

Our use of cookies

We use essential cookies to make our site work.

We'd like to use additional cookies to understand how you use the site and improve our services.

You can find details of these and all other cookies on our [cookie policy](#).

[Accept additional cookies](#)

[Reject additional cookies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)



Hansard

[UK Parliament](#) > [Hansard](#) > [Commons: 13 March 2024](#) > [Commons Chamber](#) > [Post Office Legislation](#)

Post Office Legislation

Volume 747: debated on Wednesday 13 March 2024

[Download text](#)

[Previous debate](#)

[Next debate](#)

🕒 1.09pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade >

(Kevin Hollinrake)

[Share](#)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement about Post Office legislation and the **Horizon** redress schemes.

I am very pleased to be able to announce that today we are introducing a new Bill that will quash the convictions of postmasters in England and Wales affected by the **Horizon scandal**. As set out in my written statement last month, this legislation will quash all convictions that meet a clear set of conditions. Those in scope will have their convictions quashed on the day that the new legislation is brought into force. Subject to parliamentary passage, our aim is for Royal Assent to be received as soon as possible before the summer recess.

We accept, and have always been clear, that the legislation may overturn the convictions of some people who are guilty of genuine wrongdoing, but we believe this is a price worth paying to ensure that many innocent people are exonerated. However, the Government will seek to mitigate the risk of people receiving financial redress when they have not been wronged.

The Government also accept that this legislation is unprecedented. It is an exceptional response to a factually exceptional situation. I want to be clear that this does not set a precedent, and neither is it a criticism of the judiciary or the courts, which have dealt swiftly with matters brought before them. The fact remains, however, that three years after the first convictions were overturned, only around 100 have been quashed. Without Government intervention, many of these convictions could not be overturned, either because all the evidence has long been lost or because, quite simply, postmasters have lost faith in the state and the criminal justice system, and will not come forward to seek justice.

The legislation will apply to England and Wales only. However, we are fully committed to working with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive through regular, weekly official-level engagement to progress their own approaches. I have met my counterparts in the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to offer support and address their concerns, and I will have further meetings. The financial redress scheme will be open to applicants throughout the UK, once convictions have been overturned.

I thank the Business and Trade Committee, which recently published a report that includes some recommendations for the Government regarding **Horizon** redress. We will respond to them in the usual way, but today I would like to address two of the Committee's recommendations. The first is that responsibility for redress should not lie with the Post Office, as it should be subject to independent oversight—something that has also been recommended to us by the **Horizon** compensation advisory board. I can announce today that the Department for Business and Trade, rather than the Post Office, will be responsible for the delivery of redress for overturned convictions. Final decisions on redress will be made by independent panels or independent individuals.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I shall return to the House at a later date to provide details on how we intend to deliver redress for those who have their convictions overturned by the Bill or via subsequent measures taken in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are discussing the details with the advisory board. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), will introduce legislation to make any payments made via the new scheme exempt from tax.

Secondly, the Select Committee recommended that the Government introduce legally binding timeframes to deliver redress for sub-postmasters, with financial penalties for non-compliance. I strongly support the Committee's desire to speed up redress, but we feel that its proposed regime would have the opposite impact. It would potentially mean imposing penalties on forensic accountants or others who are helping postmasters to prepare their claims. Doing that would probably cause some of them to withdraw from this work, which would slow down the delivery of redress. Furthermore, we do not want to be in the position of rushing postmasters into major decisions about their claims and the offers they receive, which would possibly mean that some are timed out of redress altogether. The advisory board has said that its "strong view" is that

"this would be a backward step",

which is why we passed legislation less than two months ago to remove the arbitrary deadline from the group litigation order scheme. We do not want to reverse that change.

However, the Government are acting to ensure that redress is delivered as quickly as possible. First, we are working with claimants' lawyers to reduce the number of cases that require expert evidence—for example, from forensic accountants—or medical evidence, which delays claims. We will pilot that approach and, assuming that the pilot succeeds, we hope to expand it rapidly.

Secondly, the advisory board and I have asked for monthly reports on each scheme. They will come from schemes' independent case managers, where such managers are in place. We will publish the reports, which will give us the best basis on which to assess measures for speeding up redress.

Finally, we are introducing optional fixed-sum awards. In January, the Government announced that they would offer an optional fixed-sum award of £75,000 to those in the group litigation order scheme. As of 5 March, 110 offers have been accepted, and over 100 people have taken the £75,000 fixed payment. Of those who have accepted the fixed payment, three quarters are new claimants, so the fixed offer has already meant that over 100 claims have been resolved promptly. In some cases, those people will have got more than they would have asked for. The fixed offer has also had a helpful effect on other claims, because it substantially reduces work on small claims by claimants' lawyers, making more resource available to progress larger claims more quickly.

I am pleased to announce today that the £75,000 fixed-sum award offer will now be extended to the **Horizon** shortfall scheme, to ensure that everyone is treated fairly across all the schemes. Those who have already settled their claim below £75,000 will be offered a top-up to bring their total redress to that amount; over 2,000 postmasters will benefit quickly from this announcement.

We are mindful that claims are not being submitted to the GLO scheme as swiftly as we would like. We have already announced the optional fixed-sum award of £75,000, but to ensure that we get help to claimants more quickly, I can announce today that anyone who chooses not to take that offer, and instead submits a full claim for individual assessment, will have their interim payment topped up to £50,000 straight away.

Many postmasters' lives have been ruined by the **Horizon scandal**, and we are working hard to deliver redress. We have set up the Williams inquiry, which will discover the truth. We will provide fair financial redress as promptly as we can, and we will exonerate those who were so unjustly convicted of crimes that they did not commit. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker >

 [Share](#)

I call the shadow Minister.

🕒 1.17pm

Rushanara Ali >

(Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)

 [Share](#)

I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement. Before I respond to it, I would like to put on the record my deep disappointment at the Minister's comments this morning on "BBC Breakfast". He failed to categorically condemn the Tory party donor Frank Hester's horrific and racist remarks about the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). Despite No. 10 finally, after much delay, describing the remarks as "racist and wrong", the Minister appeared to contradict that position this morning.

Shailesh Vara >

(North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)

 [Share](#)

On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a statement on Post Office legislation. May I respectfully say that what the hon. Lady is saying is irrelevant to this statement?

Mr Speaker > [Share](#)

The shadow Minister will be moving on.

Rushanara Ali > [Share](#)

I will move on. I simply hope that the Minister will reflect on the reversal of the statement he gave this morning, in which he took the position that he would take a donation from that donor. I hope he reflects on the impact that the issue is having on many of us.

I turn to today's crucial statement. The **Horizon scandal** is truly shocking, and is one of the most devastating miscarriages of justice in British history. The **scandal** has brought devastation to the lives of hundreds of falsely convicted sub-postmasters. Over 20 years on, they and their families still suffer from the consequences and the trauma of all that they have been put through. I pay tribute to them for their determination in pursuing justice, and to Alan Bates and the sub-postmasters who pioneered the campaign and worked tirelessly to seek justice. Without their bravery and perseverance, the campaign would not be where it is today. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for all his work, to Lord Arbuthnot for his campaigning on this issue for many years, to others in this House and the other House, and to members of the Business and Trade Committee and its Chair, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne).

We of course welcome the legislation that is being laid before Parliament today, but before giving a full verdict on it, we will need to properly scrutinise the details and analyse its potential impacts. In the first instance, the legislation leaves a series of outstanding issues, and the question of when justice and compensation will be delivered, and to whom. First, I will address the territorial scope of the legislation, which currently applies only to England and Wales, even though the Post Office is not devolved, and the **Horizon** system and the impacts of the **scandal** are UK-wide.

Approximately 30 cases need overturning in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but a series of outstanding questions remain as to when sub-postmasters in Scotland and particularly Northern Ireland will receive justice and compensation. I welcome the Minister's assurance that there will be regular dialogue with the devolved Administrations, but I would be grateful if he provided more detail on how that will work in practice, given the different legal processes.

As we know, 80% of the redress budget is yet to be paid out. There remains considerable uncertainty about when sub-postmasters will receive their compensation. I am sure that we can all agree that they have waited long enough, and the delays are causing further financial distress and suffering. We note the Business and Trade Committee's recommendation that there be a legally binding timeframe for the period between an offer being first tabled and a settlement being reached. If those legally binding targets are not

adopted, what assurances can the Minister give that he will meet his target of ensuring that all compensation is out of the door by the end of the year? What mechanisms will he put in place to ensure that there are no further delays? I know that he is committed to ensuring that there are no further delays, but sub-postmasters will want to know that this will actually happen.

Given the recent chaos in the Post Office's leadership, we welcome the decision to take the Post Office out of the redress process. As the Minister said, redress must have independent oversight. The Post Office is in disarray, and we need focus and efficiency in ensuring that compensation is paid to the sub-postmasters as soon as possible.

Financial redress alone cannot come close to repaying sub-postmasters for their suffering, though it is so important that we get it right. The very least the Government can do is ensure that sub-postmasters receive fair compensation and exoneration as soon as possible. There are those impacted by the **scandal** who have sadly passed away, and did not live to see their innocence proven or to receive the compensation that they deserved. It is vital that the Government act with the urgency and speed that is needed to correct this terrible injustice.

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

The shadow Minister's comments are on the record, so I shall deal with them briefly. I think this is the second time she has made comments at the Dispatch Box that have been unfair or factually incorrect, and I hope that she will correct the record. If she had actually watched the interview I gave, she would know that I absolutely did condemn the words of Mr Hester. I said they were wrong. I said they were racist, and I think it is absolutely right that he has apologised. She should watch the full broadcast, and I hope that she will apologise to the House and correct the record.

The points that the hon. Lady raised pertain largely to the Scottish and Northern Ireland devolved Administrations. I quite understand the concern around those issues, and I am very keen to ensure that we get this right across the United Kingdom. As she acknowledges, there are different legal processes in those areas, and we think it would be inappropriate for us to legislate for parts of the United Kingdom that have different legal processes and different prosecutors. Justice is devolved, although the Post Office is a UK-wide organisation, as she rightly says. That is why we think the legislation should allow devolved Administrations to legislate for themselves, if they choose to. We will work closely with them. Officials meet them weekly to assist wherever we can, so that compensation can be delivered UK-wide; that is how the scheme operates.

I think the hon. Lady said that 80% of compensation was yet to be delivered. I may be wrong there, so I will check the record. Across all the schemes, in around two thirds of cases, full and final compensation has already been received. That being the case, about 2,000 people will be topped up to £75,000, as I announced earlier, but it is not right to say, as I think she did, that the majority of people are waiting for compensation.

The hon. Lady asked whether we wanted to deliver the compensation by the end of the year. Absolutely we do, but as I said, not everything is in our gift. We cannot compel a claimant to submit a claim, or know when that will happen. If somebody puts in a claim right towards the end of the year, for example, it may not be possible to deal with it before the end of the year. Not everything is in our gift, but we are keen to expedite anything that is.

It is absolutely critical that we have independent oversight; all schemes have it. In the overturned conviction scheme, we have retired High Court judge Sir Gary Hickinbottom, and the £600,000 fixed-sum award; but on Mr Hickinbottom's advice, we have also introduced the £450,000 payment as soon as a full claim has been submitted. We are doing everything we can to make sure that people are compensated as quickly as possible.

Paul Scully >

(Sutton and Cheam) (Con)

 [Share](#)

I welcome the Minister's statement, and the pragmatic way that he has looked to speed up claims, and to take this in-house as best he can. I also welcome the proposed legislation, and the extension of the £75,000 to those in the historical shortfall scheme. I point the Minister to an article in *The Times* this morning about people who may reportedly be excluded from the legislation. Can he give any assurances that people who have gone through this process and whose original conviction was based substantially on the **Horizon** problems will indeed be exonerated and therefore able to get compensation?

Kevin Hollinrake > [Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for his question, for his tireless campaigning in this area, and for his tireless work as my predecessor in this role. He did some great work to help us get where we are today. He is right to say there are some people who are not exonerated through this process—for example, people who have been before the Court of Appeal—but they will be able to appeal again in the light of our legislation. Of course, they had the right to do that anyway, but we will support them where we can in bringing forward their case to the Court of Appeal, and we very much hope that innocent people who follow that process will be exonerated.

Mr Speaker > [Share](#)

We come to Scottish National party spokesperson.

Marion Fellows >

(Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

 [Share](#)

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and apologies for being slightly late. I thank the Minister for giving me prior sight of his statement. I welcome the announcement of the legislation. It will hopefully go a long way to speeding up full and fair financial redress for a large number of **Horizon** victims, and will bring them closer to justice. Furthermore, I welcome the enhanced financial redress for those who experienced **Horizon**-related shortfalls, and the fact that those who have already settled for less than £75,000 will have their redress topped up.

I pay tribute to the Minister for his hard work on this, to the **Horizon** compensation advisory board for its sterling work, and to Sir Wyn Williams and his inquiry for their ongoing work. Most of all, I pay tribute to the victims, following the unimaginable pain that they have been forced to endure at the hands of Post Office Ltd and successive UK Governments. I hope that today's announcement can give them some hope, and that there is an end in sight to this sorry chapter.

I welcome the administration of financial redress schemes being taken out of the hands of Post Office Ltd—not before time. Post Office Ltd has demonstrated obfuscation and incompetence at every stage. From a Scottish perspective—I am sure my Northern Irish colleagues will agree with me—I am deeply disappointed that the legislation is confined to England and Wales only. That needs to be addressed. We should include Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure parity. The Westminster Parliament is sovereign, but the Scottish Parliament can be challenged on its legislation, and this needs to be looked at.

The devolution process also risks slowing things down. Will the Minister guarantee today that any relevant orders under section 104 of the Scotland Act 1998 will be processed quickly by his Government? Scotland has no direct equivalent Minister for postal affairs, as only Westminster and his Department have a remit for the Post Office. Will he ensure that the Bill contains provisions requiring Post Office Ltd to fully co-operate with the Scottish Government and to supply all needed materials? It is vital that victims in Scotland and Northern Ireland do not have to wait any longer for justice than their English and Welsh counterparts. Victims across these isles suffered enormously at the hands of a wholly reserved institution, so complete parity is essential.

Kevin Hollinrake > [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Lady again for all her work in this area. She has been a tireless campaigner. We would all like to be further along, but she has made an important contribution to our work.

The hon. Lady is right to say that victims should be front and centre when it comes to compensation, which must be delivered fairly and as quickly as possible. Some of the changes I have announced today, including in my statement, have been brought forward on the basis of feedback from victims and their legal representatives. We are listening to them, and we will make sure that we deliver any changes where we can.

I fully understand the hon. Lady's point about Scotland and Northern Ireland, and she will understand the constitutional sensitivity of this area. These are tough decisions, and I understand that Scottish Ministers will have to make similar decisions. They can decide to do what we are doing and, if they do, we will support them in how they legislate. Given the sensitivities, we thought that, where

justice is devolved, the devolved Administrations should make the decision. I again commit to making sure that we work across the piece, wherever we can, to deliver the consistent compensation that she requires, without forgetting that the redress schemes are UK-wide. As soon as people's convictions are overturned, they will be able to access compensation, just as they can in England and Wales.

Sir Robert Neill >

(Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)

 [Share](#)

Everyone wants to see the sub-postmasters' suffering brought to an end as swiftly as possible, and I welcome what the Minister has said about simplifying and speeding up the compensation scheme. He will know that claimant lawyers such as Neil Hudgell, who gave evidence to the Business and Trade Committee, have real expertise in this field, and I hope he will work very closely with the sector to maximise that expertise in designing the scheme.

I sound one note of caution. The Minister says this is exceptional, and it is constitutionally unprecedented to overturn, through legislation, convictions imposed by our courts in good faith, based on the evidence before them at the time. Frankly, it is most undesirable that we should ever go down that route.

Some of us will need to see the detail of the legislation and what evidence the Government have that it will be quicker and more comprehensive to quash convictions via this constitutionally unprecedented route, rather than leaving the courts to deal with it, with assistance. As the Minister knows, this could have been dealt with via a presumption in favour of sentences being quashed where they depended on Horizon evidence, rather than this wholesale measure. In particular, will he look at what impact it will have on rehabilitation of offenders legislation, and at whether convictions quashed by this Bill will be removed effectively so that people can, for example, travel to the United States or other foreign jurisdictions where they may need a visa, for which they need to show that they do not have an outstanding conviction?

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for his question and all his work on this subject. Our engagement with him throughout the process has been very important. He has much expertise in this area.

We agree that this is unprecedented and undesirable, but we believe it is the least worst option. We want to see this delivered more quickly as, of the 790 or so sub-postmasters whom we believe this legislation will affect, only around 100 convictions have so far been overturned. We think that situation is untenable, which is why we decided to take this route. Of course, I will continue to work with him and listen to his wise advice.

I think I am right in saying that, for convictions overturned by the Court of Appeal, the record is marked "Overturned by the Court of Appeal". We foresee these records being marked in a similar way—"Quashed by Parliament" or something along those lines. Again, I am happy to engage with my hon. Friend to make sure we get it right.

Liam Byrne >

(Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)

 [Share](#)

I welcome the Minister's statement and thank him for the collegiate way in which he is working across the House to try to secure justice for those who have suffered.

This is a welcome step forward. I am glad to see the Minister taking on board some of the recommendations made in the Business and Trade Committee's report last week, setting out how we can deliver fair, fast and independent redress. The Government have today proposed how they will overturn convictions. They have taken the Post Office out of some, but not all, claim processing and, crucially, they have increased the number of people who can apply for fixed-term remuneration. However, the Post Office is still handling the claims of at least 100 people with overturned convictions when it is patently not fit for purpose.

For those who seek to contest their claim, the Minister says there will be no legally binding timeframe between the submission of a claim and an initial offer being made by his Department, which is a problem. There is no standard tariff proposed for compensation under key heads of terms, such as loss of reputation. That, too, is a problem. The Bill is far more than a half measure, that is true, but it is not yet a full solution.

I leave the Minister with the words of Jo Hamilton, who messaged me last night to highlight the plight of the GLO litigants, in particular, and the way in which they

“have to justify every last penny even if some of their claim is for actual monies stolen from them by the Post Office... Why can’t the Government do the right thing before even more victims die?”

Those words need to ring in our ears as we seek to perfect this Bill.

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and collaboration. It is important that we listen to his Committee’s recommendations and its very informative evidence sessions—I sat through all five hours.

At this point, we believe the Post Office should continue its work on the 100 or so cases before it. We currently have no capacity in the Department to handle those claims, although we clearly will by the time the Bill comes into effect. We do not want to pause between the Bill coming into effect in July and compensation payments being made. We think we can get those payments to people in August using that route.

There may be some people left in the first tranche of overturned convictions, for people who have been through the Court of Appeal. We will certainly look at the Committee’s recommendations on whether we should bring those cases back in-house or leave them with the Post Office. We will keep an open mind on that.

We already have fixed timescales to respond to offers or service level agreements in the GLO scheme. We commit to responding to 90% of full claims within 40 days of submission. I am happy to look at how we might put some benchmarks in place to make sure the new scheme has a similar speed of response. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman heard what I said about our new pilots under which lawyers can submit claims without forensic accountants and medical reports. That may do something along the line he says, and I will happily have an ongoing conversation with him.

Thus far, 128 of the 490 claims have been submitted to the GLO scheme, and 110 of them have been settled. To my knowledge, only one claim has gone to independent dispute resolution before going to the independent panel, which hopefully indicates that, generally, the offers are fair and have been accepted almost straightaway.

I understand what Jo Hamilton says, and I met her to discuss some of the processes she had to go through to prove her claim. We are determined to reduce those frictions and evidence requirements, certainly for things that are not essentially material. There are three things that we have to get right in delivering compensation: we have to be fair to the individuals and families affected; we have to be fair to all the other sub-postmasters to make sure there is consistency across the scheme; and, of course, we have to be fair to the taxpayer. There is no cap on what we will pay people, as long as it is fair.

Duncan Baker >

(North Norfolk) (Con)

 [Share](#)

I thank the Minister for bringing this statement to the House, as it clearly moves things in the right direction for closure. I have talked many times in this House about similar issues. The Government have put £1 billion aside to deal with all this, despite the fact that the Post Office has taken millions upon millions off postmasters—innocent people. We have never had the figure of what was taken, although I have asked for it before. I want a second figure, because Fujitsu has said on the record that it would help to compensate victims as well, by adding to the remuneration pot. What progress have we made on making Fujitsu pay also for being culpable in this fiasco?

Kevin Hollinrake >

[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for his regular contributions in this area, as it is always good to have the views of the only former serving postmaster in this House. We are looking to try to identify the figure he refers to and we hope to come back to him at some point; it is complicated, as a lot of these records go back a long way. However, that is a body of work we are undertaking with the Post Office. The Secretary of State had a conversation yesterday with the global chief executive of Fujitsu; we are keen to make sure that Fujitsu contributes and it has already said that it will—it said it has a moral responsibility to contribute. My hon. Friend mentions a figure of £1 billion, but we do not know the final figure for compensation. However, we would expect a significant element of it to come from Fujitsu.

Mr Alistair Carmichael >
(Orkney and Shetland) (LD)

[Share](#)

Like others, I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement but, novelly, I also thank him for advance sight of the Government “top lines to take”. That latter document includes this passage:

“So far we have identified up to around 800 cases that are potentially in scope [Note: if we use this number in public we are going to get held to it. There is a risk that we may deliver fewer overturns or award redress”—

to—

“fewer individuals, we will then have to explain that]”.

If it is the view of officials in the Minister’s Department that accountability and transparency are some sort of problem, does he really think that they are best placed to exercise oversight of the compensation scheme? Should that not be put now in the hands of someone who is independent of both Government and the Post Office?

Kevin Hollinrake >

[Share](#)

The figure the right hon. Gentleman uses and the document he references, which I was unaware he had, are interesting. Me being me, I had not read that line, although my previous comments might indicate that I had because I mentioned that exact figure. I am not afraid to be transparent or accountable for any of the delivery of these compensation schemes.

Shailesh Vara >
(North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)

[Share](#)

I congratulate my hon. Friend on all that he is doing, working night and day to bring this painful issue to a conclusion for the many postmasters and their families who have suffered so much over so many years. Where people do not accept the fixed offer but wish to pursue an individual claim, may I seek his assurance that such claims will be treated expeditiously, and that resources will be made available to deal with those claims quickly and efficiently? Will he also give an assurance that claimants will have a named individual responsible for their file, rather than whoever happens to pick up the file on a specific day?

Kevin Hollinrake >

[Share](#)

I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and can absolutely give him the assurance he seeks. A fixed-sum award is only one route; it is not right for everybody. Some people have higher levels of claims, and we will support them where we can. In my remarks, I announced new measures we are using to do that, including a pilot scheme where expert reports are not required. That should significantly abbreviate the timescale between being able to submit a claim and getting a response. As for expediting in this area, in the GLO scheme we set a target that in 90% of cases we would respond to a final claim within 40 days. Currently, we are on 87% against that measure, so we are delivering this more quickly. He makes an interesting point about a named claim manager or something along those lines, and, if I may, I will take that away with me.

Clive Efford >

(Eltham) (Lab)

 [Share](#)

I welcome the statement, the legislation and the removal of the Post Office from the process to the extent that we have seen so far. However, I do not think the Post Office is able to deal with any claims credibly. I wrote to the Minister on 12 February about my constituent who came forward after the TV programme. She had had problems with **Horizon**, had agreed compensation with the Post Office, which was way below what her losses were, and had signed a non-disclosure agreement. At the time she had been dealing with a terminally ill partner, who has since passed away, and so was in no fit state to take on the Post Office. She is seriously out of pocket, so I would expect her to be able to fall under the **Horizon** shortfall scheme. I hope that the Minister will confirm that in the letter he will doubtless send me.

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I have not seen the letter the hon. Gentleman mentions yet, but I look forward to it and I understand his points about the Post Office handling claims. I am responding personally to every letter I get on this matter from colleagues; we always do that, but I am doing so even more on this occasion. I am sorry to hear about his constituent and the situation she is in. If she has accepted less than £75,000, she will get an automatic uplift to £75,000. We are determined to ensure that, across every scheme, people are treated fairly and feel that they are being treated fairly, and I am keen to look at the hon. Gentleman's letter and make sure that is the case for his constituent.

Virginia Crosbie >

(Ynys Môn) (Con)

 [Share](#)

I welcome this important new Bill. I know that the Minister and his team have worked exceptionally hard to make it happen. Will he join me in thanking Mr James Evans from Llanfair P.G., who worked as a sub-postmaster in Llanfairpwll for 47 years, with a post office service record of 60 years, for bringing together sub-postmasters and those on Ynys Môn affected by this gross miscarriage of justice to ensure that they receive the correct support, compensation and, importantly, exoneration?

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

Again, I thank my hon. Friend for her work on this, and I absolutely thank Mr Evans. We are here now because the victims of this scandal are supporting each other, led of course by Alan Bates. So I welcome Mr Evans's work, and if I can assist him or his group at all to make sure that they get compensated fairly, whatever their circumstance within these schemes, I am happy to do that.

Jonathan Edwards >

(Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)

 [Share](#)

My constituent Mr Ennion ran the post office in Llandovery in Carmarthenshire between 2000 and 2018. In a recent BBC interview he estimated that he had lost about £75,000, and said that, in addition, his health has deteriorated severely. He said he had no faith in the **Horizon** shortfall scheme and making an application to it, because he has not kept any records and because he just does not think he is well enough to take on the Post Office for a second time. I know that the Minister is working extremely hard, and I pay tribute to him for the work he has done, but what more can he do to encourage people such as Mr Ennion to make an application through the scheme?

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words and for representing his constituent so effectively. I hope that what we have announced today will be absolutely the right route for his constituent, as it means he would not have to go through what can be a complex process of submitting a detailed claim; he can simply opt for the £75,000 fixed-sum award and walk away. There is no claim form to be filled in—a simple letter needs to be signed and that is it. If he feels he should be compensated for more than that, he can go through the **Horizon** shortfall scheme. That takes a little longer, but he will still end up with compensation both for the financial impact and the impact on his health. I am happy to help, wherever I can, with his case.

Sammy Wilson >

(East Antrim) (DUP)

 [Share](#)

I welcome the Minister's statement. He promised the House that he would bring forward legislation quickly, and he has done so. However, I must express the disappointment of all Northern Ireland representatives that Northern Ireland is not included in the Bill, and the reasons that the Minister has given for that do not stand up.

The Minister has argued that this is a sensitive constitutional issue—it is not. The First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Justice Minister have all made it clear that they would be quite happy for Northern Ireland to be included in the legislation. He has argued that the systems are different. There have been many occasions when Northern Ireland has been included in legislation here even though the judicial system is different. This Bill is about exonerating people, not about interfering with how the system works. The last thing he said was that including Northern Ireland might slow down the legislation. Since the legislation is going to go through the House following the normal process, there is absolutely no reason why, as has happened on previous occasions, he could not include a Northern Ireland clause at a later stage in our consideration of the Bill.

I ask the Minister to look again at the arguments he has made, because I do not think they stand up. There is a way forward to ensure that those affected in Northern Ireland are treated in the same way, and at the same time, as those in England and Wales.

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his contributions, and for representing his constituents, and others in Northern Ireland, who have been affected by the **scandal**. I understand his point and am very sympathetic to it. We took a very difficult decision. Clearly, we are happy to work with the authorities in Northern Ireland. As I said in the statement, I have spoken to my counterpart in Northern Ireland. We are today introducing a 10-clause, 10-page Bill, and we hope we have put together a relatively straightforward piece of legislation. We are happy to lend our support so that Northern Ireland is able to do the same as we are doing, if that is the choice that is made. As he has outlined, that is the political consensus in Northern Ireland, which I welcome.

Stephen Farry >

(North Down) (Alliance)

 [Share](#)

This is a national **scandal** that requires a national solution. As has just been stated, the political leaders in Northern Ireland are unanimous that they want Westminster to act in this sphere. The Minister will not be stepping on anyone's toes constitutionally if he proceeds on that basis. The Justice Minister advises me that what is required to include Northern Ireland is relatively straightforward. It is not complicated in any shape or form. The stark reality is that the newly restored Executive does not have the capacity to pass such legislation at the same time as Westminster, so there will be an iniquity across the UK on this reserved matter. Can I ask the Minister one more time to listen to the voices from Northern Ireland? I understand that he says he will work with the Executive, but will he take on board what the Executive are saying and include Northern Ireland in the Bill?

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his points. To reiterate what I said in response to earlier questions, we are very sympathetic. We are keen to lend support, and not just moral support but help in drafting the Bill. Of course I will continue to listen to him and others with similar views about the involvement of the devolved Administrations. We are keen to make this work UK-wide. The redress schemes will be available UK-wide, if we can get those prosecutions quashed on a UK-wide basis.

Jim Shannon >

(Strangford) (DUP)

 [Share](#)

I thank the Minister and pay tribute to his perseverance in bringing about a legislative change. It is fantastic to hear that the legislation will quash convictions relating to the **Horizon scandal**. This has been a long time coming and those affected must be praised for their long journey to justice. However, unfortunately there are many who have not lived to see this. What steps will he take to ensure the legacy of those who were affected but have passed away will live on, and that their families are supported through the redress payment scheme, to lessen the years of pain that they have endured?

Kevin Hollinrake >

 [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work on the issue, and for his regular contributions on this and many other matters. The legislation has taken too long, as he rightly says, and sadly some people have passed away, which is terrible for the families. Those people will never live to see their convictions quashed and names exonerated. The redress schemes work for the estate, so if somebody has passed away, the family can come forward and submit a claim, or they can choose a fixed-sum award and pursue their claim in that way, which is a quicker process. That happens for families in the sad situation the hon. Gentleman outlines. I am happy to work with him to ensure that we deliver for his constituents.

© UK Parliament 2024

[Cookie policy](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Privacy notice](#)

[Accessibility statement](#)