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1.   How Post Office Confirmed that Horizon was fit-for-purpose

1.1   Horizon was developed as a managed service by ICL Pathway. As is our usual practice in contracts for the development of complex IT services, Post Office put in place a formal acceptance process to assure itself that the service was fit for purpose before allowing it to be widely deployed.

1.2   Post Office's specification of the service was documented in a catalogue of requirements. This included requirements relating to the ease of use of the system, the stability of the system and the integrity of the financial information that it produces.

1.3   The acceptance process used a mixture of technical reviews, testing by ICL Pathway and by Post Office and operation of a live pilot stage in Post Office branches to confirm that each requirement was being met satisfactorily. This was not a "rubber-stamping" exercise, and significant problems were found and then fixed before the main roll-out was authorised.

1.4   There were some problems with system stability during the early stages of the acceptance process, but these were rectified, and a period of monitoring in pilot offices during October and November 1999 demonstrated that the rectification had been effective in reducing the incidence of re-boots and related problems to an average rate of less than 4 per counter position per annum. Subsequent improvements by ICL Pathway during the year 2000 reduced this to less than 3 per counter position per annum.

2.   Training

2.1   During the roll-out of the Horizon system, all users of the system (including subpostmasters and their assistants) were trained in its use. The training courses were developed and delivered by ICL having been based on an analysis of user needs carried out in conjunction with experienced Post Office trainers.

2.2   The courses took into account the profile of the users – that is, that they were older and less experienced in the use of computers than would be the case in most IT projects, but were already aware of the manual processes carried out in managing or working in a Post Office branch.

2.3   The training was practically based, carried out in small groups, and was concluded by an assessment to ensure that the trainees had acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to use the system. The standard course was of 1 day, with a longer 2 day course for branch managers (including subpostmasters). Training was carried out shortly before the relevant branches went "live" with the system.

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2.4 In addition, Post Office provided a number of reference guides which were provided to subpostmasters for use during the period when they were becoming familiar with the system.

3. Help Desk Services

3.1 ICL Pathway provided a helpdesk service (known as the Horizon System Helpdesk) to answer calls about problems with the equipment or software, and to provide advice and guidance on using the system, including its use in preparation of weekly cash accounts. This helpdesk was not required to answer general enquiries about Post Office business processes – a separate helpdesk operated by Post Office was available for this.

3.2 Post Office's contract with ICL Pathway set service levels for their help desk service to ensure that it was appropriate to the needs of Horizon users. In summary these were:

3.2.1 *Hours of service* – full service 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday; skeleton service 5am to 8am and 8pm to midnight Monday to Saturday and 7am to 10pm Sundays.

3.2.2 *Call answering* – 80% answered within 20 seconds and 99% within 40 seconds

3.2.3 *Calls not answered* to be less than 1%

3.2.4 *Help desk to provide first, second and third level services as follows*:

(a) First level – deals with all simple and straightforward problems and with general enquiries.
95% of first level calls to be resolved within 5 minutes and 100% within 10 minutes

(b) Second level – provides a diagnostics and fixing service for more complex problems
95% of second level calls to be resolved within 30 minutes and 100% within 45 minutes.

(c) Third level – analyses problems that can not be dealt with at the first 2 levels. 3rd level will either develop a fix or work-around, or document the problem as needing subsequent software changes.

3.2.5 There were also more detailed service levels requiring the provision of accurate and timely advice and guidance on completion of cash accounts.

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3.3   These service levels were much more demanding than is general in IT contracts; this was because Post Office recognised that its business depended on being able to serve customers in Post Office branches efficiently and that in turn required effective and fast support of the staff serving them.

3.4   Performance against service levels was monitored in detail during the period 3rd December 1999 to 13th January 2000 to prove that the service was operating correctly ahead of the main national roll-out of the Horizon system. Subsequently, service levels have been reported monthly, and have generally been satisfactory.