Post Office Numbers

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Summary

Over the past 30 years the number of post offices in the UK has almost halved, although numbers have remained stable over the last few years. The Post Office Network stood at 11,634 at the end of March 2015.

This note provides a breakdown of the network size over the period as well as a breakdown of post offices by type and by region.

Post Office Ltd, which owns and runs the Post Office Network, was separated from Royal Mail Group Ltd on 1 April 2012. In return for a package of Government funding for transformation and modernisation, the Post Office is committed to investing in the network, and maintaining a network of around 11,500 branches with no further substantive reductions and continued accessibility for all at the national level.

Further details about Post Office Ltd are given in the Library Standard Note (SN/EP/06718) [Postal Services: Post Office Ltd](#)
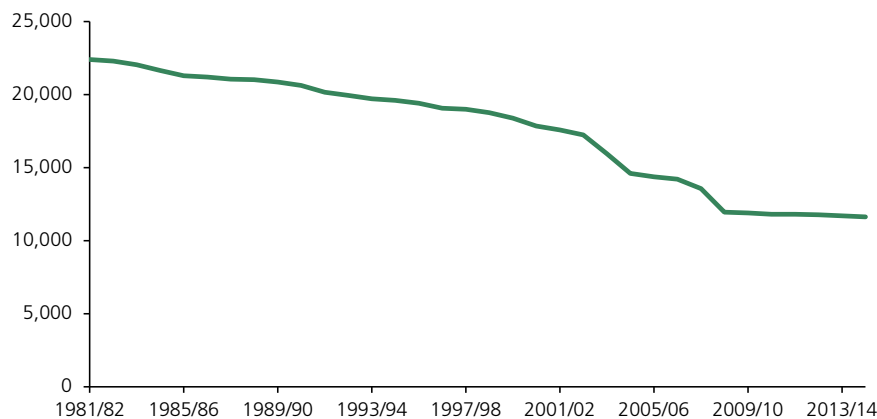
1. Overall network size

Post Office Limited is responsible for managing its network of 11,634 Post Office branches in the UK (as at the end of March 2015). The vast majority (around 97%) are operated by franchise partners or sub-postmasters, who are independent business people. Only the Crown Post Offices are directly managed by Post Office Limited.

The chart below shows that the number of Post Offices has declined over most of the last 30 years, though the decline has levelled off since 2009; table A1 in the appendix shows the numbers for each year. Care should be taken in interpreting the data given discontinuities in the data in the period 2005-2007 (see section 3 below).

Last year, the number of Post Offices fell by 62 (-0.5%) from 11,696 to 11,634.

Number of Post Offices: 1981/82-2014/15

Source: Post Office Limited Network Report 2015 & Access to Post
Office Services: Time to Act, POSTCOMM, 30 Sep 2002

1.1 Commitments on numbers and location of Post Offices

In return for its package of funding for transformation and modernisation, the Post Office is committed to investing in the network, and maintaining a network of around 11,500 branches with no further substantive reductions and continued accessibility for all at the national level. [1]

The Post Office is required by government to meet the following five 'Access Criteria:'

1.   99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet;

2.   90% of the UK population to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;

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[1]   BIS, *Building a Mutual Post Office: the Government Response*, July 2012

3.   99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;

4.   95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;

5.   95% of the total rural population across the UK to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet.

In addition, the following criterion will apply at a local level to ensure a minimum level of access for customers living in remote rural areas:

6.   95% of the population of every postcode district to be within six miles of their nearest post office outlet.[2]

The Postal Services Act 2011 requires the Post Office to produce an annual report on the Post Office network.

In 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15, the Post Office network met each of the above access criteria.

Accessibility performance, Access criteria

	Total population within 3 miles	Total population within 1 mile	Deprived Urban population within 1 mile	Urban population within 1 mile	Rural population within 3 miles	Postcode areas with < 95% of population within 6 miles
Minimum requirement	99%	90%	99%	95%	95%	0
2012/13 performance	99.7%	93.0%	99.8%	99.0%	99.1%	0
2013/14 performance	99.7%	93.0%	99.8%	99.1%	99.1%	1
2014/15 performance	99.7%	93.0%	99.7%	98.5%	98.7%	3*

Source: Post Office Ltd: *The Post Office Network Report 2015*

Note: The network analysis is based on 2001 Census

*"At the end of March there were 3 cases in PH11, DG8 and PH38 where Post Office was working to restore services following incidents that they said were beyond their control."

1.2 Quarterly Change, 2000-2015

Since March 2000 the total number of Post Offices has been made available on a quarterly basis. Only during six periods has the number of Post Offices increased. The latest quarter (December 2014 - March 2015), showed a rise of 7 Post Offices, the first rise since September - December 2013.

Further details are shown in the table below. Care should be taken in interpreting the data given the discontinuities in the data in the period 2005-2007 (see section 3).

See table A3 for more details.

The largest fall in Post Office numbers occurred in the quarter ending at 30 September 2008, a net reduction of 641.

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2   Post Office Ltd, *Post Office Network Report 2015*

2. Post Office by type and region

2.1 Urban and rural Post Office branches

The table below shows the number of Post Office branches since March 2000 with a breakdown between those classified as urban or rural. In the period March 2000 to March 2015, the net fall in the number of urban Post Offices was 3,821, with 2,938 net reductions in the number of rural Post Offices. However care should be taken of the discontinuities in the data in the period 2005-2007 (see section 3).

Urban and rural post offices: 2000-2014

	Number of post offices			Net change in year*		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
At end of:						
Mar 2000	9,099	9,294	18,393			
Mar 2001	8,993	8,853	17,846	-106	-441	-547
Mar 2002	9,124	8,460	17,584	117	-379	-262
Mar 2003	8,894	8,345	17,239	-230	-115	-345
Mar 2004	7,780	8,181	15,961	-1,129	-149	-1,278
Mar 2005	6,572	8,037	14,609	-1,208	-144	-1,352
Mar 2006	6,522	7,854	14,376	-50	-183	-233
Mar 2007	6,477	7,742	14,219	-45	-112	-157
Mar 2008	6,160	7,407	13,567	-317	-335	-652
Mar 2009	5,385	6,567	11,952	-775	-840	-1,615
Mar 2010	5,359	6,546	11,905	-26	-21	-47
Mar 2011	5,351	6,469	11,820	-8	-77	-85
Mar 2012	5,363	6,455	11,818	12	-14	-2
Mar 2013	5,351	6,429	11,780	-12	-26	-38
Mar 2014	5,334	6,362	11,696	-17	-67	-84
Mar 2015	5,307	6,327	11,634	-27	-35	-62

Source: Post Office Limited Network Report 2015 and Previous

Notes: See text for details on discontinuity

*Net change figures take account of reclassification between rural and urban post offices

2.2 Post Offices by Region

The table below shows the number of Post Offices by region. During the period March 2014 to March 2015, the number of Post Office branches fell in total by 62, or 0.5%, with the largest falls of 2.2% and 2.5% in London and Wales. See table A4 for more details.

2.3   Post Offices by Westminster constituency

A full list of Post Offices by constituency was made available by Royal Mail Group plc for the first time in 2002. These lists are copyrighted to Post Office Ltd but are available as electronic files in the Library for use by Members on request.

A list of the number of Post Offices in each constituency is available for Members and a link is available at the end of this briefing.

3. Discontinuity in post office network statistics in 2005 and 2007

From June 2005 a new system of recording the number of Post Offices was introduced. This has caused a discontinuity in the overall total, regional figures and the urban/rural breakdown. Overall, the number of post offices recorded at the end of June 2005 was only two below the total at the end of March 2005. However, 31 net rural reductions and 33 net urban reductions were counted. In this note, the totals given for June 2005 are used but the change figures are adjusted to take account of the discontinuity.

There is also a break in the series at the end of 2006 and again at the end of 2006/07 after Royal Mail undertook work regarding the identification of branches and services. In rural areas in particular, they have, over the past few years, introduced a number of 'innovative solutions' - for example, where sub-postmasters provide a service in a nearby village from the village hall. They may do this for one or more villages and the previous technical set up mean's that all accounting was completed at the host or hub site. Technical updates now mean that all individual serving points are identified. Also, in many remote areas communication with branches was through satellite links and the Post Office is now able to communicate with them through broadband. These and other activities have changed the way that some branches are identified, although there has in effect been no actual physical change in services to the public at these branches.

Between December 2006, March 2007 and June 2007, the Post Office increased the accuracy of the data in terms of the methodology and data sets used. Previous analysis to identify branch locations was based on postcode information where postcode centroids were used to plot locations which are accurate to 100m. The new approach is to use address pointed coordinates, these are accurate to the actual building, rather than the 100m for the postcode centroids.

As an example of these changes, there was a fall in the physical network at June 2007 of 44 branches on March 2007, the impact of the technical changes (-28 branches) means that the statistics showed a fall in the post office network of 72 branches.

4. Appendix tables

4.1 A1 – Annual Change in Network Size

Annual change in network size*

	Total at year end	Net change	% change
1981/82	22,405	-70	-0.3%
1982/83	22,301	-104	-0.5%
1983/84	22,058	-243	-1.1%
1984/85	21,663	-395	-1.8%
1985/86	21,305	-358	-1.7%
1986/87	21,211	-94	-0.4%
1987/88	21,071	-140	-0.7%
1988/89	21,030	-41	-0.2%
1989/90	20,871	-159	-0.8%
1990/91	20,638	-233	-1.1%
1991/92	20,160	-478	-2.3%
1992/93	19,958	-202	-1.0%
1993/94	19,722	-236	-1.2%
1994/95	19,607	-115	-0.6%
1995/96	19,414	-193	-1.0%
1996/97	19,071	-343	-1.8%
1997/98	19,008	-63	-0.3%
1998/99	18,775	-233	-1.2%
1999/00	18,393	-382	-2.0%
2000/01	17,846	-547	-3.0%
2001/02	17,584	-262	-1.5%
2002/03	17,239	-345	-2.0%
2003/04	15,961	-1,278	-7.4%
2004/05	14,609	-1,352	-8.5%
2005/06	14,376	-233	-1.6%
2006/07	14,219	-157	-1.1%
2007/08	13,567	-652	-4.6%
2008/09	11,952	-1,615	-11.9%
2009/10	11,905	-47	-0.4%
2010/11	11,820	-85	-0.7%
2011/12	11,818	-2	0.0%
2012/13	11,780	-38	-0.3%
2013/14	11,696	-84	-0.7%
2014/15	11,634	-62	-0.5%

Sources: Access to Post Office Services: Time to Act, POSTCOMM,
30 Sep 2002, Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group, Post
Office Network report 2015
**Notes: ***See text for details on discontinuity

4.2 A2 – Crown, Agency and Outreach Post Offices 1982-2015

Number of Crown, Agency and Outreach Post Offices 1982-2015

At end of:	Crown Post Office branches*	Agency contract branches**	Outreach***	Total
Mar 1982	1,573	20,832		22,405
Mar 1983	1,567	20,734		22,301
Mar 1984	1,559	20,499		22,058
Mar 1985	1,553	20,110		21,663
Mar 1986	1,509	19,796		21,305
Mar 1987	1,503	19,708		21,211
Mar 1988	1,499	19,572		21,071
Mar 1989	1,493	19,537		21,030
Mar 1990	1,339	19,532		20,871
Mar 1991	1,167	19,471		20,638
Mar 1992	1,019	19,141		20,160
Mar 1993	917	19,041		19,958
Mar 1994	800	18,982		19,782
Mar 1995	699	18,908		19,607
Mar 1996	653	18,761		19,414
Mar 1997	606	18,645		19,251
Mar 1998	601	18,407		19,008
Mar 1999	600	18,175		18,775
Mar 2000	598	17,743	52	18,393
Mar 2001	597	17,199	50	17,846
Mar 2002	589	16,916	79	17,584
Mar 2003	576	16,483	180	17,239
Mar 2004	560	15,211	190	15,961
Mar 2005	541	13,884	184	14,609
Mar 2006	495	13,618	263	14,376
Mar 2007	458	13,448	313	14,219
Mar 2008	403	12,748	416	13,567
Mar 2009	373	10,776	803	11,952
Mar 2010	373	10,599	933	11,905
Mar 2011	373	10,468	979	11,820
Mar 2012	373	10,428	1,017	11,818
Mar 2013	373	10,342	1,065	11,780
Mar 2014	350	10,255	1,091	11,696
Mar 2015	326	10,172	1,136	11,634

Source: Post Office Limited, Network Report 2015

Notes: * Branches directly managed by Post Office Limited

** Includes Franchise. MSPO, SPSO, Main, Local

*** Includes Satellite, Mobile, hosted and Partner

4.3 A3 – Quarterly Changes in the Post Office Network

Quarterly change in the Post Office network 2004-2015

At end of:		Outlets		% quarterly
		Total	Net change	change
Mar 2004		15,961	-504	-3.1%
Jun 2004		15,656	-305	-1.9%
Sep 2004		15,304	-352	-2.2%
Dec 2004		14,976	-328	-2.1%
Mar 2005		14,609	-367	-2.5%
Jun 2005	*	14,607	-64	-0.4%
Sep 2005		14,542	-65	-0.4%
Dec 2005		14,528	-14	-0.1%
Mar 2006		14,376	-152	-1.0%
Jun 2006		14,299	-77	-0.5%
Sep 2006		14,263	-36	-0.3%
Dec 2006	*	14,295	32	0.2%
Mar 2007	*	14,219	-76	-0.5%
Jun 2007	*	14,147	-72	-0.5%
Sep 2007		14,118	-29	-0.2%
Dec 2007		14,052	-66	-0.5%
Mar 2008		13,567	-485	-3.5%
Jun 2008		13,165	-402	-3.0%
Sep 2008		12,524	-641	-4.9%
Dec 2008		12,046	-478	-3.8%
Mar 2009		11,952	-94	-0.8%
Jun 2009		11,956	4	0.0%
Sep 2009		11,942	-14	-0.1%
Dec 2009		11,923	-19	-0.2%
Mar 2010		11,905	-18	-0.2%
Jun 2010		11,872	-33	-0.3%
Sep 2010		11,832	-40	-0.3%
Dec 2010		11,847	15	0.1%
Mar 2011		11,820	-27	-0.2%
Jun 2011		11,798	-22	-0.2%
Sep 2011		11,785	-13	-0.1%
Dec 2012		11,801	16	0.1%
Mar 2012		11,818	17	0.1%
Jun 2012		11,816	-2	0.0%
Sep 2012		11,799	-17	-0.1%
Dec 2012		11,783	-16	-0.1%
Mar 2013		11,780	-3	0.0%
Jun 2013		11,742	-38	-0.3%
Sep 2013		11,717	-25	-0.2%
Dec 2013		11,718	1	0.0%
Mar 2014		11,696	-22	-0.2%
Jun 2014		11,686	-10	-0.1%
Sep 2014		11,631	-55	-0.5%
Dec 2014		11,627	-4	0.0%
Mar 2015		11,634	7	0.1%

Sources: POSTCOMM Annual Reports, Royal Mail Group, Post Office Ltd

Notes: * See text for details on discontinuity

4.4 A4 – Post Offices by Region

Post offices by region: 2001-2015

	At end of:														
	Mar 2001	Mar 2002	Mar 2003	Mar 2004	Mar 2005	Mar 2006	Mar 2007	Mar 2008	Mar 2009	Mar 2010	Mar 2011	Mar 2012	Mar 2013	Mar 2014	Mar 2015
North East	736	726	717	662	583	600	595	576	494	491	491	496	490	489	493
North West	1,853	1,849	1,812	1,651	1,421	1,396	1,372	1,311	1,143	1,138	1,134	1,133	1,130	1,129	1,124
Yorkshire and The Humber	1,530	1,509	1,483	1,377	1,265	1,228	1,210	1,144	1,018	1,006	992	992	994	981	974
West Midlands	1,438	1,414	1,379	1,280	1,124	1,107	1,100	1,091	941	930	922	921	914	910	910
South West	1,880	1,846	1,805	1,673	1,596	1,581	1,566	1,549	1,306	1,303	1,293	1,300	1,303	1,280	1,268
South East	2,189	2,153	2,114	1,930	1,769	1,734	1,733	1,545	1,407	1,412	1,408	1,408	1,404	1,393	1,393
London	1,225	1,209	1,165	1,010	853	853	848	846	679	681	682	684	685	685	670
East of England	1,632	1,611	1,578	1,470	1,384	1,376	1,364	1,305	1,159	1,150	1,143	1,140	1,127	1,114	1,117
East Midlands	1,420	1,382	1,351	1,243	1,153	1,104	1,091	957	903	905	894	882	881	876	876
Northern Ireland	611	605	593	573	550	542	543	528	488	480	478	480	484	480	477
Scotland	1,933	1,907	1,887	1,810	1,712	1,688	1,651	1,599	1,443	1,446	1,433	1,425	1,411	1,405	1,402
Wales	1,399	1,373	1,355	1,282	1,199	1,167	1,146	1,116	971	963	950	957	957	954	930
United Kingdom	**17,846**	**17,584**	**17,239**	**15,961**	**14,609**	**14,376**	**14,219**	**13,567**	**11,952**	**11,905**	**11,820**	**11,818**	**11,780**	**11,696**	**11,634**

Sources: POSTCOMM Annual Reports & Post Office Ltd Network Reports 2015

Post offices by region: 2001-2015

	Network change			
	Mar 2014-Mar 2015*		Mar 2001-Mar 2015*	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
North East	4	0.8%	-243	-33%
North West	-5	-0.4%	-729	-39%
Yorkshire and The Humber	-7	-0.7%	-556	-36%
West Midlands	0	0.0%	-528	-37%
South West	-12	-0.9%	-612	-33%
South East	0	0.0%	-796	-36%
London	-15	-2.2%	-555	-45%
East of England	3	0.3%	-515	-32%
East Midlands	0	0.0%	-544	-38%
Northern Ireland	-3	-0.6%	-134	-22%
Scotland	-3	-0.2%	-531	-27%
Wales	-24	-2.5%	-469	-34%
United Kingdom	**-62**	**-0.5%**	**-6,212**	**-35%**

Sources: POSTCOMM Annual Reports & Post Office Ltd Network Reports 2015

Notes: * See text for details on discontinuity

A5 – Number of post offices by constituency: April 2011-15 (in separate document)