



Post Office Ltd

**Harassment by Customers Policy.**

Policy Owner: Paul Da Gama

Document title: Customer Harassment Policy	Version or draft number: v3	Date issued: November 2010	Review date: November 2011	Owner: Paul Da Gama Policy: Document: Amanda Booker	Location stored: POL HR Help
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## 1. Introduction:

Post Office Ltd. is committed to ensuring the safety of all its employees. This includes taking all reasonable steps to protect them from verbal and physical harassment by customers. Post Office Ltd. will not tolerate any abusive or antisocial behaviour directed towards its employees.

The policy applies to all employees of Post Office Ltd.

## 2. Guiding principles:

Post Office Ltd. has a legal and moral duty to protect their employees, as far as reasonably practicable, from harassment by customers.

To do this, Post Office Ltd. will:

- Take all necessary steps to prevent customer harassment taking place where it is within our power to prevent it.
- Make it clear to customers that harassment of staff will not be tolerated.
- Provide staff with a means of reporting customer harassment.
- Provide staff with appropriate support in dealing with incidents of customer harassment, (e.g. training, clear policy and processes for dealing with customer harassment, Branch Manager support, Union support, Employee Health Service, trauma counselling etc.)
- Take appropriate action to deal with customers who harass our staff and maintain a written record of every step taken in response to the incident.
- Provide guidance for employees and managers on best practices designed to prevent or reduce the extent and/or frequency of customer harassment.

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**3. Preventative Measures:**

Post Office Ltd. will take the following preventative measures:

**3.1. Public statement of policy:**

Post Office Ltd. will take steps to communicate to the public that;

- Post Office staff deserve to be treated with respect
- Staff must not be verbally or physically abused
- Antisocial behaviour from customers will not be tolerated.
- Post Office Ltd. reserves the right to refuse to serve anyone who behaves in an unacceptable way.

**3.2. Staff training:**

Post Office Ltd. will provide training to all customer-facing staff and their line managers, including:

- Communicating with customers in a non-confrontational way, and handling customer complaints.
- Dealing with angry and/ or aggressive customers and difficult situations.
- Dealing with customer harassment in all forms

**3.3. Work environment:**

Post Office Ltd. will:

- Provide a safe working environment as far as practicably possible, especially in public areas where customers and staff interact.
- Ensure that individual members of staff are never left alone in a public area of the branch to deal with a customer who has a known complaint or reason which may lead them to become abusive or aggressive.
- Enable colleagues to withdraw from the public side of the branch to a secure area when there is a threat of physical abuse or intimidation

**3.4. Reporting:**

Post Office Ltd. will:

- Provide a clear process for recording and reporting incidents of customer harassment and abuse towards staff. (Appendix A)
- Monitor the incidence of customer harassment and abuse towards staff and use this information to improve things as necessary.

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- Record all incidents of customer harassment which cause physical injury or mental stress<sup>1</sup> to an employee in the Accident Book.
- Report all criminal incidents of verbal and physical abuse to the police.

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<sup>1</sup> Any incident of abuse which does not cause immediate physical injury but which immediately or may subsequently lead to the member of staff suffering from stress and/ or needing to take sick absence (e.g. a stress related absence) should also be recorded immediately.

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**4. Dealing with incidents of customer harassment:**

**4.1** When an instance of customer harassment occurs, the Branch Manager will explain to the customer that their behaviour is unacceptable, and that if it continues further action may be taken.

**4.2** Where a customer does behave inappropriately and it is necessary to address their behaviour, Post Office Ltd must endeavour to treat them firmly but politely, remaining aware that their behaviour may be affected by a medical condition or disability.

**4.3 Refusal of Service**

**4.3.1** Post Office Ltd. reserves the right to refuse to serve a customer who is behaving in a harassing and/ or abusive way.

**4.3.2** Abuse on the grounds of a protected characteristic namely race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, age or disability or based on association or perception of a protected characteristic is completely unacceptable to our business. The business will fully support colleagues who refuse to serve a customer who has abused them or their colleague(s) because of a protected characteristic or because of association or perception of a protected characteristic.

**4.3.3** If any employees (including the Branch Manager) are threatened during an incident of customer harassment, the police should be contacted. If there are witnesses to the incident, the Branch Manager (or another member of staff if this is not possible) should ask for their name and contact details so that The Post Office®, or the police, can contact them during an investigation. The manager should refuse service to the customer

**4.3.4** If the customer's behaviour constitutes a potentially criminal offence (e.g. physical assault, criminal damage to property, inciting racial hatred) or sexual harassment if in any doubt, the police should be contacted and service to the customer refused. (See Appendix B for examples of scenarios and whether or not to involve the police. )

**4.4 Exclusion**

**4.4.1** Where the situation recurs or continues, the Branch Manager will tell the customer that their behaviour will not

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be tolerated, and that further incidents will result in them being excluded from the Branch.

If applicable, the Branch Manager may also decide to tell the customer that they have the option of:

- Nominating an agent to conduct transactions at the Branch on their behalf.
- Transferring their business to another Branch of their choosing

**4.4.2** Where a customer wants to transfer their business to another branch, the Branch Manager must notify any clients of the decision, and inform them of the customer's chosen alternative Branch. Where transfer of the customer's business is arranged, the Branch Manager of the receiving office should be advised by the Branch Manager of the former office as to why the customer is being transferred.

## **5. Temporary and permanent exclusion from a Branch :**

Where a very serious incident of customer harassment (or repeated incidents by the same customer) occur, the Branch Manager should exclude the customer from their Branch, on a temporary or permanent basis.

It is very important that where exclusion happens, Post Office Ltd. can demonstrate that they have acted reasonably and have good grounds for doing so.

For this reason, exclusion of a customer will always be decided by the Crown Area Manager after discussion of the case with the Branch Manager. Customers who have not been formally excluded must remain free to use the Post Office network.

Post Office Ltd will only permanently exclude a customer from a Crown Office Branch where all other remedies have failed (including a temporary exclusion or 'cooling off' period) or where such a course of action is regarded as essential in order to protect it's employees from further harassment.

The following are some examples of customer behaviour where exclusion may be appropriate. (The list does not cover every situation where exclusion is appropriate):

- Repeated instances of harassing behaviour from the same customer
- Aggressive/ threatening behaviour by a customer towards a member of staff

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- The use of offensive and/ or discriminatory language that causes offence to individual employees and to other customers, particularly on the grounds of a protected characteristic namely, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, age or disability or based on association or protection of a protected characteristic.
- Unacceptable anti-social behaviour, e.g. graffiti, spitting, kicking the office furnishings, slamming the counter screen etc.
- Incidences of 'stalking' of staff members when outside the Branch.

In situations where the Branch Manager considers that exclusion may be appropriate, they should gather and document all the facts of the situation, and then discuss the situation with the Crown Area Manager as soon as possible and at least within seven days (immediately if anyone is in imminent danger).

The Crown Area Manager will then obtain advice from Legal Services, and make a decision based on all the facts available, as to whether or not to exclude the customer from the Branch (either temporarily or permanently). In coming to a decision the Crown Area Manager should also discuss the case with the Regional Manager. This activity is not expected to exceed seven days.

If the decision is to exclude the customer, the Regional Manager will write to the customer, informing them of their decision. Where a temporary exclusion is to be issued, the customer will be informed of the start and end dates of the exclusion. Where a permanent exclusion is to be issued, this will be made clear and the start date of the exclusion will be specified. The customer will be made aware in the letter the consequences of transgressing the exclusion order. Where the customer draws pension, allowance, or benefit payments through the Post Office Branch, the Regional Manager will also need to make arrangements for the appropriate Issuing Authority to be informed.

## 6. Notifying clients:

When a customer is excluded, the Regional Manager must notify any clients that the customer has changed Branches due to a temporary or permanent exclusion, and requesting that the customer's nominated office status be altered.

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Transactions that require the customer to have a 'nominated office' are those that will be affected.

The Branch Manager should, as far as possible, provide the Crown Area Manager with details of affected clients.

When writing to a customer to confirm their exclusion from a specific branch, the Regional Manager should include a copy of the letter that has been sent to the relevant client(s), for the customer's information.

If Post Office Ltd. is unable to obtain the customer's address, this should be done via the client. If the client is unwilling to provide an address, the Regional Manager should forward the customer's letter on to the client, and request that they forward on behalf of Post Office Ltd.

## **7. Reporting of Incidents**

If any employees are distressed by an incident, they should be offered the services of the Employee Health Service by the Branch Manager. Very serious incidents, such as threats with weapons or physical assault, should also be channelled through the Trauma Debriefing process.

## **8. Following an incident**

Details of the incident must be recorded using the process described in this document (See Appendix A) . Where any injury to a member of staff, either physical or mental, has occurred, the incident must also be recorded in the Accident Book.

## **9. Supporting Documents**

Standard letters to be used for this process can be found on the Customer Harassment page on HR Help along with further advice for managers and employees

## **10. Further advice and support**

Contact Managers HR Help on 0844 2102042  
HRSC on 0845 6016260

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**Appendix A: Reporting incidents of harassment by customers.**

**Part One: For completion by the employee who has been harassed:**

**Your personal details:**

Surname	
Forenames	
Grade or band	
Payroll number	

**When and where did the incident happen?:**

Date (dd/mm/yy)	
Time	
Location	

**What kind of harassment took place (you should tick as many boxes as you feel apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Abusive language (including derogatory comments referring to race, gender, age, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, disability or appearance, etc)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foul language (e.g. swear words)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Threats/threatening behaviour
<input type="checkbox"/>	Actual physical violence - <i>if this is the case you <b>must</b> also complete the Accident Record Book.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Damage to the office
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify as clearly as possible in the box below):

NB Any incident of abuse which does not cause immediate physical injury but which immediately or may subsequently lead to the member of staff suffering from stress and/ or needing to take sick absence (e.g. a stress related absence) should also be recorded immediately in the accident book.

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**Describe what happened.** Describe in as much detail as possible exactly what happened. Stick to the facts and avoid making assumptions. Include what was said particularly in cases of verbal abuse. (Continue on separate sheet if necessary.)

**How did the incident affect you?**

Were you physically injured? *	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you require first aid?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you have to go to the hospital?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you experience any emotional or physical symptoms as a result of the incident?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you need to go home early from your duty as a result of this incident?		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you incur any sick absence as a result of this incident?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

**\* if so, you must also complete the Accident Record Book with full details of your injuries.**

Did you miss any work time at all as a result of this incident? If so, how much (NB: even if you just took 10 minutes away from the counter to gather your composure, please say so. It does not signify weakness on your part!)

Duration of work time missed

**Is there anything else you wish to add about the impact of this incident on you?**

**Signature (of employee) and date:**

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**Part Two: For completion by Branch Manager (or person in charge at time of incident):**

**Note: It is vital that you keep accurate written records (in addition to this form below) of all the steps that you take in response to any complaint by an employee about harassment by a customer, including every discussion you have with an employee and the customer. These records will be relied on in a hearing if the employee who has reported the harassment makes a complaint to the Employment Tribunal.**

Were the police called?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did they attend?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, enter police officer's name:	<input type="text"/>			
Crime reference number (if applicable):				
Did they speak to the customer?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Details of any witnesses:**

Name	Address (to be included if the witness is not a member of staff)

**Name and address of customer allegedly carrying out the harassment (if known):**

Name	Address

**Checklist (please tick whichever apply):**

<input type="checkbox"/>	I have investigated this incident, and retained a copy of this report in the office.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I satisfied myself that my colleague was fit and able to continue with his/her duties
<input type="checkbox"/>	I sent my colleague home/agreed they should go home after the incident
<input type="checkbox"/>	I sent my colleague to the hospital/called an ambulance
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have retained a copy of this report locally.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have completed an Accident Report in the Accident Record Book report and have sent a copy of this report to HR Services. (Completion of the P6343 managers investigation is not necessary)

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Is there anything else you wish to add about the impact of this incident on you or your staff? (continue on separate sheet if necessary)

Branch Manager's signature and date:

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On completion, please send this form, by email, to: **HR Absence**  
**Please retain a copy of the completed form in your office for local reference.**

**Appendix B: Harassment by customers - examples of possible scenarios and when to call the police.** <sup>2</sup>

Scenario	What does this amount to?
Every Monday a customer stands at the back of the office, staring at one particular colleague for hours at a time. When the colleague goes to lunch, he follows. The BM has asked the customer if he needs any help; he says no, but doesn't leave. The colleague is very concerned.	Harassment. You will need to produce evidence that this has occurred at least twice.
A man appears to be drunk and is refusing to leave the office. He has had an argument with a colleague and does not accept that he cannot be served.	Obstructive behaviour if he <b>is</b> obstructive, abusive or refuses to leave; drunk and disorderly; and threatening, abusive or insulting

<sup>2</sup> Every situation is different, and the information given in this guidance note can only be attributed to the specific examples shown. If you decide to call the police, you are advised to use statements such as 'we have a disturbance', or just describe exactly what is happening. You might, inadvertently, cause confusion by trying to 'tag' an incident against a specific Act or offence. Let the police decide what offence, if any, someone is committing.

Be aware that some of our more disruptive customers may be suffering from illnesses or conditions that affect their behaviour. Whilst you are entitled to request police assistance in helping restore order and a safe environment, you should be mindful that the outcome of police involvement may not be as obvious as you first expected.

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	behaviour.
A woman hasn't got any identification on her and has been refused her green giro. She is ranting at the whole office that she has children to feed and is abusing anyone who approaches her.	If she is being obstructive you can ask her to leave and call the police if she refuses. Possibly, threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour.
An individual has attacked a customer in the queue (either with or without a weapon).	Assault, and (if assault with certain weapons) possessing an offensive weapon.
A youth has ripped up the barrier and is threatening to throw it at the counter screen.	This is criminal damage and threatening, abusive and insulting behaviour.
A customer is refusing to be served by a colleague because of their ethnic origin and is making racist comments directly at the colleague. This is not the first time this customer has behaved in this way, and the colleague is distressed.	This is harassment and is a criminal offence
A colleague has legitimately refused to serve a customer who is now threatening to wait outside the office for the colleague and "beat them up" once they leave the building.	This is breach of the peace. With sufficient evidence they could be bound over to keep the peace. Possibly, offence of threatening, abusive and insulting behaviour.
A colleague has rung in sick because she is scared to leave her house because one of the Branch's regular customers has discovered where she lives and is following her everywhere.	This is harassment. With evidence, the Branch Manager should encourage and support the colleague in contacting the police.
A woman is preaching her religion at the front of the queue in a very loud and aggressive manner. The BM has asked her to stop, but she refuses, stating that it is a public place so she'll do what she wants!	Possible offensive behaviour, breach of the peace.

**If you think you need to call in the police, then you probably do!  
Let the professionals handle it!**

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