Witness Name: Kathryn Frances Parker

Statement No: WITN06050100

Exhibits: None

Dated: 10th December 2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT ENQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF KATHRYN FRANCES PARKER (FORMERLY COOK)

I, Kathryn Frances Parker will say as follows:

1. I was employed by the Post Office in 1984 as a member of its graduate programme direct from university. I had a number of roles during my employment with the Post Office and with Royal Mail Group, including two stints working with Post Office Counter Services / Post Office Counters/POCL. My second stint working for POL finished in 2001 and I left Royal Mail Group in 2006. I have been largely self-employed since then - running my own company and providing interim services to clients (mainly in the public sector but also for a small number of private companies) in the UK. I am currently working as Head of Organisation Development for a West London council (Harrow Council). I regret that my recollection of some of the specifics is not good given the passage of time.

2. I was not involved in either the procurement or design of the Horizon IT project. I was involved in the work around training provision for the roll out of the system albeit that as I did not have operational expertise in counter transactions/ balancing I worked with others in the team who did have expertise in this area. I do not recall if my involvement predated January 1999.

3. I have considered documents sent to me by the Inquiry, including the Post Office Network Policy For Releasing to attend training [FUJ00119699] and the POCL Processing for Training and Awareness Scheduling to Support National Rollout [POL000 89741]. Whilst I do not specifically recall these documents they were clearly the source documents for ensuring that there were practical measures in place to make sure the training was attended as required by the programme. The documents also set out the arrangements for competency testing of staff, sub postmasters and their assistants.

4. I have considered a memorandum dated January 1999 [POL00039748]. Sadly, I do not recall the specific background to this memorandum which refers to concerns about "the entry level of competency". I clearly recall that there was concern across the business that the move from an often manual operation to one using technology to complete transactions would be challenging and would require significant attention and investment. This was especially the case for those who had very limited, if any, exposure to using technology previously. It was also the belief that those using paper based ways of completing transactions had developed, over time, their own ways of working - Horizon would require transactions to be done in a standard

way across the entire network and using prescribed methodologies i.e. to move to a much more of a "conformance culture". I do not recall if the team that was created following this letter was the same as the Horizon Training Competencies Development Group. I do not recall its terms of reference or purpose.

5.   I have considered a letter dated 19 February 1999 with the title Horizon Training: Competency and Conformance and its annexes; and a report dated 11 December 1998 titles Project Initiation Document: Conformance Strand 3, Business case [POL00039781], [POL00039782], [POL00039783], [POL00039784], [POL00039785] and [POL00089738]. Regrettably after the passage of time since this meeting was held I do not recall it. As set out earlier I clearly recall concerns about introducing technology into an often manual operation at a time when the use of technology was much more limited than it is now. Sub postmasters and their staff were highly skilled at using existing processes to complete multiple transactions. From recollection, these numbered over 200 at the time. Each required different forms, different documentation to be validated and different processes etc. Annex C [POL 00039784] sets this challenge out well (although I do not recall the meeting that produced it). Annex D [POL00039785] appears to be a brainstorm of gaps - it refers to a potential gap being "not starting from the competence we want" - although I do not recall the conversation that led to this, my reading of it now is that it refers to the left hand column in Annex C [POL00039784]. Annex D looks to be a document that set out possible gaps, not all of which were known to exist for certain. The Project Initiation Document [POL00089738] (which I do not recall) suggests to me now a comprehensive

understanding of the need to ensure POL moved to a compliance culture that had previously not been required.

6. I am asked if I feel that the training programme offered to sub postmasters was

   "adequate at this point in time". My assessment following my reading of the documents you supplied to me, was that there were signs that the achievement of competency by all those required to achieve it was a concern - changing very long established ways of working and introducing technology at the same time certainly put pressure on those operating the new system. The training and post training support required a considerable investment in both time and money by Post Office Counters - the Horizon system could not have successfully gone live without it. I have considered an email from Clare Dryhurst to myself dated 23 February 1999 (**[POL00039712]**). I am asked why this email was sent to me and what I did with the information. . Regrettably I do not recall this.

7. I have considered another email from Clare Dryhurst to myself dated 23 February 1999 [POL00039724]. Regrettably, I do not recall the background to this e-mail. I do not know what the reference to "ICL remedies" refers to.

8. I have been asked a number of questions about a memorandum dated 9 April 1999 with an enclosed report [POL00039735] . My response to each question is set out below:

a) I am asked to expand on the quote the "business has never had a detailed definition - other than the recently introduced one for new entrant counter clerks... of what we mean by competency" and I am asked what effect, if any this had on the Post Office. As mentioned earlier, people working in Post Offices had, over time, developed ways of working that delivered the outcomes that were required (good levels of customer service etc) but didn't have standard processes that had to be followed - each sub postmaster had, from recollection, accountability for training their assistants and assuring their capability. This meant that over time, different sub post offices had developed their own ways of working. Given this, it was difficult, I believe, to set a common competency standard because there was no standardised way of working. Pre the use of technology it was clearly a system that worked - the introduction of technology meant that this way of working had to be transitioned into a new (much more rigorous and uniform) way of working. This in itself does lend of course to more rigorous fixed and effective ways of measuring competence. This was not something I believe that we were able to do prior to that (other than to a limited extent in branch offices). I am asked to consider the reasoning behind the competency statement at page 11. Although I do not recall this specifically, this appears to set out the differences we expected to see once the Horizon system had been introduced across the network.

b) I am asked to what extent; if at all the group gave consideration to whether the ability to establish the cause of discrepancies in branch accounts reports produced by the Horizon system ought to be included in the definition of

competency. I regret that I do not recall whether I or the group gave consideration to that point - we would certainly I'm sure, have given consideration to the ability of sub postmasters to carry out all necessary requisite reconciliations and there was consideration given to that in the training proposal.

c) I am asked for my views on why the commissioned research found that pre course competency was measured at 79% and a course completion rate of 97.63% and what steps if any were taken to confirm the reason for this difference. I do not recall what steps were taken to confirm the reason for this difference.

d) I am asked to expand on all points raised in the bullet point beginning "both the end to end" and ending "recognising individual training needs" on page 7. Having reminded myself through reading this document I believe that this paragraph raises questions about that the duration of the Horizon training. I note that the document suggests this research did not include some of the additional support subsequently made available. With a large training roll out such as that for Horizon, it would have been incredibly difficult to tailor training to each individual's needs. The approach taken I believe was to provide standard training for all users and then to supplement this where required with specific support through one to one measures and helpline support. The competency tests themselves identified where some of that additional support might be required.

e) I am asked for my views and on whether or not the competence of sub postmasters across the post office network was such to materially affect the training programme. It's my recollection that we were dealing with a very diverse population. Whilst it's true to say that some were using technology to a limited extent, some people were not using a lot of technology and were reliant on manual systems that had been in place for many years. The competence of any person to pick up a new technology quickly was always a concern and this was why the training was provided and the additional support measures were put in place post training. I am asked whether the training programme was adequate to train sub masters across the network to use the Horizon IT system. I don't have access to the figures for how many sub postmasters required additional support or at this distance, nor how many had to repeat the competency tests so it is difficult to comment on that particular point. The system did though go live and most people were able to use the system albeit that it took time for some to become fully proficient. I am also asked I what steps if any were taken in respect of improving training generally, the training programme and /or competence across the post office network following this report. I am sure that improvements were made following this report but regrettably I do not have access to the documentation to confirm what these improvements were. I moved on to another role in 2001 and didn't have any involvement in Horizon after that point – I cannot therefore provide any insights into the data that was collected about competence levels as the roll out proceeded.

9.   I have considered an electronic memo dated 25 June

1999([POL00090408]. I do not recall the background to this research, nor who

commissioned it or for what purpose. I do not recall what steps I took in

relation to the report but it was clearly an important insight that should have

influenced our approach. I have been asked to review the POCL Policy On

Competency Training dated 13 August 1998 [FUJ00001287]. My recollection

is somewhat hazy but I recall that competency testing focused on a number of

transactions but not all because of the very large number of transactions that

were done at the time. I believe that testing focused on the most frequently

required transactions including balancing.

10. I have been asked if I felt in hindsight if anything more could have been done

in respect of training or competency testing. I have thought about this carefully

given what we now know about the operation of Horizon in practice. This was

a massive programme of change, affecting thousands of people. The

investment in training was considerable (both in time and money terms) and in

re reading the documents it looks to me that the design of the training and

competency were proportionate. Given the passage of time and the issues

which the Inquiry is now looking at I wonder however if there should have

been a change to the pacing and phasing of roll out ie although the approach

to training design and competency felt proportionate at the time, it may be the

case that training duration should have been looked at in the light of data

coming back from the competency testing processes (and other measures of

effectiveness). Potentially this could have resulted in slowing down roll out to

ensure that all of the competency issues had the chance to emerge before

driving the roll out further. This could I suppose have been achieved by going live much more slowly - learning as region by region went live or by type of office in batches. I do not know the financial implications of this of course, so do not know if this would have been financially possible. It is worth stating that I do not recall seeing any impact data while I was working on the programme.

11. I have been asked if there is anything else in relation to the inquiry of which I think the Chair should be aware. I do not other than to say that at no point did we consider that there were issues with the design of the system or how it operated. In relation to training and competency we took it as a given that the Horizon system was secure and operated as it was supposed to in terms of serving customers and in the balancing/reconciliation processes. It was shocking to hear subsequently of the issues that have arisen.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: | **GRO** |

Dated: 10·12·22

Index to First Witness Statement of Kathryn Parker

No.	URN	Document Description	Control Number
1	FUJ00119699	Post Office policy for releasing individuals to attend training. V 2.0 dated 22/11/2000	POINQ0125891F
2	POL00089741	POCL Processes for Training and Awareness Scheduling to Support National Role Out v1.0 dated 10/08/1998	POL-0086717
3	POL00039748	Memo from Kathryn Cook to multiple recipients re: Horizon Training Competency and Conformance dated January 1999	POL-0036306
4	POL00039781	Letter from Ms Kathryn Cook to Ms Sue Smith and others re: Horizon Training: Competency and Conformance dated 19 February 1999	POL-0036339
5	POL00039782	Annex on Horizon Training: Competency and Conformance Action Points	POL-0036340
6	POL00039783	Horizon Training Competencies Development Group: Meeting on 3 February 1999.	POL-0036341
7	POL00039784	Report detailing Competence In Front Line Service.	POL-0036342
8	POL00039785	Annex on Brainstorm of Gaps	POL-0036343
9	POL00089738	Post Office Project Initiation Document: Conformance Strand 3,	POL-0086714

		Business Case v0.3 by Clare Dryhurst and Glenys Davies dated 11/12/98	
10	POL00039712	Email from Clare Dryhurst to Kathryn Cook dated 23/02/1999	POL-0036270
11	POL00039724	Email from C Dryhurst to Kathryn Cook dated 23/02/1999	POL-0036282
12	POL00039735	Letter from Kathryn Cook to Bruce McNiven regarding Horizon Training – dated 09/04/1999	POL-0036293
13	POL00090408	Electronic Memorandum from Alan Bourne to Dolores O'Conner, Neil Barrett, Lorna Green, Kathryn Cook and others re: FWD: Horizon qualitative research – dated 25/06/1999	POL-0087377
14	FUJ00001287	POCL Policy On Competency Testing. V 1.0 dated 13/08/1998	POINQ0007458F