



BRIEFING PAPER

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Post office numbers

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Summary

As of March 2020, there are 11,638 branches in the Post Office network. In the year to March 2020 the total number of post offices in the UK stayed the same.

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

On the 23rd March the government announced strict curbs on businesses due to the coronavirus pandemic. Post offices are one of the few outlets [permitted to remain open](#) during periods of lockdown. Despite this, data shows that the number of open post offices fell by 651 (6%) from March to April 2020, to **10,987**.

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 committed to investing in the network, and maintaining around 11,500 branches. Further details about Post Office Ltd are given in the Library Note [The Post Office](#).

In November 2020, the government [announced](#) the Post Office would receive a **£227 million** investment.

Further information on 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 2020, there are **11,638 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.

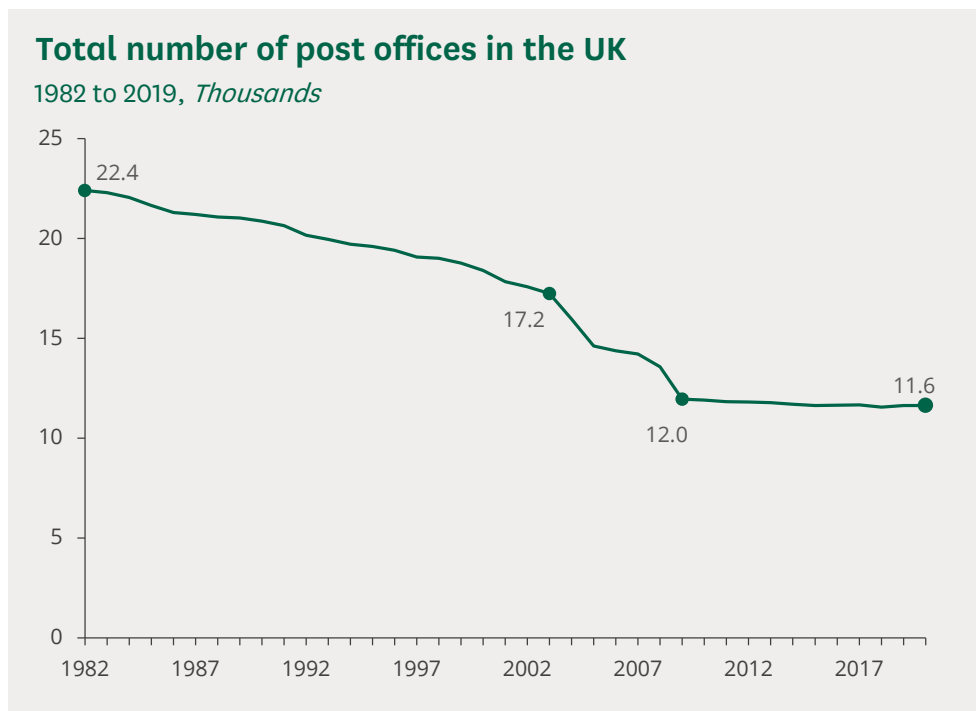
The Library Briefing Paper [The Post Office](#) accompanies this paper and explains how the Post Office network is owned and managed

1.1 Change in the network size

Between March 2019 and March 2020, the total number of post offices in the UK stayed at the same level.

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.



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 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](#)

1.2 Commitments on numbers and location of Post offices

Access Criteria

In return for its package of funding for transformation and modernisation, 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

In December 2017 the government pledged £370million in funding for the Post Office up to March 2021.³ In November 2020, the government announced the Post Office would receive a **£227 million** investment, which includes £50 million to protect essential services in commercially challenging locations.⁴

The Post Office is required by government to meet six 'Access Criteria:'

- 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet;
- 90% of the UK population to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
- 99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
- 95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within one mile of their nearest post office outlet;
- 95% of the total rural population across the UK to be within three miles of their nearest post office outlet.
- 95% of the population of every postcode district to be within six miles of their nearest post office outlet.⁵

Post Office performance against the access criteria

At the end of March 2020, the Post Office met five of its six access criteria as shown in the table below.

It missed the target for the number of postcode areas 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 seven postcode areas where this was not met.⁶

² BEIS, [Government Response to the 2016 Post Office Network Consultation](#), December 2017, p6

³ See the Library briefing [The Post Office](#) for further details

⁴ Rina Patel, *Post Office*, [Post Office welcomes £227 million funding from Government](#), 26 November 2020

⁵ Post Office Ltd, [Post Office Network Report 2019](#)

⁶ All seven affected postcode areas were in Scotland
Source: Post Office Ltd, Post Office Network Report 2020

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Performance against accessibility criteria					
2017/18 to April 2020					
	Minimum requirement	2016/17 performance	2017/18 performance	2018/19 performance	2019/20 performance
Total population within 3 miles	99%	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%
Total population within 1 mile	90%	92.9%	92.8%	92.7%	92.7%
Deprived Urban population within 1 mile	99%	99.6%	99.6%	99.4%	99.4%
Urban population within 1 mile	95%	98.4%	98.3%	98.2%	98.3%
Rural population within 3 miles	95%	98.7%	98.7%	98.7%	98.7%
Postcode areas with < 95% of population within 6 miles	0	0	7	3	7

*The Postcode District (PCD) accessibility can be impacted by one or more branches not providing service at the time of reporting. In March 2020, this access criteria was affected by 7 Postcode Districts. In April following Government lockdown measures there were service issues affecting an additional 14 Postcode Districts.

Source: Post office Ltd, *The Post Office Network Reports*

2. Post offices by type

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).⁷
- 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.

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

At the end of March 2020, there were

- 9,812 agency branches, 84% of the network.
- 1,700 outreach services, 15% of the total network.
- 127 Crown branches, 1% of the Post Office Network.

Trend in post offices by branch type

Between 2019 and 2020 the number of outreach branches increased by 67. However, the number of Crown and agency services fell by 65 and 2, respectively. The fall in Crown post offices continue trends seen in recent years.

Number of post offices by contract type
2010 to 2020

	Crown	Agency	Outreach	Total
2010	373	10,599	933	11,905
2011	373	10,468	979	11,820
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

Notes: Data is for March in each year

Source: Post Office Ltd, Network Reports

Agency branches can be further broken down by type: main, local and traditional⁸ branches. In March 2020, there were 3,404 main branches, 4,134 local branches and 2,274 traditional branches.

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

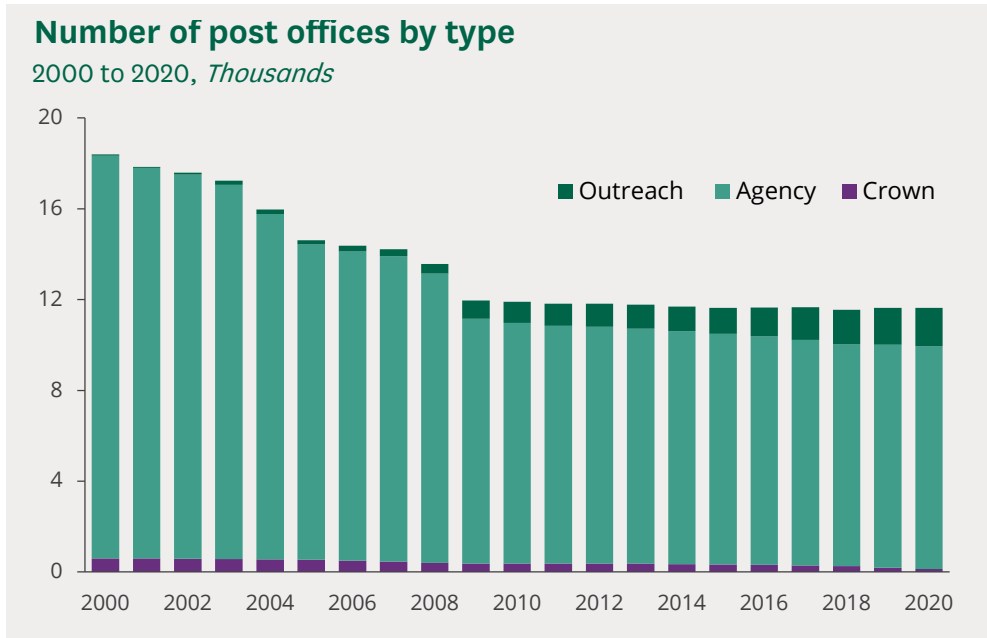
⁷ There are multiple types of agency branch. Further details about the different types of post office branch can be found in the Library briefing [The Post Office](#).

⁸ Branches that remain on contracts issued before the Network Transformation programme

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outreach services than Crown branches. Outreach services now number 1,700 as of March 2020, 15% of the total network.

The number of Crown post offices has been falling since 2013 (when there were 373 Crown branches, compared with 127 in 2020). Other than between 2018 and 2019, the number of agency branches has also been declining, but much more gradually.



Source: Post Office Ltd

3. Post offices by location

3.1 Urban and rural post office branches

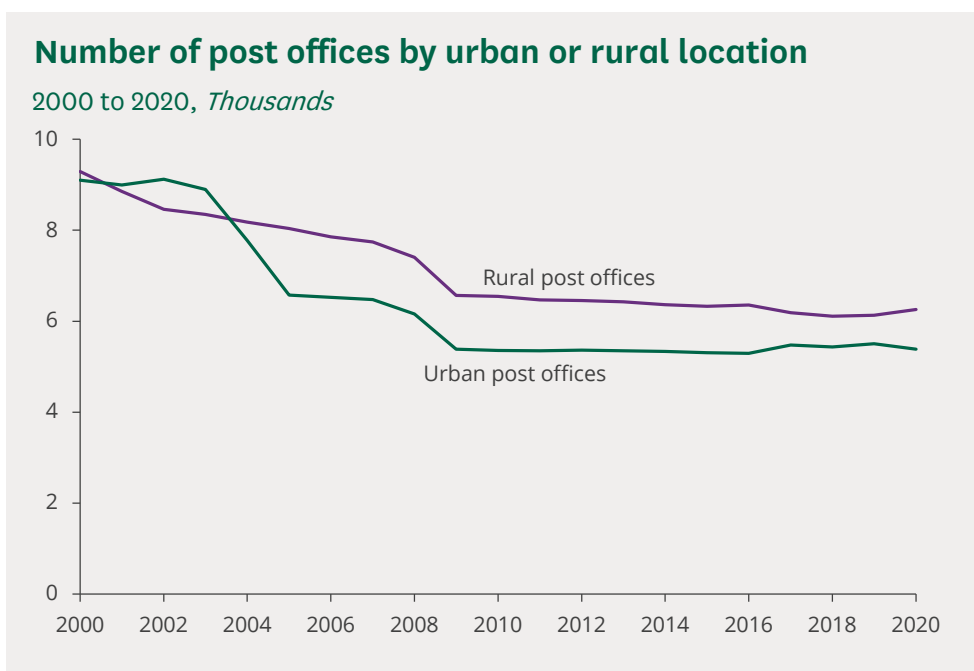
There are slightly more post offices in rural locations than there are in urban locations.

At the end of March 2020 there were 6,256 post offices in rural locations in the UK, 54% of the Post Office Network, and 5,382 post offices in urban locations, 46% of the network.

Between March 2019 and March 2020, the number of rural post offices increased by 125, while the number in urban areas fell by 125.

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

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.

As of March 2020, Scotland had the most post offices of any UK region and country (1,373) and the North East had the fewest (499).

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

Change over time

During the period between March 2019 and March 2020, the change in the number of post office branches across the UK's regions and countries varied, from an increase of 10 in the East of England to a fall of 15 in Scotland.

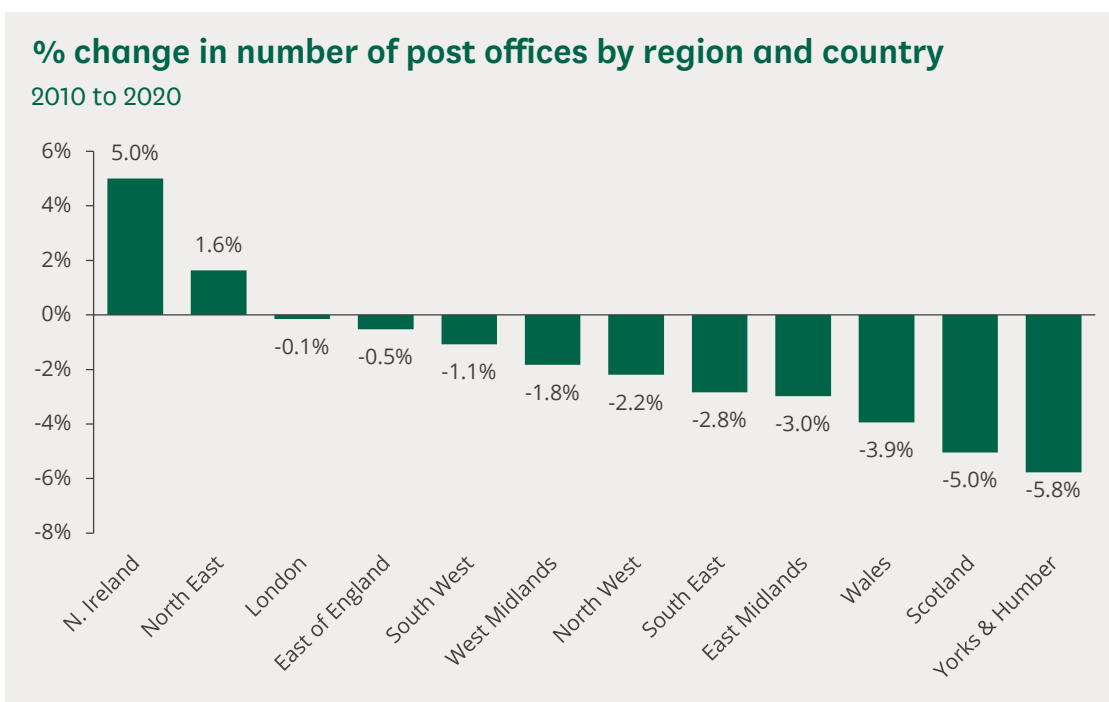
Number of post offices by UK region and country				
2019 to 2020				
	2019	2020	Net change	% change
East Midlands	879	878	-1	-0.1%
East of England	1,134	1,144	10	0.9%
London	675	680	5	0.7%
North East	497	499	2	0.4%
North West	1,111	1,113	2	0.2%
South East	1,382	1,372	-10	-0.7%
South West	1,283	1,289	6	0.5%
West Midlands	910	913	3	0.3%
Yorkshire and The Humber	951	948	-3	-0.3%
Northern Ireland	498	504	6	1.2%
Scotland	1,388	1,373	-15	-1.1%
Wales	930	925	-5	-0.5%
<i>England</i>	8,822	8,836	14	0.2%
United Kingdom	11,638	11,638	0	0.0%

Source: Post Office Network Reports

Notes: Data refers to March in each year

Longer term trend

Since 2010 the trends in many UK regions and countries has been fairly similar to each other. Northern Ireland and the North East have seen growth in the number of post offices, whilst all other regions and countries have seen reductions in the number of post offices. Scotland and Yorkshire and the Humber have seen the largest percentage falls in the number of post offices.



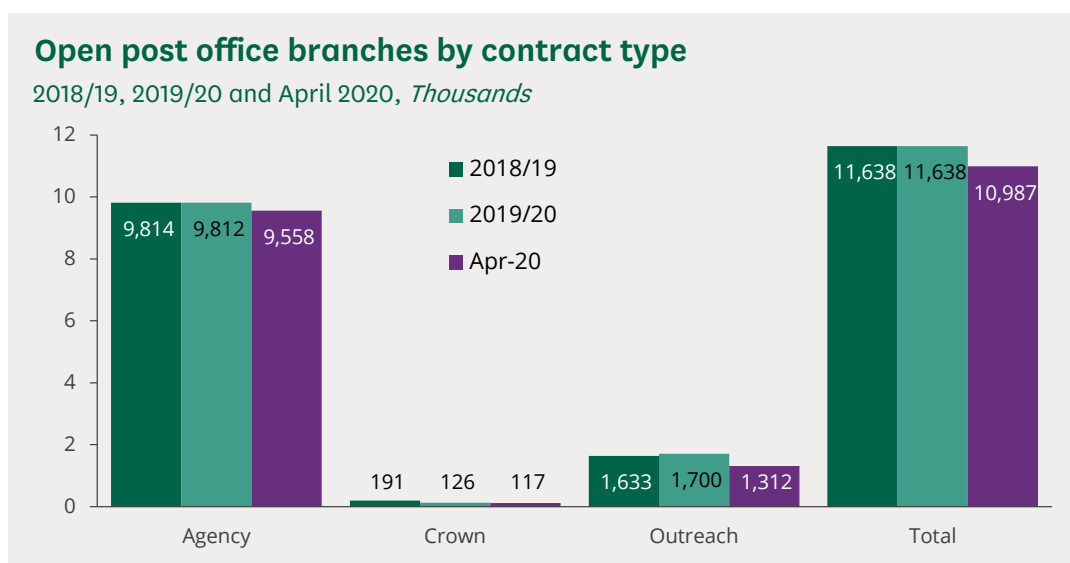
Source: Post Office Ltd

4. Impact of coronavirus

In the [Post Office network report 2020](#), figures were published for April 2020, showing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and government lockdown measures.

On the 23rd March the government announced strict curbs on businesses due to the coronavirus pandemic. Post offices are one of the few outlets [permitted to remain open](#) during periods of lockdown. Despite this, data shows that the number of open post offices fell by 651 (6%) from March to April 2020, to **10,987**.

The largest fall was seen by outreach branches, with 388 (23%) fewer branches open in April than in March 2020. The number of open agency branches fell by 254 (3%) whilst the number of crown branches fell by 9 (7%).



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 means 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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