



[REDACTED]

Date
24 October 2024

[REDACTED]

Post Office
100 Wood Street
London EC2V 9ER

Your Ref:

Classification:
Public

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2024/00072

We are writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (“**Post Office**”) on 11 January, 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:

“How many suspected and prosecuted cases were there of theft, fraud and false accounting in UK Post Offices in the period 1983-1999, by year?”

How much money was actually lost by the UK Post Office due to theft, fraud and false accounting in the period 1999-2015?”

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

Regarding the first part of your request, as our case records have no categorisation for “suspected” cases, we have interpreted “suspected” in your request to mean “investigated”. We have also interpreted “UK Post Offices” to mean Post Office branches in the UK (including directly managed branches, formerly known as Crown Offices), but excluding all cases where the alleged criminal conduct relates to non-Post Office branches (e.g., cash centres, supply chain cases, and cash-van-in-transit cases).

We have, therefore, interpreted the first part of your request as asking for a yearly breakdown of the number of individuals who were, with Post Office's involvement, investigated and /or prosecuted for theft, fraud and false accounting relating to Post Office branches in the UK in the period of 1983 to 1999.

In addition to the foregoing, we have been guided by the following considerations in dealing with the first part of your request:

1. As you have not limited your request to investigations and prosecutions brought by Post Office, we have included all cases known to Post Office that fulfil the criteria above, regardless of the prosecutor, including Post Office / Royal Mail Group, the Department of Work & Pensions, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the Scottish and Northern Irish prosecution services.
2. Our pre-1999 case records generally show offences by "case type" such that the exact offence concerned is not always known, so our analysis covers all case types that are fraud, theft or false accounting related or are similar in nature to the offences specified in your request. The case types included in our analysis are as follows:

Accounting discrepancies; allegations affecting character; ATM fraud; audit concerns; audit shortage; bureau theft/fraud; cash loss; cheques; disputed transactions; Pensions & Allowances frauds and overclaims; false accounting; fraud; giro suppression and overclaims; mint redemption fraud; missing cash accounts; missing remittances; missing vouchers; misuse of Post Office funds; MoneyGram fraud; official property losses; plastic bank note envelope discrepancies; postal order theft/fraud; scratch cards; stock loss; suspected dishonesty; theft; undefined loss; voucher loss; other and unknown case types.

3. Investigation covers all relevant individuals regardless of their roles at the affected branches (e.g., postmasters, assistants, branch managers, clerks, postal officers, those whose roles are unknown, outsiders, etc.) and regardless of the case outcome (e.g., prosecutions, dropped charges, cautions, convictions, acquittals, unknown outcomes, etc.). Prosecution includes all

cases that resulted in a decision to charge, regardless of outcome.

4. Our analysis is based on the dates that the individual cases were set up, although the prosecution might have occurred in a later year. This is the simplest and most accurate way to identify cases per year since information as to the date of charge is not always known. Consequently, the figures in the table below include all known relevant cases that were commenced between 1983 and 1999, although prosecution in some cases might have started after 1999:

Year	Investigations	Prosecutions
1983	No data	No data
1984	No data	No data
1985	1	0
1986	1	1
1987	3	2
1988	1	1
1989	2	0
1990	7	1
1991	7	4
1992	12	2
1993	17	6
1994	40	9
1995	78	7
1996	256	26
1997	369	39
1998	642	77
1999	1002	108
1990s (specific year unknown)*	414	9

*These were definitively commenced in the 1990 decade, but the specific date of case creation is unknown.

Overall, given the historical nature of the data concerned, with some dating back 41 years, we cannot be certain about the accuracy or completeness of the information we have provided, including the specific offences for which individuals were

investigated or prosecuted. For example, we are not certain that there were only 8 investigations and 4 prosecutions between 1983 and 1989. Post Office continues to receive material from third parties regarding cases. Consequently, the numbers in the table may change later and are, to the best of our knowledge, correct only as of 18 October 2024.

Regarding the second part of your request (i.e., “How much money was actually lost by the UK Post Office due to theft, fraud and false accounting in the period 1999-2015?”), we have excluded “false accounting” from our analysis because, unlike “theft” and “fraud”, it is not a loss-causing crime; rather, it is the crime of falsifying or concealing accounting information, done to mislead by misrepresenting or distorting the true state of affairs, which might relate to a loss caused by theft and / or fraud.

Post Office estimates that it lost around £476,584.69 due to theft and fraud in the period of 1999 to 2015. This is based on our analysis of all the cases where the original criminal convictions (for theft and / or fraud) have been upheld on appeal by the courts or where the appeal was rejected by a single judge. Such convictions are the only ones beyond the reach of the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024, which quashed all relevant-convictions with effect from 24 May 2024. All cases caught by this legislation have been excluded from our analysis because the affected individuals have been exonerated.

Finally, and for completeness, it is possible that there might have been other losses due to fraud and / or theft of which Post Office is neither aware nor able to quantify.

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
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