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Post office numbers



Summary

- 1 Overall network size
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Appendix: discontinuity in post office network statistics in 2005 and 2007

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Post office numbers

Summary

As of March 2022, there were 11,635 post office branches in the UK.

Trends

Between March 2021 and March 2022, the number of post offices rose by 1.9%, returning to around the number seen in March 2020.

Between 2009 and 2020 the number of post offices in the UK remained reasonably consistent. Over the longer term (since the early 1980s) the number of post offices has almost halved.

In return for its government funding, the Post Office is committed to investing in the network, and maintaining around 11,500 branches with no further substantive reductions.

Location of post offices

Over the last decade Northern Ireland has seen the most growth in the number of post offices, at 4.6%, and Scotland has seen the greatest fall at 6.4%.

The number of both rural and urban post offices has been relatively stable since 2009.

Types of post offices

At the end of March 2022, there were

- 9,617 agency branches, 83% of the network.
- 1,901 outreach services, 16% of the total network.
- 117 Crown branches, 1% of the Post Office Network.

There has been a significant rise in the number of outreach services since 2000 – going from less than 1% of the total in 2000 to 16% of the total network in the latest figures.

The number of Crown branches has also fallen significantly over the period.

Post office numbers

Further information

Further details about Post Office Ltd are given in the Library Note [The Post Office](#).

Post offices in each constituency

A full list of Post offices by constituency has been made available to the Library by the Post Office Ltd, since 2002. These lists are copyrighted to the Post Office and for that reason the Library is only able to provide them to Members and their staff.

A table with the numbers of post offices by constituency [Post offices by constituency](#) is available via the Parliamentary intranet only.

1 Overall network size

As of March 2022, there were 11,635 post office branches in the UK.¹

The vast majority of post offices (around 99%) are operated by franchise partners or sub-postmasters, who are independent business people. Only around 1% of post offices are Crown post offices, which are directly managed by Post Office Limited.

Note: Post Office Ltd, which owns and runs the Post Office Network, was separated from Royal Mail on 1 April 2012.

1.1 Change in the network size

The Library Briefing Paper The Post Office accompanies this paper and explains how the Post Office network is owned and managed

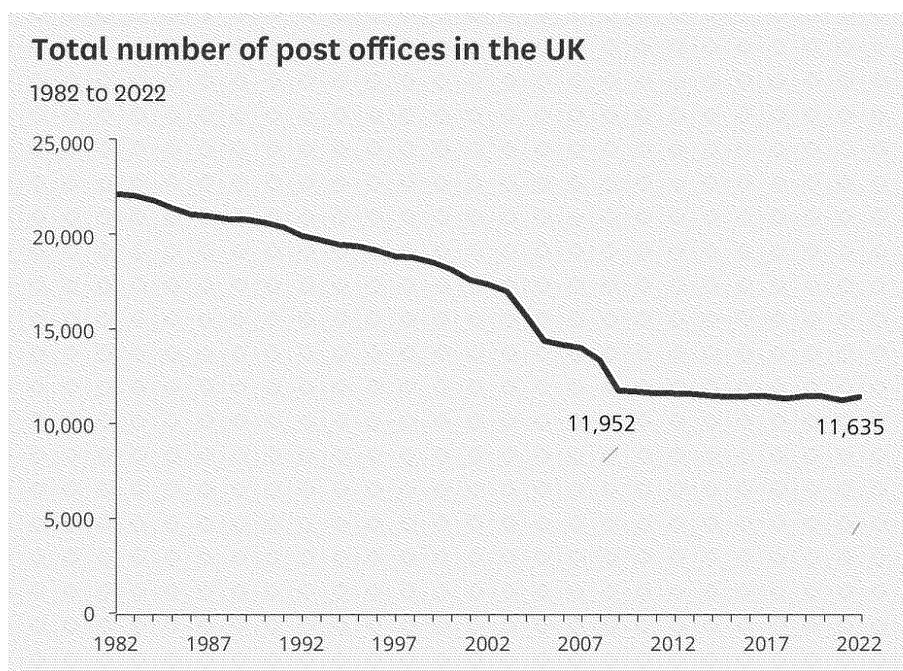
Between March 2021 and March 2022, the number of post offices rose, by about 2%, returning to around the number in March 2020.

Overall, since around 2009 the number of post offices in the UK has remained reasonably consistent.

Whilst the recent trend has been stable, over the longer term there has been a decline in the number of post offices. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a steady decline in the number of post offices. In the mid-2000s this decline increased.

¹ Many of the figures in this paper are from Post Office Network Reports, which also contain further information – see reports for [2014](#), [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#)

Post office numbers



Source: Post Office Ltd

Notes: Care should be taken in interpreting the data given discontinuities in the data in the period 2005-2007 (see appendix)

1.2

Commitments on numbers and location of Post offices

Access Criteria

In return for its funding, the Post Office is committed to investing in the network, and maintaining around 11,500 branches with no further substantive reductions and continued accessibility for all at the national level.²

Due to the impact of Covid-19, the government granted a waiver which permitted the Post Office to have fewer than 11,500 open branches during the pandemic, until 30 June 2021.³ The number of branches is now back at around its pre-pandemic level.

² BEIS, [Government Response to the 2016 Post Office Network Consultation](#), December 2017, p6. The Post Office current receives £50 million in network subsidy per year – see [PO 60006](#), answered 17 Oct 2022

³ Post Office Ltd, [Post Office Network Report 2021](#)

The Post Office is required by government to meet six ‘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;
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.
6. 95% of the population of every postcode district to be within six miles of their nearest post office outlet.⁴

Post Office performance against the access criteria

At the end of March 2022, the Post Office met five of its six access criteria as shown in the table below.

It again missed the target for the number of postcode districts in which 95% of population are within six miles of their nearest post office – this is intended to ensure a minimum level of access for customers living in remote rural areas. There were nine postcode areas where this was not met.⁵

⁴ Post Office Ltd, [Post Office Network Report 2021](#)

⁵ The Post Office has noted that a “number of postcode districts are failing due to non-availability of either Postmaster or Buildings to run these branches from”, and said that it “will continue to find solutions for these”.

Post office numbers

Performance against accessibility criteria 2017/18 to 2021/22						
	Minimum requirement	2017/18 performance	2018/19 performance	2019/20 performance	2020/21 performance	2021/22 performance
Total population within 3 miles	99%	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%	99.6%	99.7%
Total population within 1 mile	90%	92.8%	92.7%	92.7%	92.5%	92.7%
Deprived urban population within 1 mile	99%	99.6%	99.4%	99.4%	99.3%	99.3%
Urban population within 1 mile	95%	98.3%	98.2%	98.3%	97.8%	97.8%
Rural population within 3 miles	95%	98.7%	98.7%	98.7%	98.0%	98.2%
Postcode districts with <95% of population within 6 miles	0	7	3	7	12	9
Source: Post Office Ltd: The Post Office Network Reports						

Source: Post Office, Post Office Network Reports

2

Post offices by type

More information regarding these post office contract types can be found in the Library briefing paper [The Post Office](#).

Post office branches operate under different contract types. There are three main types of post office:

- Crown post office branches: those post offices that are directly managed by Post Office Ltd.
- Agency post office branches: post offices owned and managed by either an independent postmaster or a larger franchise partner (for example WH Smith or the Co-operative).⁶
- Outreach services: typically small part-time branches that may use a village hall or mobile van to provide post office services to communities that might not otherwise receive them.

At the end of March 2022, there were

- 9,617 agency branches, 83% of the network.
- 1,901 outreach services, 16% of the total network.
- 117 Crown branches, 1% of the Post Office Network.

Trend in post offices by branch type

Between 2020 and 2022, the number of outreach branches increased by 201, the number of agency services fell by 195 and the number of Crown branches fell by 9. These changes are in line with pre-pandemic trends.

⁶ There are multiple types of agency branch. Further details about the different types of post office branch can be found in the Library briefing [The Post Office](#).

Post office numbers

Number of post offices by contract type 2012 to 2022				
	Crown	Agency	Outreach	Total
2012	373	10,428	1,017	11,818
2013	373	10,342	1,065	11,780
2014	350	10,255	1,091	11,696
2015	326	10,172	1,136	11,634
2016	315	10,062	1,266	11,643
2017	285	9,935	1,439	11,659
2018	262	9,768	1,517	11,547
2019	191	9,814	1,633	11,638
2020	126	9,812	1,700	11,638
2021	118	9,646	1,651	11,415
2022	117	9,617	1,901	11,635

Source: Post Office Ltd, Network Reports - data is for March in each year

Agency branches can be broken down by type: main, local and traditional⁷ branches. In March 2022, there were 3,370 main branches, 4,242 local branches and 1,995 traditional branches. The agency figure for 2022 given above also includes 10 new 'drop & collect' branches focussed on pre-paid parcels.

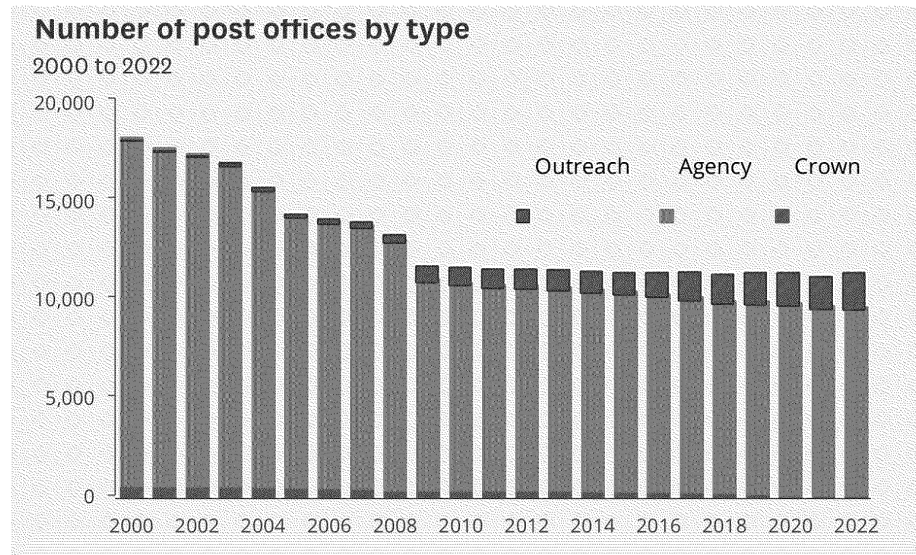
There has been a significant rise in the number of outreach services since 2000. There were 52 outreach services in the year 2000 representing less than 1% of the total Post Office Network at the time. By 2009 there were more than double the number of outreach services than Crown branches. Outreach services now number 1,901 as of March 2022, 16% of the total network.

The number of Crown post offices has been falling since 2013, when there were 373 Crown branches, compared with 117 in 2022.

Other than between 2018 and 2019, the number of agency branches has also been declining, but much more gradually.

⁷ Branches that remain on contracts issued before the Network Transformation programme

Post office numbers



Source: Post Office

3 Post offices by location

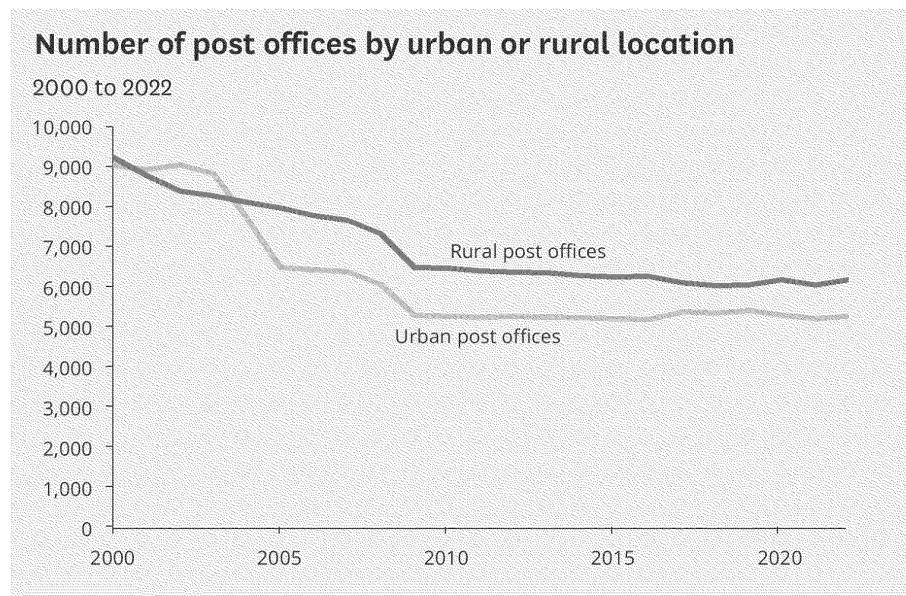
3.1 Urban and rural post office branches

There are slightly more post offices in rural locations than there are in urban locations.

At the end of March 2022 there were 6,265 post offices in rural locations in the UK, 54% of the Post Office Network, and 5,370 post offices in urban locations, 46% of the network.

Trend in urban and rural post offices.

The number of both rural and urban post offices has been relatively stable since 2009.



Source: Post Office Ltd

3.2

Post offices by region and country

Data by constituency is available to Members of Parliament, please contact the Library for details.

The number of post offices in each UK region or country varies depending on the size and density of the population. Sparsely populated regions and countries often have more post offices per person to ensure that the access criteria is met for all residents.

Change over time

During the period between March 2020 and March 2022, the change in the number of post office branches across the UK's regions and countries varied, from an fall of 2.8% in Scotland to an increase of 4.3% in Wales.

Number of post offices by UK region and country

2020 to 2022

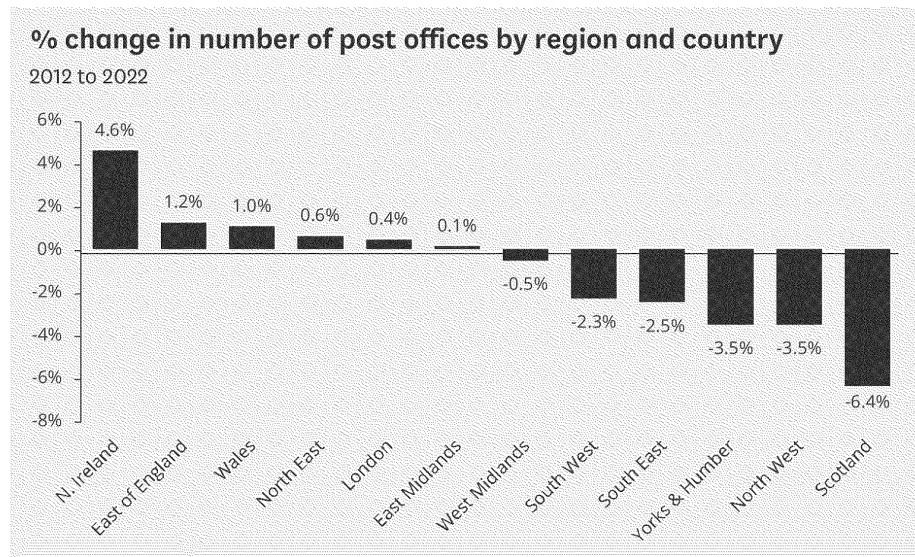
	2020	2021	2022	<i>Net change 2020-2022</i>	<i>% change</i>
North East	499	494	499	0	0.0%
North West	1,112	1,096	1,093	-19	-1.7%
Yorks & Humber	948	930	957	9	0.9%
West Midlands	912	898	916	4	0.4%
South West	1,290	1,254	1,270	-20	-1.6%
South East	1,372	1,349	1,373	1	0.1%
London	680	663	687	7	1.0%
East of England	1,144	1,121	1,154	10	0.9%
East Midlands	878	862	883	5	0.6%
N. Ireland	504	494	502	-2	-0.4%
Scotland	1,372	1,321	1,334	-38	-2.8%
Wales	927	933	967	40	4.3%
England	8,835	8,667	8,832	-3	0.0%
United Kingdom	11,638	11,415	11,635	-3	0.0%

Source: Post Office Network Reports - data refers to March in each year

Longer term trend

Over the last decade Northern Ireland has seen the most growth in the number of post offices, at 4.6%, and Scotland has seen the greatest fall at 6.4%.

Post office numbers



Source: Post Office Ltd

Appendix: 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 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.

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 online. These and other activities changed the way that some branches are identified, although there had 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.

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