiches, for example."

NEW YEAR –

In this edition of *The SubPostmaster*, we take a look at the opportunities and events of the New Year

DEC

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY!

WHSmith starts selling Cadbury Creme Eggs from Boxing Day – they are great impulse buys. Stores across the country do this, so join in and get your share of the market. If you stock confectionery or are a convenience store, start displaying these near your till as an impulse purchase. You'll be amazed how many you will sell. Everybody loves a Creme Egg!



JAN

SET YOUR MARKETING PLAN

January is the time to plan marketing activities for the year ahead. See NFSP CEO Calum Greenhow's six points for a successful marketing plan on P4.

JAN

JANUARY SALES

Every high street retailer should be clearing old and slow-selling lines in January. This is a great opportunity for you to make space for new products.

Sale periods work best when the 'sale' stock is grouped together in one place to make a bold and powerful display. This approach has more impact than when sale products are spread throughout the store. Find a suitable space and really drive the sale message. Red as a colour to promote these products also works best.

FEB



NEC SPRING FAIR SUNDAY 6 – 9 FEB 2022

The NEC Spring Fair is the UK's most vibrant marketplace for wholesale home, gifts and fashion. Held at the NEC Birmingham in February across four days, the definitive 'shop for shops', helps support the retail industry. www.springfair.com

FEB

CHINESE NEW YEAR 1 FEB 2022

Start preparing for Chinese New Year on 1 February 2022. NFSP partner Davora offers a great range of Chinese New Year cards – as well as cards for many other ethnic occasions – and this is an ideal opportunity to increase sales at what is typically a quieter time of year. Davora can be contacted at: www.davora.co.uk



NEW START



VALENTINE'S DAY 14 FEB 2022

A key date in the greeting card calendar. Last year over 145 million Valentine cards were sold, making it the most popular occasion for cards outside Christmas. Make sure you have a full and powerful display on show from mid-January. If you have space, why not try and make a romantic window feature to support your internal retail offer?



NEW CAR REGISTRATIONS 1 MARCH 2022

The new 2022 car registration plates commence from 1 March 2022. NFSP partner Affinity Leasing has many great offers for NFSP members if you are thinking of changing your car. Affinity can create tailor-made deals at competitive prices. Call them on 0800 060 7070 or visit their website: www.affinity4u.co.uk and use the code 'federation'.

Affinity Leasing
vehicle finance
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2022 WALLPLANNER

The 2022 NFSP wallplanner is included with this edition of *The SubPostmaster*. The wallplanner contains all the key dates for 2022 and info about when to capitalise on seasonal opportunities.



ALSO COMING UP...

NFSP Regional meetings. A round of meetings will be held around the UK in the New Year. If you haven't attended a Regional meeting before, these are an opportunity to meet other subpostmasters in your area and your local NFSP representatives, and to hear more about what the NFSP is doing on your behalf. See NFSP emails and WhatsApp for more information nearer the time.

Horizon inquiry hearings. The inquiry will commence public hearings in early 2022. The NFSP will continue to contribute fully to the inquiry and will keep members informed of all relevant developments.



MOTHER'S DAY 27 MARCH 2022

This important card occasion deserves special treatment, and you should be looking to provide a defined promotional area for your Mother's Day cards from the end of February.

After Christmas it's only around 12 weeks away, so make sure you have your orders in place ASAP for this busy period. It is also a good idea to promote relevant Mother's Day gifts, such as chocolates, alongside your cards.



**MUMMY CAN WE GO
ON HOLIDAY?**



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