



BRIEFING PAPER

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Bank branch and ATM statistics

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Summary

In 2018 there were 11,065 bank or building society branches in the UK. Of these 9,090 were bank branches and 1,975 were building society branches.

Since the mid-1990s, the number of bank branches in the UK has been falling steadily, whilst the number of building society branches has been broadly steady.

The number of bank and building society branches per head of population is even spread across the UK, with an average of 1.7 branches per 10,000 people in each region and country of the UK.

But there is some variation in the recent change in the number of branches in the regions and countries of the UK. In Northern Ireland there has been an 8% increase in the number of bank and building society branches from 2012 to 2018. There has been a fall in the number of branches in all of the other countries and regions of the UK, mostly of around 17%. In the South West the number of bank and building society branches fell by 21%.

Post Offices provide some consumer financial services. In 2018 there were 11,547 Post Offices in the UK. Post Office numbers are discussed in detail in another Library Briefing Paper: [Post Office numbers](#).

ATMs (or cash machines) provide essential financial services to individuals by giving access to cash, balance and account information and some other limited functions. [LINK](#), who operate the vast majority of cash machines in the UK, state that in 2018 there were 63,100 cash machines in the UK, 82% or 52,000 were free to use.

The number of cash machines per head is broadly similar in the regions and countries of the UK, with between 11 and nine ATMs per 10,000 residents.

1. Introduction

Consumer banking services have traditionally been provided in branches. But for many years, bank branches have been closing.

Explanations include cost-cutting by banks; mergers within the industry; competitive pressures from new entrants in the banking sector; and the increasing popularity of internet banking.

Despite the availability of alternative ways to access banking services, branch closures are still controversial. Many customers value face-to-face services and some people are unable to access online alternatives. Bank branches also play a role in community cohesion, particularly in rural areas with few other amenities.

Government policy to address the issue of bank branch closures is discussed in detail in the House of Commons Briefing Paper, [Bank branch closures](#).

In brief, banks are bound by the '[Access to Banking Standard](#)' which came into effect in May 2017. The Standard's overarching aim is that:¹

Customers and relevant stakeholders of a bank branch that is closing will be provided with clear, understandable, accessible documentation and information about that specific closure as soon as the bank is able to do so, also what it will mean for them and how they can continue to bank following its closure.

The Standard was agreed by the banks, interested stakeholders, Trade Associations and the UK Government. The Lending Standards Board monitors compliance with the Standard and publishes a report on this topic once a year. The first annual report was published in September 2018: [Access to Banking Standards summary report](#).

The Standard *does not* require banks to publish figures on the number of open branches or the number of branches they have closed. So, there is no official source for statistics on bank branches and branch closures.

1.1 Providers of consumer financial services

Bank branches provide consumer financial services to individuals and businesses, but they are not the only providers of these services. Building societies also provide many of the same services, and so figures for bank and building societies are often combined to give the total number of 'bank branches'. The Post Office also provides financial services to local customers, and figures for Post Offices are also included in this Briefing Paper (although Post Office numbers are not included in any of the totals for bank branches). ATMs (Automatic Telling Machines, or cash machines) are another source of financial services that are sometimes seen as an alternative to bank branches.

The Access to Banking Standard states that after a branch closes, banks must²

...ensure that customers are aware of and understand how and where they obtain continuance of the help and assistance they received post closure should they still require it...

This "help and assistance" often comes in the form of financial services from remaining building societies, post offices or ATMs in the local area.

¹ British Banker's Association, [Access to Banking Standard](#), 2017, p1

² *Ibid*, p3

2. Bank branches in the UK

Box 1: Sources of data on bank branches

This Briefing Paper uses a range of sources to give information on the historic number of branches, branches by region and the number of closures:

- **British Banker's Association (BBA):** For historic information on bank and building society branches, this Briefing Paper uses data from the BBA. This data is based on returns from BBA members. It does not include branches of banks that are not BBA members (which excludes only a very small number of financial institutions). The BBA data runs from 1986 to 2014.
- **Office of National Statistics (ONS):** More recent data on the number of bank branches comes from the ONS publication, *Business activity size and location*, via the [NOMIS database \(UK Business Counts variable\)](#). This data is based on VAT and PAYE returns of 'local units' (also referred to as individual sites or workplaces) in the [Bank](#) (Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code 64.19/1) and [Building Society](#) (SIC code 64.19/2) industries.
- **Which?:** The consumer affairs organisation has researched the question of [bank branch closures](#). They have tracked branch closures since 2015, and have published information on the [total number of branch closures](#), closures [by bank](#), [and region](#). They have also created [a tool that allows users to search by postcode](#) to find planned closers in their region.

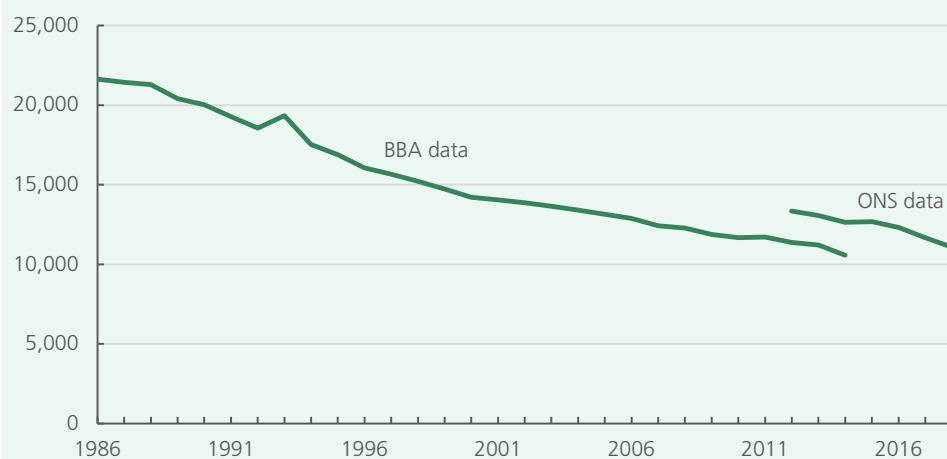
Although these sources all broadly correspond, they use different methodologies to produce their data and so should be compared cautiously.

The following chart shows the total number of bank and building society branches in the UK since 1986. (British Bankers' Association (BBA) data ended in 2014. Data from 2012 to 2018 is from the Office for National Statistics, ONS). All the data in the following charts is available in the Annex of this briefing paper.

Over the past three decades, the number of bank branches has fallen steadily. In 1986 there were 21,643 bank or building society branches in the UK. In 2014 there were 10,565. Over this period, the total number of bank and building society branches fell by 11,078 or 51%.

Using the ONS data, the total number of bank and building society branches fell from 13,345 in 2012 to 11,065 in 2018, a fall of 2,280 or 17%.

Total number of bank and building society branches in the UK



Sources: 1986 to 2014 = BBA; 2012 to 2018 = ONS

2.1 Bank and building society branches

The following chart separates the data for bank and building society branches in the UK since 1986. The number of bank branches has trended steadily downwards since the mid-1990s. The number of building society branches has been broadly steady over this period.

In 1986, there were 14,689 bank branches and 6,954 building society branches in the UK. In 2014 (when the BBA data ends) there were 9,216 banks branches and 1,349 building society branches.

The ONS data shows that there were 11,335 bank branches in 2012 and 9,090 bank branches in 2018. There were 1,990 building society branches in 2012 according to the ONS, and 1,975 in 2018.

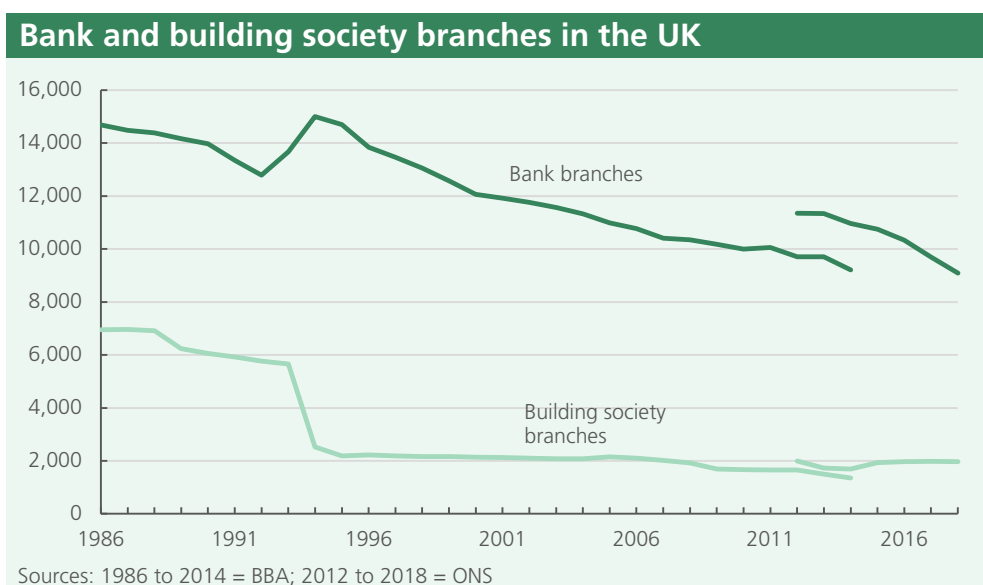
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of bank and building society branches fell gradually and at roughly the same pace.

Between 1992 and 1994, some building societies reclassified as banks (including Halifax and Abbey National), which had the effect of increasing the number of bank branches and reducing the number of building society branches.

Between 1995 and 2008 the number of building society branches in the UK remained steady at around 2,200, but the number of bank branches fell from 14,698 to 10,354.

The fall in the number of bank branches accelerated from 2008 onwards. Using the BBA data, the number of bank branches fell from 10,354 in 2008 to 9,713 in 2014.

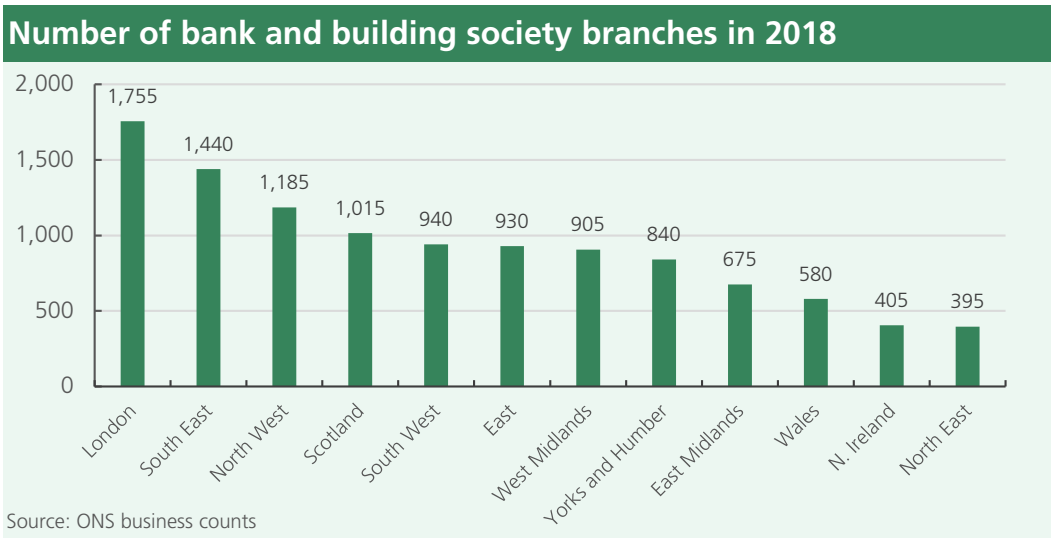
Using the ONS data, the number of bank branches has fallen by 2,265 or 20% between 2012 and 2018. The number of building society branches has remained at around 2,000.



3. Bank branches in the UK regions and countries

The ONS data on bank and building society branches can be used to show the number of branches by UK region and country.

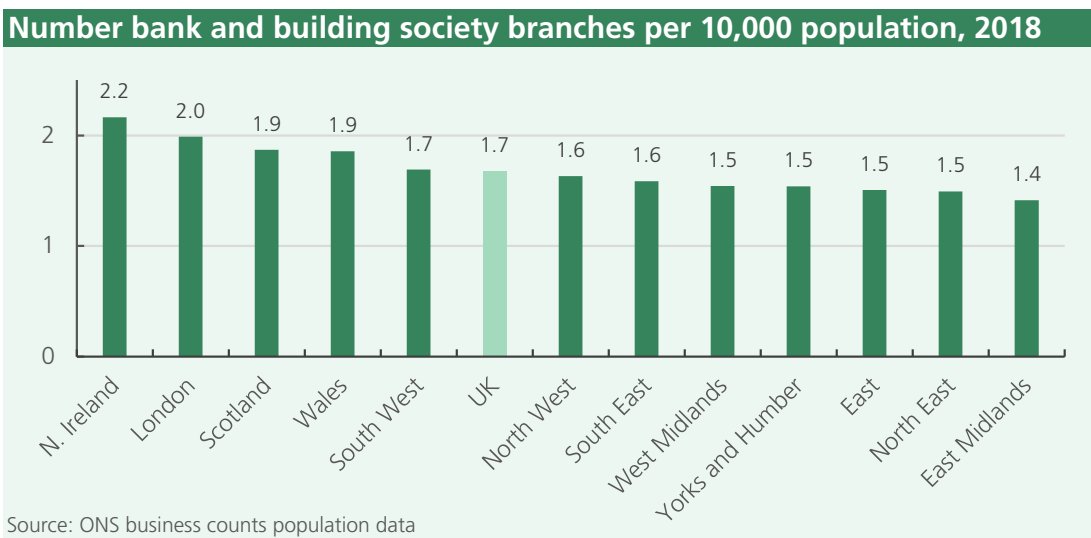
There is considerable variation in the number of bank and building society branches across the regions and countries of the UK. In London there are more than four times as many branches as in the North East of England.



This variation in the number of bank and building society branches is largely due to the fact that there are more people and businesses in London than in the North East, for example, meaning that there is greater demand for banking services.

A better way to compare the number branches in different regions is to consider how many branches there are compared to the population. The following chart shows the number of bank and building society branches per 10,000 residents in each region and country of the UK.

The number of bank and building society branches per head is similar in the regions and countries of the UK with between 1.7 and 1.5 branches per 10,000 residents. Northern Ireland and London have more branches – 2.2 and 2.0 per 10,000 residents.



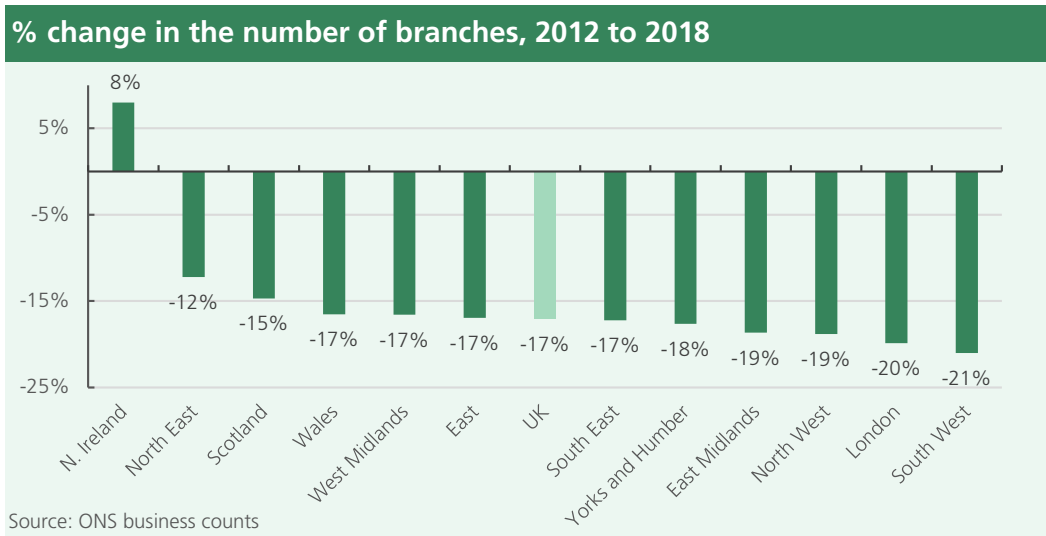
3.1 Change in the number of bank branches

The following chart shows the % change in the number of bank and building society branches by region and country of the UK from 2012 to 2018.

All but one of the UK countries and regions have seen a fall in the number of bank and building society branches over this period (the exception is Northern Ireland). Most regions and countries saw between a 15% and a 20% decline during this period.

There was a slightly larger decline in the South West (-21%) and a slightly smaller decline in the North East (-12%).

There was an 8% increase in the number of branches in Northern Ireland.



3.2 Region and country data

Bank and building society branches by UK region and country, 2012 to 2018									
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2012 to 2018	
								Change	% change
North East	450	445	435	440	435	420	395	-55	-12%
North West	1,460	1,435	1,390	1,390	1,370	1,265	1,185	-275	-19%
Yorks and Humber	1,020	1,000	985	985	935	890	840	-180	-18%
East Midlands	830	810	785	785	750	715	675	-155	-19%
West Midlands	1,085	1,065	1,025	1,020	1,010	950	905	-180	-17%
East	1,120	1,090	1,060	1,040	1,020	960	930	-190	-17%
London	2,190	2,125	2,030	1,970	1,865	1,800	1,755	-435	-20%
South East	1,740	1,700	1,640	1,625	1,575	1,495	1,440	-300	-17%
South West	1,190	1,175	1,130	1,135	1,090	990	940	-250	-21%
Wales	695	675	665	680	655	605	580	-115	-17%
Scotland	1,190	1,165	1,170	1,190	1,180	1,145	1,015	-175	-15%
Northern Ireland	375	380	335	415	425	430	405	30	8%
<i>UK</i>	<i>13,345</i>	<i>13,060</i>	<i>12,650</i>	<i>12,680</i>	<i>12,315</i>	<i>11,675</i>	<i>11,065</i>	<i>-2,280</i>	<i>-17%</i>

ONS, *Business activity size and location*, via the [NOMIS database \(UK Business Counts variable\)](#)

Figures rounded to nearest 5; Banks = Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code, 64.19/1; Building Societies are SIC code 64.19/2

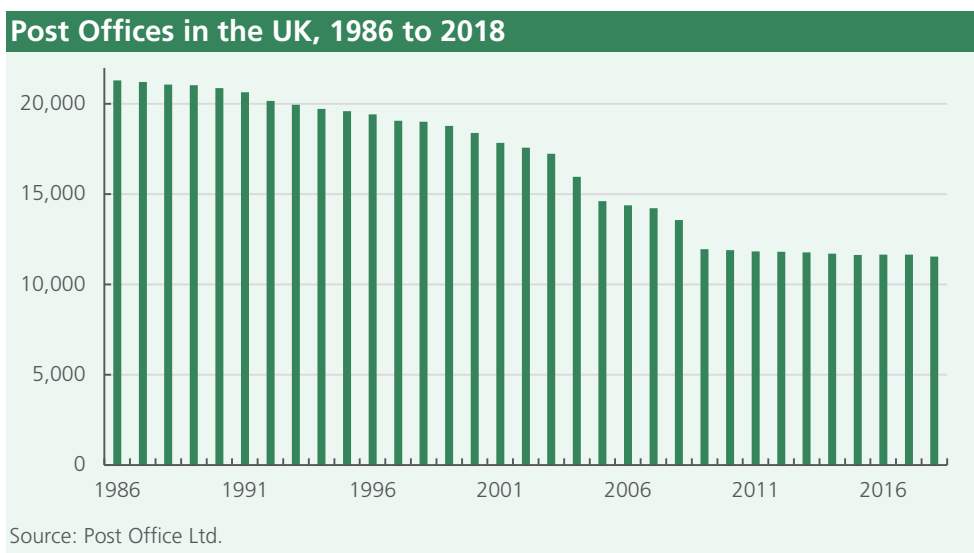
4. Post Offices

Post Offices provide some customer financial services and so are often cited as an alternative to bank or building society branches.

Post Office numbers are discussed in detail in another Library Briefing Paper: [Post Office numbers](#).

The following chart shows the number of Post Offices in the UK. In 2018 there were 11,547 Post Offices in the UK. The number of Post Offices in the UK has remained at around this level, since around 2009.

Whilst the recent trend has been stable, over the longer term there has been a decline in the number of post offices. (Note that there is a discontinuity in the data between 2005 and 2007 so comparisons should be made cautiously).



There are roughly the same number of Post Offices in Scotland and many English regions: around 1,200. In London there are around half this number: 662.

Number of Post Offices by UK region and country				
	2017	2018	Change	% change
Scotland	1,403	1,398	-5	0%
South East	1,389	1,373	-16	-1%
South West	1,293	1,268	-25	-2%
North West	1,117	1,119	2	0%
East of England	1,136	1,116	-20	-2%
Yorkshire and The Humber	963	951	-12	-1%
Wales	931	906	-25	-3%
West Midlands	906	900	-6	-1%
East Midlands	882	879	-3	0%
London	661	662	1	0%
North East	497	490	-7	-1%
Northern Ireland	481	485	4	1%
<i>UK</i>	<i>11,659</i>	<i>11,547</i>	<i>-112</i>	<i>-1%</i>

Source: Personal communication with the Post Office and the Post Office Network Reports

Notes: Data refers to March in each year

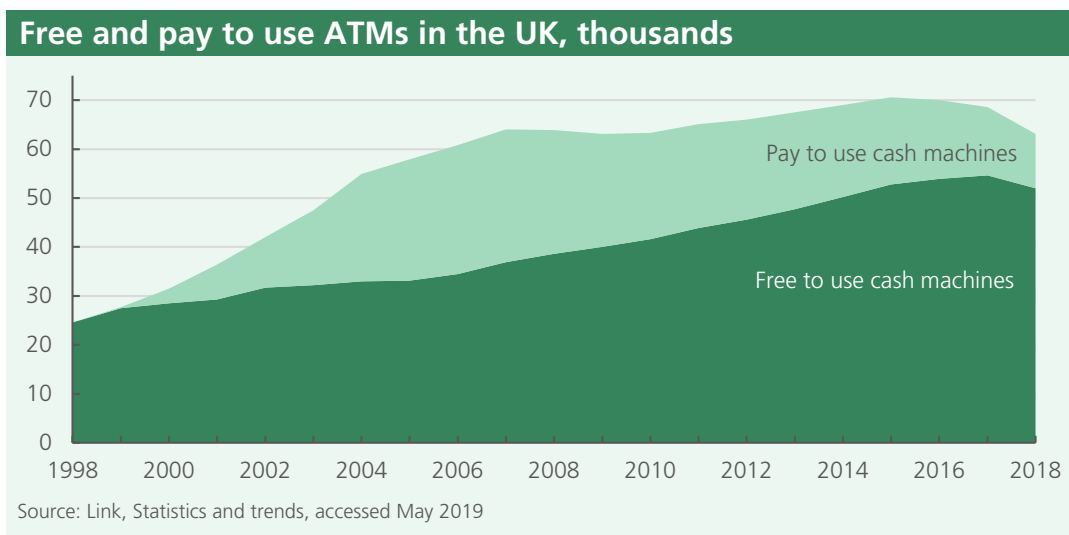
5. ATMs

ATMs (or cash machines) provide essential financial services to individuals by giving access to cash, balance and account information and some other limited functions.

[LINK](#) operate the vast majority of cash machines in the UK (their network includes “effectively every cash machine in the UK” according to their website).³ They publish data on ATMs in the UK on their [Statistics and Trends](#) website. The following chart shows the number of free and pay to use cash machines in the UK since 1998. (The data underlying the chart below can be found in the data Annex of this briefing paper.)

In 2018 there were 63,100 cash machines in the UK, 82% or 52,000 of which were free to use. The remaining cash machines (11,100) were pay to use.

The total number of ATMs in the UK rose quickly from 1998 until 2007, driven mainly by the growth of pay to use cash machines. Since 2007, the number of pay to use cash machines has fallen each year, whilst the number of free to use cash machines has continued to rise. For the first time in 20 years, the number of free to use cash machines in the UK fell in 2018 compared to the year before.



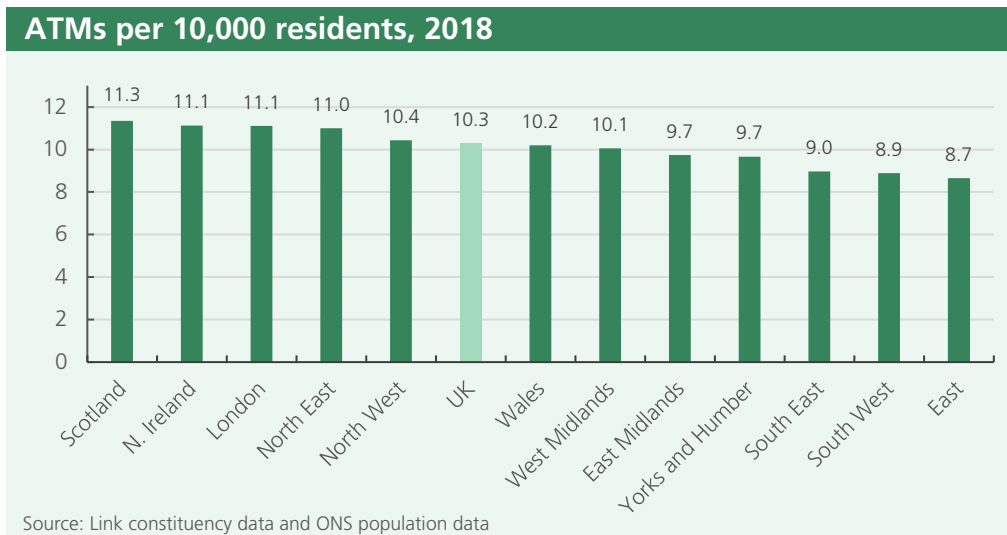
Further information on ATMs in local areas can be found in the House of Commons Library Insight, [The decline of ATMs?](#)

³ LINK, [An introduction to us](#), accessed May 2019

5.1 ATMs by region and country of the UK

The following chart shows the number of ATMs in each region and the country of the UK per 10,000 residents.

The number of cash machines per head is broadly similar in the regions and countries of the UK, with between 11 and nine ATMs per 10,000 residents.



6. Annex – data on branches and ATMs

6.1 Bank and building society branches

Bank and building society branches in the UK							
	Bank branches		Building society branches		Bank and Building Society branches		Post Offices
	BBA data	ONS data	BBA data	ONS data	BBA data	ONS data	
1986	14,689		6,954		21,643		21,305
1987	14,480		6,962		21,442		21,211
1988	14,387		6,912		21,299		21,071
1989	14,169		6,236		20,405		21,030
1990	13,977		6,051		20,028		20,871
1991	13,350		5,921		19,271		20,638
1992	12,785		5,765		18,550		20,160
1993	13,678		5,654		19,332		19,958
1994	15,005		2,525		17,530		19,722
1995	14,698		2,192		16,890		19,607
1996	13,845		2,221		16,066		19,414
1997	13,469		2,187		15,656		19,071
1998	13,059		2,157		15,216		19,008
1999	12,573		2,161		14,734		18,775
2000	12,061		2,139		14,200		18,393
2001	11,924		2,126		14,050		17,846
2002	11,764		2,103		13,867		17,584
2003	11,565		2,081		13,646		17,239
2004	11,327		2,074		13,401		15,961
2005	10,988		2,148		13,136		14,609
2006	10,774		2,105		12,879		14,376
2007	10,409		2,016		12,425		14,219
2008	10,354		1,916		12,270		13,567
2009	10,184		1,685		11,869		11,952
2010	10,001		1,672		11,673		11,905
2011	10,061		1,652		11,713		11,820
2012	9,713	11,355	1,652	1,990	11,365	13,345	11,818
2013	9,702	11,335	1,502	1,725		13,060	11,780
2014	9,216	10,960	1,349	1,685		12,645	11,696
2015		10,745		1,930		12,675	11,634
2016		10,340		1,975		12,315	11,643
2017		9,690		1,985		11,675	11,659
2018		9,090		1,975		11,065	11,547

Sources: 1986 to 2012: British Bankers' Association, Annual Abstract of Banking Statistics, Table 5.02, various years
2010 to 2018: ONS, Business activity size and location, via NOMISweb database ([Business counts, local units](#))

Banks are defined as Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) [code 64.19/1](#), and building societies as [SIC code 64.19/2](#)

6.2 ATMs in the UK, 1998-2018

ATMs in the UK, thousands			
	Free to use	Pay to use	Total
1998	24.6		24.6
1999	27.5	0.2	27.7
2000	28.5	3.0	31.5
2001	29.3	7.1	36.4
2002	31.7	10.3	42.0
2003	32.2	15.3	47.5
2004	33.0	21.9	54.9
2005	33.1	24.8	57.9
2006	34.5	26.3	60.8
2007	36.9	27.1	64.0
2008	38.6	25.3	63.9
2009	40.0	23.1	63.1
2010	41.6	21.7	63.3
2011	43.9	21.2	65.1
2012	45.6	20.4	66.0
2013	47.7	19.8	67.5
2014	50.2	18.8	69.0
2015	52.8	17.8	70.6
2016	53.9	16.1	70.0
2017	54.6	14.0	68.6
2018	52.0	11.1	63.1

Source: Link, [Statistics and trends](#), accessed May 2019

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