



Numbers of Post Office branches

Standard Note: SN/EP/2585

Last updated: 5 December 2011

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Over the past thirty years the number of post offices in the UK has steadily fallen, with the decline accelerating in recent years. This note provides a breakdown of the network size by year and by quarter. Also included is a breakdown of post offices by type and by region.

After recent restructuring (the Post Office Network Change Programme), the Post Office Network stood at 11,785 at the end of September 2011.

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1 Overall network size

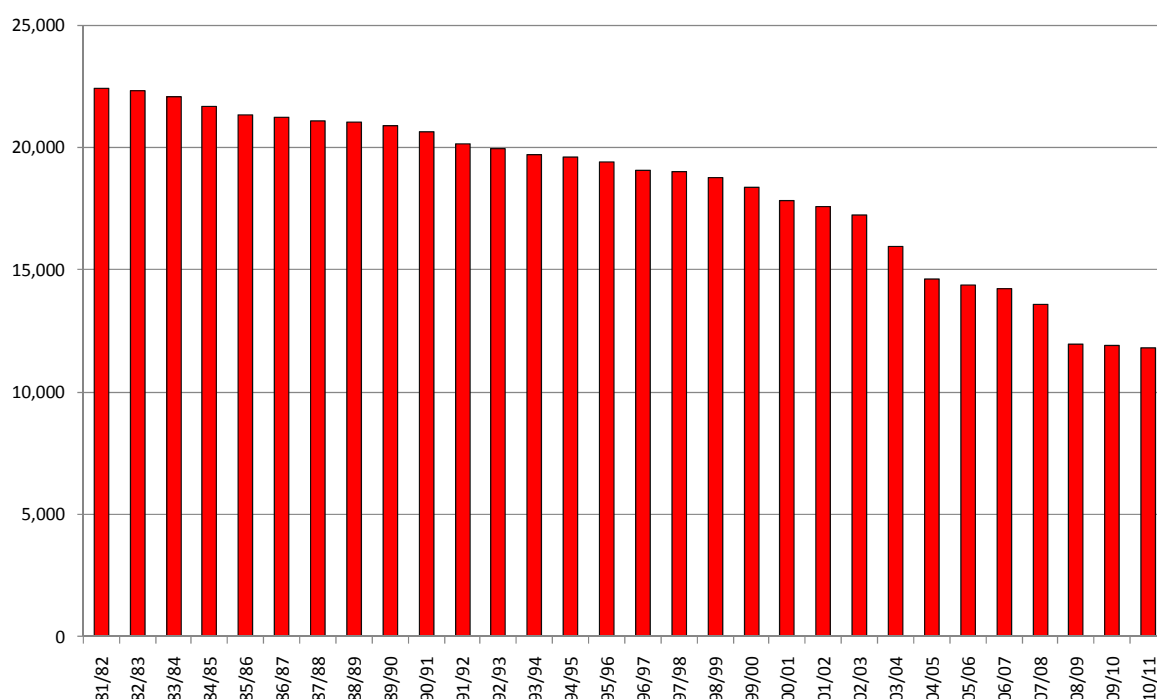
1.1 In brief

The latest available figures show 11,785 Post Offices in the UK at the end of September 2011, down from 11,798 at the end of June 2011.¹

During 2010/11, the number of post offices decreased by 85, or 0.7%. The chart below shows the trend in the number of Post Offices since 1981/82. Tables A1 and A2 at the end of this note give more detailed figures including figures for Post Offices by type.

The current Government has stated that in return for funding of £1.34 billion over the Spending Review period, Post Office Ltd must maintain a network of at least 11,500 branches and adhere to the access criteria which require 99% of the population live within 3 miles of a post office.²

Chart 1: Number of Post Offices: 1981/82-2010/11



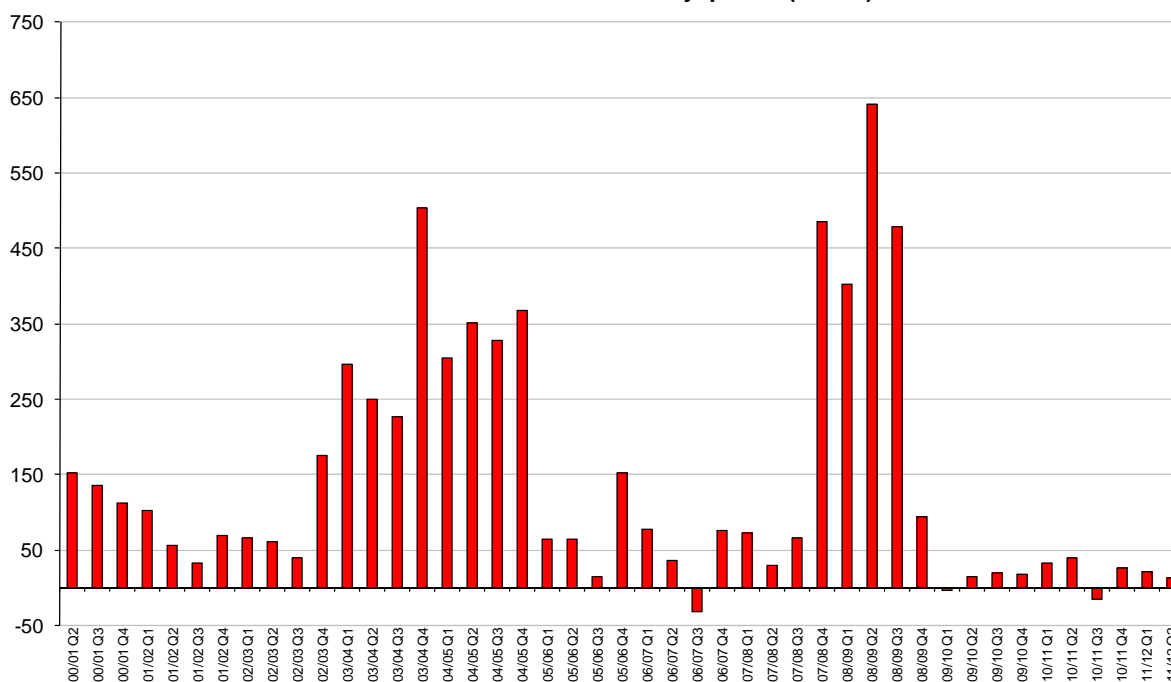
1.2 Quarterly change March 2000 – March 2011

Since March 2000 the total number of Post Offices has been made available on a quarterly basis. Only during three periods (ending: 31 December 2006, 30 June 2009 and 31 December 2010) has the number of Post Offices increased. The largest fall in Post Office numbers occurring in the quarter ending at 30 Sept 2008 (641 net closures).

¹ Royal Mail Group

² See BIS, [The Post Office Network](#)

Chart 2: Net Post Office closures by quarter (end of)



1.3 Discontinuity in post office network statistics

From June 2005 a new system of recording the number of Post Offices was introduced. This has 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 closures and 33 net urban closures were counted. In this note, the totals given for June 2005 are used but the change figures are adjusted to take account of the discontinuity.

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 Subpostmasters 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 Royal Mail is now able to communicate with them through broadband. These and other activities have changed the way that some branches are identified, although there has 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.

There is also discontinuity in post office by constituency data due to boundary changes.

2 Post Offices by type and by region

2.1 Urban and rural Post Office branches

Since March 2000 statistics for Post Office closures have been made available with a breakdown between those classified as urban or rural. In the period March 2000 to March 2011, the net fall in the number of urban Post Offices was 3,777, with 2,796 net closures of rural Post Offices.

Table 1

Urban and rural post offices: 2000-2011 (c)

At end:	Number of post offices			Net change in year (b)		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Mar 2000	9,099	9,294	18,393			
Mar 2001	8,993	8,853	17,846	-106	-441	-547
Mar 2002	9,124	8,460	17,584	117	-379	-262
Mar 2003	8,894	8,345	17,239	-230	-115	-345
Mar 2004	7,780	8,181	15,961	-1,129	-149	-1,278
Mar 2005	6,572	8,037	14,609	-1,208	-144	-1,352
Mar 2006	6,522	7,854	14,376	-50	-183	-233
Mar 2007	6,477	7,742	14,219	-45	-112	-157
Mar 2008	6,160	7,407	13,567	-317	-335	-652
Mar 2009	5,385	6,567	11,952	-775	-840	-1,615
Mar 2010	5,359	6,546	11,905	-26	-21	-47
Mar 2011	5,351	6,469	11,820	-8	-77	-85

Notes: (b) Net change figures take account of reclassification between rural and urban post offices

(c) See text for details on discontinuity

Sources: *POSTCOMM Annual Reports*

Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group

2.2 Post Offices by Region

Table 2 shows the number of Post Offices by region. During the year March 2010 to March 2011, the number of Post Office branches in Wales fell by 1.3 per cent and the number of branches in the East Midlands fell by 1.2 per cent, whereas Wales saw no net change in Post Office numbers.

Table 2

Post offices by region: 2001-2011

	At end:									Network change	
	Mar 2001	Mar 2004	Mar 2005	Mar 2006	Mar 2007	Mar 2008	Mar 2009	Mar 2010	Mar 2011	Mar 2010 to	Mar 2011 (a)
										Number	Per cent
North East	736	662	583	600	595	576	494	491	491	0	0.0%
North West	1,853	1,651	1,421	1,396	1,372	1,311	1,143	1,138	1,134	-4	-0.4%
Yorkshire and The Humber	1,530	1,377	1,265	1,228	1,210	1,144	1,018	1,006	992	-14	-1.4%
West Midlands	1,438	1,280	1,124	1,107	1,100	1,091	941	930	922	-8	-0.9%
South West	1,880	1,673	1,596	1,581	1,566	1,549	1,306	1,303	1,293	-10	-0.8%
South East	2,189	1,930	1,769	1,734	1,733	1,545	1,407	1,412	1,408	-4	-0.3%
London	1,225	1,010	853	853	848	846	679	681	682	1	0.1%
East of England	1,632	1,470	1,384	1,376	1,364	1,305	1,159	1,150	1,143	-7	-0.6%
East Midlands	1,420	1,243	1,153	1,104	1,091	957	903	905	894	-11	-1.2%
Northern Ireland	611	573	550	542	543	528	488	480	478	-2	-0.4%
Scotland	1,933	1,810	1,712	1,688	1,651	1,599	1,443	1,446	1,433	-13	-0.9%
Wales	1,399	1,282	1,199	1,167	1,146	1,116	971	963	950	-13	-1.3%
United Kingdom	17,846	15,961	14,609	14,376	14,219	13,567	11,952	11,905	11,820	-85	-0.7%

Notes: (a) See text for details on discontinuity

Sources: POSTCOMM Annual Reports
Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group

2.3 Post Offices by Westminster constituency

A full list of Post Offices by constituency was made available by Royal Mail Group plc for the first time in 2002. These lists are copyrighted to Post Office Ltd but are available as electronic files in the Library for use by Members and can be viewed on request.

The number of Post Offices by constituency for March 2011 is available at as [Table A4](#) of this note.

3 Closure programmes

Over the last ten years there have been two Post Office modernisation programmes that have led to numbers of branch closures: the Urban Network Reinvention Programme and the Network Change Programme.

3.1 Urban Network Reinvention Programme

The Urban Network Reinvention Programme ran between 2002 and 2005. It had two distinct elements: the Urban Closure Programme, where closures, mergers or relocations were proposed, and the Urban Investment Programme which provided investment for the remaining urban network.

The Post Office Ltd originally estimated that 3,000 urban Post Offices needed to close to make the Network sustainable. In the end, the Programme resulted in the closure of just under 2,500 Post Office branches between February 2003 and March 2006. Table 3 shows the closures by region:

Table 3

Closures under the Urban Reinvention Programme by Government Region

North East	110
North West	395
Yorkshire and The Humber	211
West Midlands	241
South West	214
South East	358
London	319
East of England	169
East Midlands	162
Northern Ireland	31
Scotland	149
Wales	127
UK	2,486

[Source: Postcomm, Network Annual Report 2005-06, October 2006](#)

For more information about the Urban Network Reinvention Programme see the Library Standard Note, SN/EP/1916, [The Post Office Urban Reinvention Programme](#).

3.2 Network Change Programme

The Network Change Programme was an initiative led by the Labour Government to modernise the network.

The Government's programme followed a public consultation on its proposals which ran between 14 December 2006 and 8 March 2007.³ The Government's response to the consultation document announced a range of proposed measures to modernise and reshape the Network and set out the minimum access criteria for the Post Office to use to decide on any closures.⁴

Over an 18 month period commencing in October 2007, approximately 2,500 branches were closed, with more than 500 of them replaced by outreach services. The changes were delivered across the UK on an area by area basis.⁵

Table 4 below shows changes in the regional network, as a result of the Network Change Programme:

³ DTI, [The Post Office Network: A consultation document](#), December 2006

⁴ DTI, [Government Response to Public Consultation](#), May 2007

⁵ See the Post Office's [Network Change](#) pages for more information

Table 4

**Closures under the Network Closure Programme
by Government Region**

North East	100
North West	228
Yorkshire and The Humber	202
West Midlands	181
South West	303
South East	277
London	161
East of England	213
East Midlands	200
Northern Ireland	92
Scotland	269
Wales	203
UK	2,429

Source: Royal Mail Group

Background information on the Network Change Programme can be found in SN/EP/4808, [The Post Office Network Change Programme](#).

4 Additional tables

- Table A1 Annual change in network size
- Table A2 Number of Crown, Franchised and Sub Post Offices 1969-2007
- Table A3 Quarterly change in network
- Table A4 [Number of post offices by constituency: March 2011 \(in separate document\)](#)

Table A1

Annual change in network size ^(a)

Year	Total at year end	Net change	% change
1981/82	22,405	-70	-0.3%
1982/83	22,301	-104	-0.5%
1983/84	22,058	-243	-1.1%
1984/85	21,663	-395	-1.8%
1985/86	21,305	-358	-1.7%
1986/87	21,211	-94	-0.4%
1987/88	21,071	-140	-0.7%
1988/89	21,030	-41	-0.2%
1989/90	20,871	-159	-0.8%
1990/91	20,638	-233	-1.1%
1991/92	20,160	-478	-2.3%
1992/93	19,958	-202	-1.0%
1993/94	19,722	-236	-1.2%
1994/95	19,607	-115	-0.6%
1995/96	19,414	-193	-1.0%
1996/97	19,071	-343	-1.8%
1997/98	19,008	-63	-0.3%
1998/99	18,775	-233	-1.2%
1999/00	18,393	-382	-2.0%
2000/01	17,846	-547	-3.0%
2001/02	17,584	-262	-1.5%
2002/03	17,239	-345	-2.0%
2003/04	15,961	-1,278	-7.4%
2004/05	14,609	-1,352	-8.5%
2005/06	14,376	-233	-1.6%
2006/07	14,219	-157	-1.1%
2007/08	13,567	-652	-4.6%
2008/09	11,952	-1,615	-11.9%
2009/10	11,905	-47	-0.4%
2010/11	11,820	-85	-0.7%

Notes: (a) See text for details on discontinuity

Sources: *Access to Post Office Services: Time to Act*,
POSTCOMM, 30 Sep 2002
Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group

Table A2

Number of Crown, Franchised and Sub Post Offices 1969-2010 ^(d)

	Main Post Offices			Sub-post Offices	Satellite & Outreach ^(c)	Total
	Total	Directly operated ^(a)	Others ^(b)			
Mar 1969	1,765	1,765	0	23,055		24,820
Mar 1970	1,743	1,743	0	22,907		24,650
Mar 1971	1,715	1,715	0	22,799		24,514
Mar 1972	1,699	1,699	0	22,672		24,371
Mar 1973	1,622	1,622	0	22,510		24,132
Mar 1974	1,607	1,607	0	22,276		23,883
Mar 1975	1,600	1,600	0	22,060		23,660
Mar 1976	1,586	1,586	0	21,804		23,390
Mar 1977	1,581	1,581	0	21,543		23,124
Mar 1978	1,579	1,579	0	21,342		22,921
Mar 1979	1,580	1,580	0	21,213		22,793
Mar 1980	1,583	1,583	0	21,056		22,639
Mar 1981	1,581	1,581	0	20,894		22,475
Mar 1982	1,573	1,573	0	20,832		22,405
Mar 1983	1,567	1,567	0	20,734		22,301
Mar 1984	1,559	1,559	0	20,499		22,058
Mar 1985	1,553	1,553	0	20,110		21,663
Mar 1986	1,509	1,509	0	19,796		21,305
Mar 1987	1,503	1,503	0	19,708		21,211
Mar 1988	1,499	1,499	0	19,572		21,071
Mar 1989	1,493	1,493	0	19,352		20,845
Mar 1990	1,491	1,338	153	19,138		20,629
Mar 1991	1,484	1,165	319	18,849		20,333
Mar 1992	1,485	1,019	466	18,702		20,187
Mar 1993	1,493	915	578	18,463		19,956
Mar 1994	1,496	800	696	18,286		19,782
Mar 1995	1,509	699	810	18,098		19,607
Mar 1996	1,520	653	867	17,894		19,414
Mar 1997	1,526	606	920	17,725		19,251
Mar 1998	1,539	601	938	17,469		19,008
Mar 1999	1,539	600	939	17,236		18,775
Mar 2000	1,527	598	929	16,866		18,393
Mar 2001	1,521	597	924	16,325		17,846
Mar 2002	1,515	589	926	16,069		17,584
Mar 2003	1,499	576	923	15,740		17,239
Mar 2004	1,474	560	914	14,487		15,961
Mar 2005	1,466	541	925	13,143		14,609
Mar 2006	1,448	495	953	12,847		14,295
Mar 2007	1,430	458	972	12,789		14,219
Mar 2008	1,432	403	1,029	11,719	416	13,567
Mar 2009	1,419	373	1,046	9,730	803	11,952
Mar 2010	798	373	425	10,174	933	11,905

Notes: (a) i.e Crown Post Offices

(b) This category includes Modified Sub Post Offices (usually ex-Crown post offices) and Franchise post offices

(c) Includes Mobile, Home Service and Partner

(d) See text for details on discontinuity

Sources: *Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group*

HC Deb 17 May 1999, c254-5W

Deposited paper (3)4539, 1997

HC Deb 18 Jan 1996 c702W

Post Office (Library paper 94/87)

Evidence to Trade and Industry Committee, 1987-88, HC

273-i,ii,iii, Annex C, UCW,

[Postcomm Annual Reports on the Post Office Network](#)

Table A3

Quarterly change in network

At end:	Outlets		% quarterly change
	Total	Net change	
Mar 2000	18,393		
Jun 2000	18,246	-147	-0.8%
Sep 2000	18,094	-152	-0.8%
Dec 2000	17,959	-135	-0.7%
Mar 2001	17,846	-113	-0.6%
Jun 2001	17,743	-103	-0.6%
Sep 2001	17,687	-56	-0.3%
Dec 2001	17,654	-33	-0.2%
Mar 2002	17,584	-70	-0.4%
Jun 2002	17,518	-66	-0.4%
Sep 2002	17,457	-61	-0.3%
Dec 2002	17,417	-40	-0.2%
Mar 2003	17,239	-176	-1.0%
Jun 2003	16,942	-297	-1.7%
Sep 2003	16,692	-250	-1.5%
Dec 2003	16,465	-227	-1.4%
Mar 2004	15,961	-504	-3.1%
Jun 2004	15,656	-305	-1.9%
Sep 2004	15,304	-352	-2.2%
Dec 2004	14,976	-328	-2.1%
Mar 2005	14,609	-367	-2.5%
Jun 2005 (a)	14,607	-64	-0.4%
Sep 2005	14,542	-65	-0.4%
Dec 2005	14,528	-14	-0.1%
Mar 2006	14,376	-152	-1.0%
Jun 2006	14,299	-77	-0.5%
Sep 2006	14,263	-36	-0.3%
Dec 2006 (a)	14,295	32	0.2%
Mar 2007 (a)	14,219	-76	-0.5%
Jun 2007 (a)	14,147	-72	-0.5%
Sep 2007	14,118	-29	-0.2%
Dec 2007	14,052	-66	-0.5%
Mar 2008	13,567	-485	-3.5%
Jun 2008	13,165	-402	-3.0%
Sep 2008	12,524	-641	-4.9%
Dec 2008	12,046	-478	-3.8%
Mar 2009	11,952	-94	-0.8%
Jun 2009	11,956	4	0.0%
Sep 2009	11,942	-14	-0.1%
Dec 2009	11,923	-19	-0.2%
Mar 2010	11,905	-18	-0.2%
Jun 2010	11,872	-33	-0.3%
Sep 2010	11,832	-40	-0.3%
Dec 2010	11,847	15	0.1%
Mar 2011	11,820	-27	-0.2%
Jun 2011	11,798	-22	-0.2%
Sep 2011	11,785	-13	-0.1%

Notes: (a) See text for details on discontinuity

Sources: POSTCOMM Annual Reports
Quarterly Network Numbers, Royal Mail Group