



[Redacted]

Date
1 May 2024

[Redacted]

Post Office
100 Wood Street
London EC2V 9ER

Your Ref:

Dear [Redacted],

Classification:
Public

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2024/00076

We are writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (“**Post Office**”) on 11 January 2024, which has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“**FOIA**”). We sincerely apologise for the delay in our response.

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

“I understand that 700 sub-postmasters were convicted between 1999 and 2015 as a result of the Horizon scandal. My question is very simple; how many sub-postmasters were convicted for similar offences during the previous 15 years? Please confirm that no charge will be made for responding to this request.”

We can confirm that Post Office does hold some information in scope of your request and that no charge will be made for responding to this request.

For clarification, the figure of 700 (which has now reduced to 696, following further review of material available to Post Office) relates to convictions where Horizon evidence may have been relied on by Post Office, in whole or in part, in the original prosecution. It includes convictions of sub-postmasters (“**postmasters**”) as well as individuals in a variety of other roles, including postmaster assistants, clerks, and branch managers.

We have interpreted the “previous 15 years” in your request as 1984 to 1998. The total number of convictions only for postmasters (together with those whose roles were unknown) for the period 1984 to 1998 for similar offences, based on information known to Post Office as of 29 April 2024 is 51, although there were no convictions found in 1984 and 1985.

The total number of convictions for all role types for the period 1984 to 1998 for similar offences, based on information known to Post Office as of 29 April 2024 is 98, although as per the above, there were no convictions found in 1984 and 1985.

However, please note that approximately 143 convictions from 1999 onwards for “similar offences” for all role types were based on conduct prior to the installation of Horizon and therefore could not have relied on Horizon data in whole or in part. Due to the way you have asked the question (based on the date of conviction rather than the date the alleged offences were committed), these convictions are excluded from the numbers (i.e., 51 and 98) provided above. Consequently, as of 29 April 2024, the number of convictions for “similar offences” for all role types for conduct prior to Horizon’s installation is 241.

The rationale used by Post Office to answer your questions is set out below in line with our duty under section 16 FOIA to advise and assist requestors and we have also defined what we understand to be a “similar offence” as set out in your request. Please also note below the caveats in relation to the limited nature of Post Office’s records pre-1999.

Given you have asked for how many postmasters were convicted for similar offences during the previous 15 years prior to Horizon’s installation, we have provided the number of postmasters convicted during this period, plus the number of convictions where the role of the person convicted is unknown. For transparency, we have also provided information as to the number of convicted individuals in all roles who were prosecuted for similar offences during the 15 years before Horizon’s installation in 1999.

Regarding your reference to “similar offences”, we have interpreted your question to mean only those cases that we consider would have relied (in whole or in part) on Horizon data had the case been prosecuted after Horizon’s installation at a branch. As the information held by Post Office is limited as to the actual offences that were charged or indicted during the pre-1999 period, we have had to interpret this question by reference to the “case type” recorded by Post Office in relation to convictions during this period. Please note that these are the categories of case type recorded by Post Office at the time, rather than categories created for the purpose of this response. Similar case types as those within the post-1999 period that did rely on Horizon data include the following categories of cases:

- Allegations affecting character: this case type includes a wide variety of offending and, therefore, cases have only been included where they appear to relate to dishonesty offences;
- Audit shortage;
- Bureau theft/fraud;
- Cash loss;
- Cash Loss (Audit discrepancy);
- False accounting;
- Giro suppression;
- Other: this case type includes a wide variety of offending and, therefore, cases have only been included where they appear to relate to dishonesty offences such as theft, fraud, or where it is not clear that they relate to other types of offending that would not have relied on Horizon data, had they been prosecuted after Horizon's installation;
- Pensions & Allowance (i.e., benefits) encashment fraud, laundering and overclaims cases;
- Stock loss; and
- Theft of official cash.

Where a conviction date is unknown, we have selected those cases where the investigation commenced during the same period of 1986 to 1998, although please note it is possible that the cases that were commenced in the late 1990s may have resulted in a conviction after 1999.

Post Office's data for the pre-1999 period is limited and is based on several casework spreadsheets. Given the age of these cases, the amount of other documentation to corroborate the information held on those casework spreadsheets is limited, and, therefore, the numbers provided at this stage are subject to change as more information is received from third parties regarding other convictions that may have been secured during this period.

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/>

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