



NFSP member FAQs on the coronavirus crisis

Updated 3 April 2020

Financial support from Post Office Ltd

Q - What if I just close up shop?

For the avoidance of doubt: your remuneration for April and May will still be 'topped-up' if you are currently closed or (in future) close your post office over this period.

The NFSP advises you to keep your post office open unless it becomes necessary for you to close due to health and safety concerns and/or a lack of resource.

Subpostmasters are unique in the community role we play. We have been classed as providing 'essential services' by the government and we should aim to continue to serve our communities during this difficult period.

In our conversations with government, the NFSP consistently underlines the vital community role our members play. If, as a result of the financial support PO are providing, post offices around the country start closing up for a period of weeks/months – this will damage our collective reputation and could have negative consequences in future.

We have spoken to PO about the issue and their feedback was as follows:

"We have decided to include all branches in the guarantee, even if they have closed or reduced their hours, because we recognise that some postmasters have had to make that choice due to circumstances beyond their control. We trust postmasters to make the right decision for the health of them, their staff and their customers whilst wanting to maintain service as much as possible."

Q - What about June and onwards?

A great deal of work has been done, including many interactions between the NFSP, PO and government, leading to the support that you will receive in April and May.

Plans for June and onwards are not yet in place and the NFSP will continue to work with PO on these going forwards.

It is worth flagging that (as per the Q above 'What if I just close up shop?') should a high proportion of offices (temporarily) close as a result of this announced support, the NFSP anticipates that the availability and scope of any potential support for June and beyond would be adversely affected.

Q - Certain transaction rates were due to increase as a result of the review of subpostmaster remuneration – is that still happening?

The NFSP had great success in achieving increases to subpostmasters' remuneration last year; around £20m worth of increases were to be implemented in the new financial year 2020/21.

Under PO's original plans the first month in which these increases would land in your remuneration was scheduled to be May 2020. The NFSP successfully challenged this and as a result, the increases will land in your April remuneration.

This means that in addition to the guaranteed income PO will provide in your April remuneration, you will also receive an additional payment to reflect the increase in remuneration rates that the NFSP achieved for you. This will appear as an additional line in your April remuneration advice slip. PO will also provide an explanatory insert alongside your April remuneration advice slip.

The increases the NFSP achieved for you will be built into your May 2020 remuneration (i.e. there won't be a separate payment line in your remuneration advice slip).

Q - Will my remuneration pay for outreach services be affected? What happens if I cannot offer my full contracted outreach hours?

Part of the discussions between the NFSP and Post Office have been around fixed elements of remuneration such as the Core Tier Payment, Assigned Office Payment and outreach remuneration, all of which will be unaffected during this current situation.

If you need to reduce your hours or are unable to attend, this will not affect any contract you have.

You can report any closures, or changes to your opening hours online by logging into One Post Office. See [HERE](#)

Q – What happens about my mailwork office and income?

The mailwork you provide as part of your Post Office services is classed as an essential service, but delivery offices are not classed as retail and so may fall outside the scope of Post Office's support package.

Mailwork offices will be receiving a 1.7% increase in their remuneration for their mailwork business. This is in-line with inflation.

Q - Is the Bank of Ireland (BOI) ATM deal still coming to an end? Will there be ATM rate relief during the coronavirus period?

During this crisis, all current plans related to BOI ATMs are on hold. Some post offices were due to have their ATM's removed due to the leases coming to an end and BOI had made the decision not to renew them, but these plans have been postponed.

Your ATM will not qualify for rates relief at this moment, but that will not impact your ability to claim for relief on your retail business.

Government financial support measures

The NFSP has produced a summary of the financial support measures government is introducing for businesses in response to the coronavirus. The summary can be accessed via the NFSP website [HERE](#)

If you have any issues or concerns about commercial or property finance issues - in particular any commitments you have on your rent, mortgage, bank loan repayments or any other finance agreements for vehicles or shop-fittings – the NFSP can provide (free) professional advice and support through our partner organisation Commercial Plus. Call 01273 452324 and select option 2.

Q - Our corporation tax is due for payment at the end of May. Can our payment be deferred?

Self-employed payments to account on 31 July 2020 have been deferred until January 2021 but PAYE and corporation tax have not been deferred under the current government support packages.

HR advice and support

For (free) professional advice and support with HR/staff related issues – including information and resources on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, NFSP members can speak to our partner organisation HR:4UK by calling 01273 452324 and selecting option 1.

Q - If I am still open and my trade is down, can I furlough staff?

You can furlough staff if you are staying open, however, you must discuss this with these staff members and provide them with the appropriate paperwork. If they are not currently registered with HMRC via your payroll, they will not be eligible. You will also have to notify HMRC of which employees are to be furloughed.

The minimum time that an employee can be furloughed is three weeks, and staff cannot work at all during this period.

Q - How do I pay staff who have been advised to self-isolate for longer periods of time?

Your employee can receive Statutory Sick Pay of £94.25 per week for up to 28 weeks and can receive it from day one rather than day four. More guidance can be found [HERE](#).

Your employee will be required to provide you with an isolation note, available [HERE](#).

Other queries about operating your post offices

Q - Will there be any guidance on how to wear gloves and masks and use them properly?

Whilst the most effective way to kill the virus is to wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap, it is accepted that wearing gloves can, for many people, reduce the urge to touch their face. If used, it is recommended that gloves are changed regularly every 3-4 hours and disposed of with care (double bagged). For more information on health and safety in your branch, see [HERE](#).

Q - What are our essential and non-essential services?

These are subjective terms, and we are seeking further clarity on this. The official government guidance is currently to “only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work at home).”

We do not wish to place ourselves in a position of conflict with our customers, so keep in mind that what is not essential to you may be essential to others.

We have raised this issue with Post Office Ltd and we are looking to develop clear guidance and materials to help support members with similar concerns.

Q - My office is closed at the moment, how will I be contacted?

If PO have additional contact details for you, such as a mobile number or email address, then your Area Manager can reach you that way.

You can also divert calls that go through to your post office phone number to an alternative number.

Remember to report any closures or changes to your opening hours to PO, as well as contacting your local sorting office to update them.

To contact fellow subpostmasters, you can join your local NFSP WhatsApp group by getting in touch with your NFSP Branch Secretary or by emailing communications@nfsp.org.uk

Q - Is Royal Mail still maintaining normal delivery times?

Royal Mail is still operating under the Universal Service Obligation in relation to delivery times. That being said, mail may be delayed due to staff shortages, which may also affect collections as well.

Please contact your local delivery office on a regular basis and accommodate where possible. This may alleviate any last-minute changes and stress around collections. Royal Mail has at present suspended the next day by 1pm service but will prioritise these items of mail for delivery for the following day.

Q - The World Health Organisation says that the virus lives up to 24 hours on porous surfaces such as cardboard. Is there a risk?

Government guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus states “handling post or packages: staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working; there are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages.” On that basis, the risk is low.

Q - Can we leave mail bags on the customer side to reduce our contact with mail items?

Letters and parcels are each post office's responsibility until handed over to Royal Mail. Therefore, should any go missing it is the post office's responsibility.

Mails integrity is regulated and our processes should be adhered to as far as possible. As such we don't recommend this course of action.

Q - If the UK isn't able to 'flatten the curve', does PO have a contingency plan if this lockdown goes on for longer than 12 weeks?

PO are currently working on contingency planning. These plans are evolving daily in line with government guidance. We will update members on these plans when they are finalised.