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Post office numbers



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Appendix: discontinuity in in 2005, 2007

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Summary

As of March 2023, there were 11,684 post office branches in the UK.

Trends

Between March 2022 and March 2023, the number of post offices rose by 0.4% to 11,684, the highest number since March 2014.

This figure includes 232 of the new drop & collect post offices, which are branches that focus on prepaid parcels, rather than providing a full post office service.

Since 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.

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.

Types of post offices

At the end of March 2023, there were:

- 9,411 agency branches, 81% of the network.
- 1,924 outreach services, 16% of the network.
- 232 drop & collect branches, 2% of the network.
- 117 Crown branches, 1% of the 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.

Drop & collect branches focus on pre-paid parcels and bill payments. The first of these opened in late 2021 and they made up 2% of the network by 2023.

The number of Crown branches has fallen significantly over recent decades.

Location of post offices

Over the last decade, the East of England has seen the most growth in the number of post offices, at 5.6%, and Scotland has seen the greatest fall at 6.7%.

Post offices in each constituency

A full list of Post offices by constituency is made available to the Library by the Post Office Ltd each year. 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 to Parliamentary users via Sharepoint.

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

1 Overall network size

As of March 2023, there were 11,684 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 network size

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

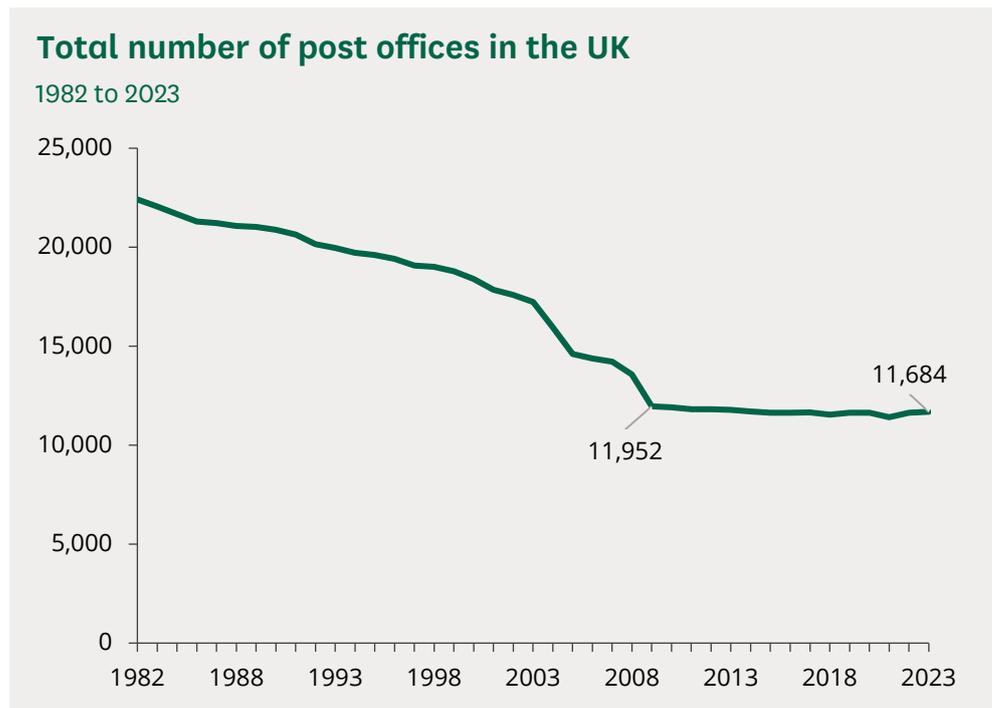
Between March 2022 and March 2023, the number of post offices rose by 0.4%, to 11,684, which is the highest number of post offices since March 2014.

Overall, since around 2009 the number of post offices in the UK has remained reasonably consistent.²

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 contain further information – see reports for [2021](#), [2022](#), [2023](#)

² There was a dip in 2021. 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. Source: Post Office Ltd, [Post Office Network Report 2021](#).



Source: Post Office Ltd

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.³

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;

³ 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 [PQ 60006](#), answered 17 Oct 2022

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

Drop & collect branches (see section 2) count towards the commitment to having 11,500 branches but are not included when assessing performance against the access criteria.⁵

Post Office performance against the access criteria

At the end of March 2023, the Post Office met all of its six access criteria as shown in the table below.

2023 is the first year since 2013 that the Post Office met the target for the number of postcode districts in which 95% of the population are within six miles of their nearest post office.⁶ This target is intended to ensure a minimum level of access for customers living in remote rural areas.

Performance against access criteria						
2017/18 to 2022/23, based on locations of post offices excluding drop & collect branches						
	Minimum requirement	2018/19 performance	2019/20 performance	2020/21 performance	2021/22 performance	2022/23 performance
Total population within 3 miles	99%	99.7%	99.7%	99.6%	99.7%	99.6%
Total population within 1 mile	90%	92.7%	92.7%	92.5%	92.7%	92.3%
Deprived urban population within 1 mile	99%	99.4%	99.4%	99.3%	99.3%	99.2%
Urban population within 1 mile	95%	98.2%	98.3%	97.8%	97.8%	97.5%
Rural population within 3 miles	95%	98.7%	98.7%	98.0%	98.2%	98.0%
Postcode districts with <95% of population within 6 miles	0	3	7	12	9	0

Source: Post Office Network Reports

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

⁵ [HC Deb 23 March 2023 c409](#); Post Office, [Nick Read speech to Seniors Leaders Meeting: Resilience, Managing Ambiguity & Relevance of our Purpose](#), April 2023

⁶ Post Office network reports

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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 four 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.
- Drop & collect branches: these are branches that focus on prepaid parcels and bill payments, rather than providing a full post office service.

At the end of March 2023, there were:

- 9,411 agency branches, 81% of the network.
- 1,924 outreach services, 16% of the network.
- 232 drop & collect branches, 2% of the network.
- 117 Crown branches, 1% of the network

Trend in post offices by branch type

Between 2022 and 2023, the number of outreach branches increased by 23, the number of drop & collect branches increased by 222, the number of agency services fell by 196 and the number of Crown branches remained the same.

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](#).

Number of post offices by contract type

2012 to 2023

	Crown	Agency	Outreach	Drop & Collect	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	9,607	1,901	10	11,635
2023	117	9,411	1,924	232	11,684

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

Agency branches can be broken down by type: main, local and traditional⁸ branches. In March 2023, there were 3,308 main branches, 4,218 local branches and 1,885 traditional branches. The total number of agency branches has been gradually declining.

In 2023 there were 232 drop & collect branches, 2% of the total network. The first of these branches opened in late 2021.⁹ The number is growing rapidly.¹⁰

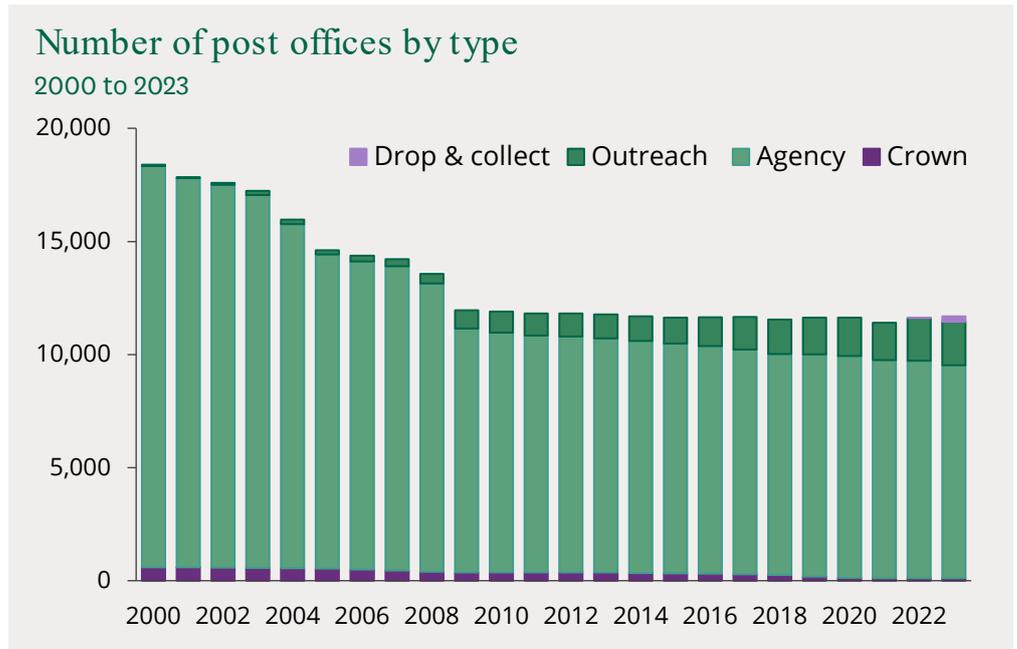
There has been a significant rise in the number of outreach services since 2000. There were 52 outreach services in the year 2000 representing less than 1% of the total Post Office network at the time. Outreach services now number 1,924 as of March 2023, 16% of the total network.

The number of Crown post offices has been falling since 2013, when there were 373 Crown branches, compared with 117 in 2022 and 2023.

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

⁹ Better Retailing, [Post Office to open first Drop & Collect branch](#), 8 October 2021

¹⁰ The [Post Office annual report 2022/23](#) reported that there were 500 drop & go branches open and trading as of December 2023.



Source: Post Office Ltd

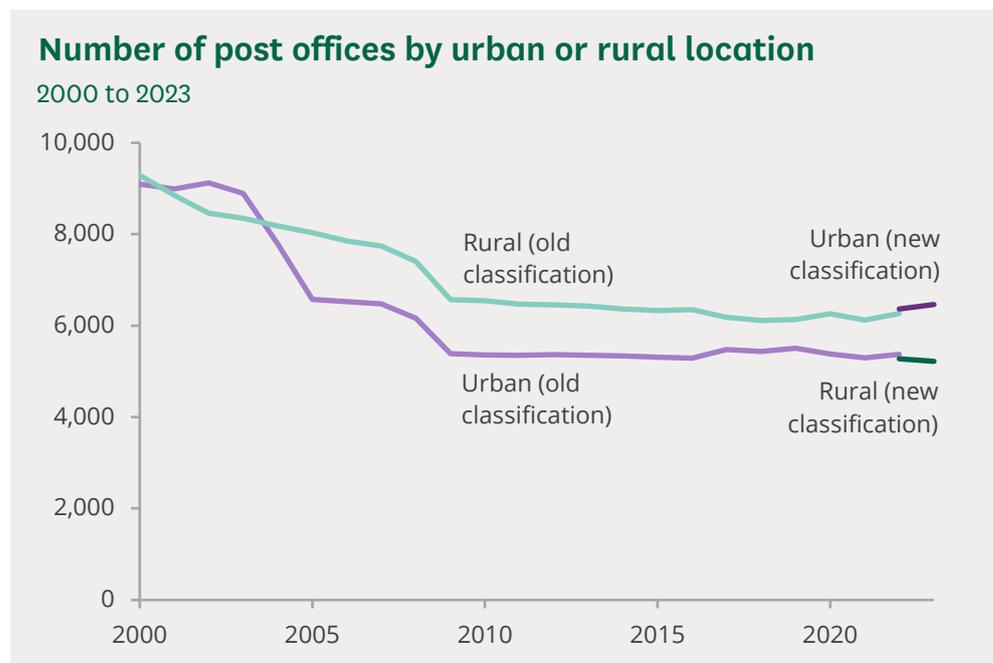
3 Post offices by location

3.1 Urban and rural post office branches

The Post Office has changed how it classified post offices into urban and rural branches.

Based on the changed classification, there are slightly more post offices in urban locations than there are in rural locations.

At the end of March 2023 there were 5,221 post offices in rural locations in the UK, 45% of the network, and 6,463 post offices in urban locations, 55% of the network.



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.

Change over time

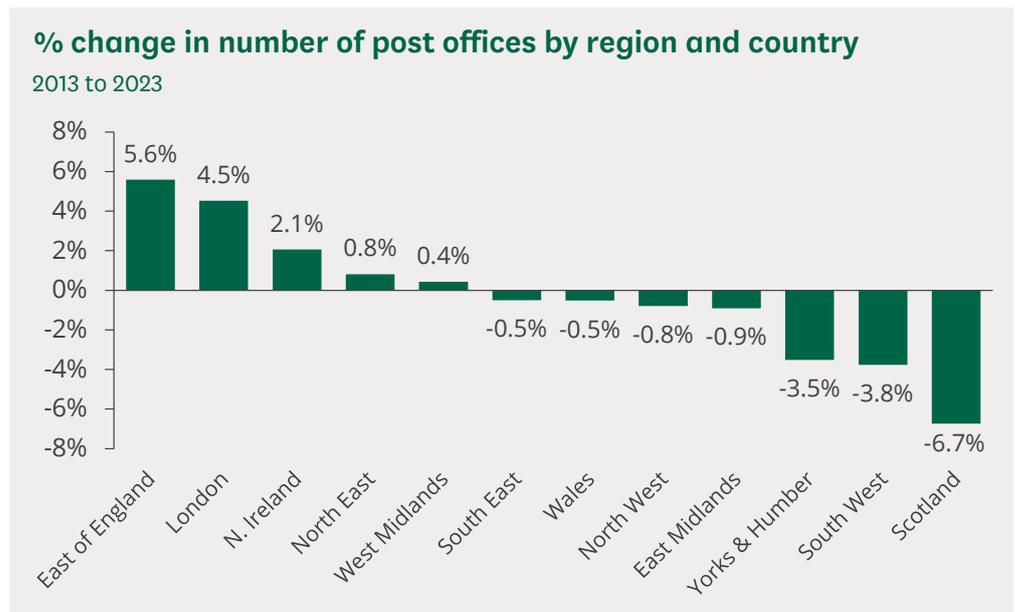
During the period between March 2022 and March 2023, the change in the number of post office branches across the UK's regions and countries varied, from falls of 1.6% in Northern Ireland and Wales to an increase of 4.2% in London.

Number of post offices by UK region and country 2022 to 2023				
	2022	2023	Net change 2022-2023	% change
North East	499	494	-5	-1.0%
North West	1,093	1,121	28	2.6%
Yorks & Humber	957	959	2	0.2%
West Midlands	916	918	2	0.2%
South West	1,270	1,254	-16	-1.3%
South East	1,373	1,397	24	1.7%
London	687	716	29	4.2%
East of England	1,154	1,190	36	3.1%
East Midlands	883	873	-10	-1.1%
N. Ireland	502	494	-8	-1.6%
Scotland	1,334	1,316	-18	-1.3%
Wales	967	952	-15	-1.6%
United Kingdom	11,635	11,684	49	0.4%

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

Longer term trend

Over the last decade, the East of England has seen the most growth in the number of post offices, at 5.6%, and Scotland has seen the greatest fall at 6.7%.



Source: Post Office Ltd

3.3 Post offices by constituency

A table with the numbers of post offices by constituency [Post offices by constituency](#) is available to Parliamentary users via Sharepoint. The Post Office do not make this information available to the public.

Appendix: discontinuity in in 2005, 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 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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