

**POST OFFICE NETWORK &
NETWORK BANK**

**INTERIM GUIDELINES FOR
APPLICATION OF
THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT**

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POST OFFICE NETWORK & NETWORK BANK

FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

INTERIM GUIDELINES

DECEMBER 1999

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Consequent upon implementation of Post Office Network and Network Bank organisations from September 1999 it has been necessary to make some minor changes to the 1996 CWU Framework Agreement in order that it continues to operate effectively. Details of the changes in relation to the existing agreement are attached which should be read in conjunction with that document.
- 1.2** As a general principle where arrangements within the existing Framework are operating effectively, and can continue to do so under the revised structure, then no change has been made at this time.
- 1.3** These guidelines have been produced to assist managers and union representatives apply the Framework Agreement in a constructive and productive manner following the organisational changes and supports Post Office Group recognition that continued involvement of the trade unions is important to business success, including a move to more strategic involvement.
- 1.4** *It is important to recognise the interim nature of these guidelines and they will only apply until such time as a more detailed review of the Framework Agreement is completed, currently scheduled for April 2000.*

2.0 Network Bank and Cash Handling

- 2.1** The guidelines and changes to the Framework Agreement shall also apply to the Network Bank and Cash Handling, until such time as the full review is completed, or separate Framework Agreements are introduced for either of these organisations.
- 2.2** Employee representation within these organisations will continue to be provided by existing Regional Counters Representatives and Section Secretaries (see below).

3.0 Summary of Changes

3.1 Role Descriptions – Post Office Network

With the migration from Regional to Territorial structures, together with changes to the HR organisation consequent upon introduction of HRSAP a number of positions referred to in the Framework Agreement no longer exist, namely Regional General Manager and Head of Human Resources and it is necessary to be clear who should now encompass these roles to ensure continuity.

3.1.1 Sales & Service General Manager's

Should assume the role of Regional General Manager referred to in the existing Agreement. In summary:

- Lead Strategic Discussions on Territory wide business.
- Deal with those registered disagreements that have been referred from a lower level.
- Deal with Facilities provision (time, accommodation & equipment), where agreement cannot be reached at a lower level.

3.1.2 Head of Operations Support

Should assume the role of Head of Human Resources referred to in the existing Agreement. In summary:

- Agreement on Facilities Time for Section Secretaries.
- Monitoring of Facilities Time and associated costs.
- Accommodation and equipment provision to RCR's.
- Appraisal issues for RCR's.
- Conduct, harassment and equal opportunity issues involving Union representatives.
- Approving credentials for Union representatives.
- Local review of industrial relations.
- Appointment of arbitrator when a dispute over application of the Procedural Agreement arises.
- Discussions involving application of the Framework Agreement.
- Other discussions with Union representatives as appropriate.

3.1.3 HR Advisors

Should provide support to Head of Operations Support and other members of the Territory team in application of the Framework Agreement. In summary:

- Provide advice and guidance in matters of procedure.

- Provide advice and guidance in matters relating to application of employment law, national and local agreements, terms and conditions of employment.
- Support to members of the management team by attendance at and contribution to, discussions with Union representatives as appropriate.

Note that the HR Advisor, London should continue to carry out the role of Head of HR referred to in the existing agreement, (as now undertaken by Territory Heads of Operation Support, see above) in addition to this support role.

3.1.4 HORN's, RNM's & BM's

The roles of Heads of Retail Network, Retail Network Manager's and Branch Managers referred to in the existing agreement continue unchanged.

This continues to recognise the important principle that matters should be dealt with at the lowest practicable level of the organisation with managers empowered to negotiate change.

3.1.5 RCR's & Section Secretaries

Until such time as the wider review is complete, role descriptions of Regional Counter's Representatives and Section Secretaries detailed in the existing agreement should remain unchanged (see sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the agreement for full detail). However the Regional allocation of RCR's needs to be adjusted to meet the Territory structures and this is mentioned below. Section Secretaries will continue to operate in relation to Union Branch structures.

RCR's will represent all members within a particular territory, in addition the RCR's within Northern and Eastern Territories will continue to represent employees covered by the Chesterfield and London HR Advisors respectively, as with the current arrangements. Note that the London HR Advisor is deemed to cover the Network Bank organisation.

3.2 Role Descriptions – Cash Handling & Transaction Processing

For the purposes of these guidelines existing management roles having dealings with application of the Framework Agreement shall continue unchanged pending full review of the Agreement and transfer of the Cash Handling unit to the proposed Cash Handling & Distribution organisation for which a separate agreement may be required.

As mentioned above RCR and Section Secretary representation will continue as now.

3.3 Role Descriptions – Network Bank

For the purposes of these guidelines the London HR Advisor will continue to act in the role of Head of HR in respect of the Network Bank organisation, continuing to do so until the HR manager role in that organisation is filled. This arrangement to be reviewed as part of the wider review mentioned above.

As mentioned above RCR's within Eastern Territory shall represent employees within the Network Bank organisation for the time being.

3.4 Representational Structure

3.4.1 Regional Counters Representatives & Executive Council Members

The current agreement allows for full time release of two executive council members and nine Regional Counters Representatives that remains unchanged at this time (with one RCR position ex NT&EA Region vacant), but will be reconsidered as part of the wider Framework review. It should be noted that the role of Regional Chairperson remains unchanged at this time.

3.4.2 However, it is necessary to consider how best to allocate areas of responsibility for the RCR's recognising the organisational structure change from seven Regions to three Territories. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion and retain a measure of continuity RCR's should continue to cover the same geographical area as now but within the revised Territory structure such that:

<u>RCR's</u>	<u>Allocated</u>
Northern Ireland	Northern Territory
Scotland	Northern Territory
North East	Northern Territory
North Wales & North West	Northern Territory
Midlands	Western Territory
South Wales & South West	Western Territory
South East	Eastern Territory
North Thames & East Anglia x 2	Eastern Territory

The RCR's should be left to decide how best to divide their allocation of duties within the Territory. These arrangements to continue pending completion of the full review.

Note: The ex Midland Region RCR will continue to cover the Derby/Leicester/Nottingham HORN/RNM areas pending implementation of boundary changes.

4.0 Discussion Arrangements

4.1 The Procedural Agreement Framework

- 4.1.1** The way the Network should conduct its business with the Union is detailed within the Procedural Agreement Framework as incorporated within the Framework Agreement. The principles remain sound and will continue to work effectively within the revised business structures.
- 4.1.2** At inception of the Framework Agreement the business and CWU made clear their shared commitment to the creation and maintenance of a positive and constructive Industrial Relations environment that benefits employees and is in the interests of the business, its customers and clients.
- 4.1.3** This commitment remains, however, it is recognised that there may be occasions where disputes arise and the aim should always be to reach agreement with the minimum of delay and by consultation between the relevant union representative and manager.
- 4.1.4** *The principle remains that differences should be resolved at the point at which they occur as far as it is practicable.*
- 4.1.5** When applying the Procedural Agreement it must be remembered that the following General Principles remain paramount:
- That at all times the parties must be driven by the objective of seeking to reach agreement which best serves the interests of the business and its employees.
 - It is in the interests of good business that both parties are kept up to date and well informed and this requires the timely exchange and sharing of relevant information.
 - Formal proposals put forward by either party must be given serious consideration by the other. They should never be rejected out of hand but in all cases where they are not acceptable a formal response should be provided.
- 4.1.6** The General Arrangements outlined in the Procedural Agreement also continue to apply particularly the underlying principle that the first stage of the procedure should be handled by the manager empowered to negotiate change. This is confirmed as follows:

A Branch Manager for his/her own workplace.
A Retail Network Manager for a group of workplaces.

- 4.1.7** However where an issue has Territory wide implications then senior managers such as Heads of Operations Support or Heads of Retail Network may become involved. This does not preclude the involvement of other senior managers within the territory becoming involved as deemed appropriate. HR Advisors will be available to provide support in discussions as necessary.
- 4.1.8** Experience suggests that in some areas Branch Managers and Retail Network Manager's are either unclear about their level of empowerment or are being restricted in their decision making authority. In order that discussions can be carried out productively it is important that all managers have a clear understanding in this regard and that meetings are held at the appropriate level to avoid wasted discussions, which have to be referred to a higher level for agreement. It is suggested that each Territory ensures that levels of authority are clearly communicated and understood. Where necessary appropriate training may be required and this should be evaluated through PDP procedure.
- 4.1.9** In the normal course of events early stages of discussion with Branch Managers and RNM's should take place with Section Secretaries, with referral to RCR's in the event that agreement is not reached.
- 4.1.10** Similarly Territory wide discussions should normally commence at RCR level with reference to the Headquarters of the CWU in the event that agreement cannot be reached.
- 4.1.11** It should be remembered that only questions involving the interpretation or clarification of National Agreements should be referred to the Head of Employee Relations, Post Office Network and the headquarters of the Communication Workers Union.

4.2 Union Involvement at a Strategic Level

- 4.2.1** In order to fully meet the commitment to full, open and honest two way communication at all levels of the organisation, it is important that the Unions are involved in strategic decisions regarding the business. This is a fundamental principle supported at Group level and is to be a cornerstone of IR Agreements across the Post Office. It is nothing new for Post Office Network with Regions successfully involving Union representatives to varying degrees on an informal basis for some years.

4.2.2 It is noteworthy that many organisations external to the Post Office have found that proper involvement of Trade Unions in strategic issues has enhanced the relationship between Union and employer and given employee representatives a greater understanding of the issues essential to business success. This in turn enables the business to respond far more quickly and positively to change, avoiding the delays brought about when Unions and employees are kept in the dark and are suspicious of management motives through a lack of awareness and understanding.

4.2.3 It is the intention that the full review of the Framework Agreement will formalise strategic involvement picking up principles established at Group level. However, there is an opportunity now to consider how this process can be developed at Territory level.

4.2.4 What does Strategic Involvement Mean

Strategic involvement is about fact sharing and idea dialogue between Union and employer. It provides an opportunity for Union representatives to influence decisions at their formative stages and to improve business plans and their deployment. The purpose is to build mutual trust through a joint and shared understanding across the organisation. In this way there can develop a genuine support for the changes being made.

4.2.5 How should it work at Territory level

The main forum for strategic level involvement with Trade Unions will be at National level, concerned with Group and business wide issues, however there are significant strategic matters that can be regarded as Territory specific and should be covered at that level. This would most likely involve members of the senior management team, CMA Divisional Representatives and CWU Regional Counter's representatives, plus Federation representatives where appropriate.

4.2.6 The parties involved must be able to give a mutual commitment to courteous, open and honest discussion and sharing of information, facts and ideas with participants showing trust and respect for each other irrespective of the views they may hold. They should agree to preserve confidentiality and work to a 'no surprises' policy. Importantly this means there should be no fait accompli and no barriers to the prioritisation and inclusion of new items into future agendas as the necessity arises.

4.2.7 It would be appropriate that the format of, and attendance at, strategic meetings should be agreed on a Territory or business unit basis with the appropriate union representatives.

4.2.8 There will be a minimum of four National level meetings per year, timed to coincide with the business planning process, e.g. April, July, October and January and it may be appropriate to time Territory meetings in the same way. This would not, of course, preclude additional ad-hoc meetings as major issues arise.

4.2.9 What should be discussed

Whilst there are no hard and fast rules currently, Group are actively considering appropriate guidelines as part of the wider review of IR Frameworks across the businesses. In the meantime consideration should be given to discussion of Territory strategy in relation to:

- Territory Performance & Productivity
- Territory business plans & initiatives together with their deployment
- Information sharing
- Customer complaints
- Organisational structure
- Accommodation
- Health & Safety
- Security
- Agreement on principles of change to be applied throughout the Territory
- Communication

4.2.10 This list should be regarded as a suggested guide rather than a regulatory framework, the important aspect to remember is that issues for discussion should relate to the big picture and matters of principle rather than minutiae of detail. They should not be the forum for discussion of individual claims or grievance issues that must be dealt with separately.

4.2.11 What Next

Each Territory and business should allocate responsibility to a senior member of the management team to consider how strategic involvement may best be applied within their particular Territory. In the meantime as Group wide principles are developed they will be communicated to the Territories for implementation as appropriate. It is to be expected that early meetings will require a greater level of facilitation and involve future agenda setting, establishing a structured way of working together and developing individual roles.

4.2.12 These meetings should be seen as setting the scene for a more formalised approach to be developed as part of the larger Framework Review enabling progress to be made in the creation of a more open and involved Industrial relations climate.

4.3 Review of Regional Agreements

4.3.1 It is evident that consequent upon the amalgamation of Regions into Territories there may be differing work practices that are the subject of Union agreement. It may be the case that geographical and business needs continue to make these variances valid and change is not required at this time, however they should be kept under review to ensure this remains the case. Where this is not so and as Territory objectives take over from earlier Regional objectives it may be necessary to change or amend them to take a more common and co-ordinated approach.

4.3.2 If this is the case then proposals for change should be formulated and negotiated in accordance with the Framework Agreement and these guidelines. It may be a useful opportunity to identify and highlight particular areas requiring review at an early strategic forum in order that the issue is raised and dealt with in a constructive manner.

