



[Redacted]

Date
10 September 2024

[Redacted]

Post Office
100 Wood Street
London EC2V 9ER

Your Ref:

Classification:
Public

Dear [Redacted],

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2024/00748

We are writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (“**Post Office**”) on 2 May, which has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“**FOIA**”). We sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to this request.

In your email you have requested the information shown verbatim in bold below:

“Under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I am writing to request information regarding prosecutions of sub postmasters by the Post Office for theft or false accounting from 1990 to the present day, broken down by year.

Specifically, I would like to obtain the following information for each year:

**The number of sub postmasters prosecuted by the Post Office for theft.
The number of sub postmasters prosecuted by the Post Office for false accounting.**

If possible, please provide this data in a tabulated format, with separate columns for each year and the corresponding number of prosecutions for theft and false accounting.”

We can confirm that Post Office does hold some information in scope of your request.

As the rollout of the Horizon IT software (“**Horizon**”) in Post Office branches began in 1999, we advise that the period covered by your request (i.e., 1990 to date) cuts across prosecutions involving Post Office, both pre- and post-Horizon rollout. As the specific offences for which postmasters were prosecuted in most of the pre-1999 cases (that is, most pre-Horizon cases) are not always known, we are unable to provide separate yearly breakdown numbers for (a) postmasters who were prosecuted for theft and (b) those who were prosecuted for false accounting.

As such and to ensure that our parameters are consistent across the entire 34-year period requested, in the table below, we have provided the yearly number of postmaster prosecutions that relied on Horizon-related evidence (in part or in whole) for those cases that took place after Horizon rollout. And for those cases that occurred prior to Horizon rollout, we have identified cases that are equivalent in nature to those that were prosecuted after Horizon’s introduction, where that information is available. This has been done largely by reference to the case type for those cases that was recorded on several spreadsheets maintained by Post Office’s investigation team. The information provided below therefore includes cases that were prosecuted for theft and false accounting, as well as other offences such as fraud. Please see the Annex below for the case types we have included or excluded.

Additionally, as you have requested information regarding prosecutions brought by Post Office only (to which we include those brought by Royal Mail Group prior to the splitting of the two entities in April 2012), we have excluded data for cases that were brought by other prosecutors during the relevant period, including cases brought by the Crown Prosecution Service, the Department for Work and Pensions, Royal Mail Group Limited post separation of the two entities in April 2012 and the Northern Irish and Scottish prosecutors.

Year	No of Postmaster Prosecutions	No of all Grades of Offender Prosecutions
1990s (unknown date setup)*	7	9
1990	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
1991	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
1992	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
1993	Fewer than 5	6
1994	Fewer than 5	9
1995	Fewer than 5	7

1996	10	26
1997	24	39
1998	43	70
1999	54	101
2000s (unknown date setup)*	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
2000	52	98
2001	34	63
2002	42	75
2003	28	58
2004	41	94
2005	39	64
2006	31	48
2007	26	51
2008	42	77
2009	47	63
2010	33	41
2011	34	41
2012	34	44
2013	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
2014	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
2015 to 2024 (up to 16 August)	0	0

* This data includes information for that decade, but where the exact year of case creation cannot be established.

As requested, the second column in the above table shows the yearly number of postmasters (including other individuals whose roles are unknown) who were prosecuted in the requested period within the parameters as set out above. However, there were other individuals prosecuted in the same period, but were in non-postmaster roles. If we include all grades of offender (including e.g. postmasters, postmaster assistants, clerks, branch managers, assistant branch managers, those whose roles are unknown, cleaners, engineers, etc.), the number of prosecutions would be different as shown in the third column.

The yearly breakdown in the tables above is based on the date on which an investigation started, although the outcome of the case might have occurred in a different year. This is the simplest way to identify cases per year, as information as to the date of charge or eventual conviction is not always known.

Where there were fewer than 5 cases were prosecuted, we have withheld the actual numbers under sections 40(2) and 40(3A) of the FOIA as they constitute personal data relating to other persons. These sections exempt personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would breach any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the UK GDPR.

We consider that disclosure of the actual numbers is likely to breach the first data-protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly, and in a transparent manner. Disclosure of that number would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data, as it may lead to the identification of the relevant postmasters.

Overall, given the historical nature of the data concerned, with some dating back 34 years, we cannot be certain about the accuracy or completeness of the information we have provided. Post Office continues to receive material from third parties regarding cases. Consequently, the numbers provided in response to this request may change later and are correct only as of 16 August 2024.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of this response, you do have a right to request an internal review. You can do this by writing to the address above within 40 working days of receipt of this response stating your reasons for your internal review request or alternatively, by emailing information.rights@postoffice.co.uk.

If, having requested an internal review by Post Office, you are still not satisfied with our response you also have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113
www.ico.org.uk/foicomplaints

Yours sincerely,

Information Rights Team
information.rights@postoffice.co.uk
<https://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/en/governance/access-to-information/access-to-information/>

Post Office Limited is committed to protecting your privacy, information about how we do this can be found on our website at www.postoffice.co.uk/privacy

Annex

Those case types that are considered analogous to post-Horizon cases that relied in whole or in part on Horizon data include: allegations affecting character; audit shortage; bureau theft/fraud; cash loss; disputed transactions; false accounting; fraud (internal); giro suppression; mint redemption fraud; P&A fraud/overclaims; postal order theft/fraud; stock loss; theft; and 'other' or unknown, unless in any of those case type categories it is clear from other information held by Post Office that that case is not analogous to post-Horizon cases.

Those case types that are not considered analogous to those post-Horizon cases that relied in whole or in part on Horizon data include: armed robbery and attempted armed robbery; robberies; burglaries; counterfeit goods; counter snatch; external fraud; compensation/remuneration fraud; plastic bank note envelope discrepancies; motor vehicle licence loss; supply chain losses, unless in any of those case type categories it is clear from other information held by Post Office that that case is analogous to post-Horizon cases.