Witness Name: Paul D'Ambra

Statement No.: WITN07130100

Dated: 22 March 2023

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

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FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF *PAUL D'AMBRA*

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I, *PAUL D'AMBRA*, will say as follows...

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a former employee of ICL (Fujitsu) and held the position of first-line support and then second-line support.

2. This witness statement is made to assist the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 24th January 2023 (the "**Request**").

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

3. In July of 2001 I was made redundant from a role as a team leader at Marks & Spencer. I had for some time wanted a career in I.T. After several temporary

roles, I began a role as Technical Support Advisor on the Horizon help desk in or around December 2001.

4. I studied Biochemistry at University. Primarily discovering I was not a biochemist and since then had had several roles in call centres. The love of problem-solving that led me to science ultimately led me to work on and with computers.

5. I spent time on first and then second-line support at Fujitsu. I believe it was still ICL when I joined but already on the route to being part of Fujitsu. When the post office elected to reduce the number of call centres to reduce the cost of the contract the Manchester call centre closed and I went through an internal process to secure a role in the second-line support desk for the magistrates' courts. I spent over 4 years in that role.

6. Since then I have continued in I.T. roles. Spending 6 years managing I.T. for The British Mountaineering Council. Completing an MSc in Computer Science. And since 2012 as a software engineer in various roles and environments. I am currently a senior software engineer at a start-up.

7. As Horizon was my first technical role I was unsure what to expect. I also applied myself in that role with a view to the career I was hoping to build. At some point between December 2001 and July 2002, I was promoted to a second-line role on the Horizon desk in recognition, I believe, of my commitment to the role.

8. I have read "The Great Post Office scandal" book and have very few written records from the period I worked on Horizon.

TRAINING AND/OR HELP RECIEVED

9. Training for the helpdesk role was minimal, with a focus on learning on the job. I had very little training at all while at Fujitsu. Compared to later technical roles where training and learning are frequent and prioritised. As an example from a later role in Fujitsu, we were to attend Windows Server 2003 training in order to prepare us for updating print servers to that operating system. We had completed upgrading all 400+ servers before the training was scheduled.

10. At one point, I visited some Post Offices along with some colleagues. That was a fantastic experience to understand more about the people we were helping. This type of activity was, as I remember it, rare at Horizon, at least from my perspective of working on the helpdesk.

11. I do remember a period when Fujitsu ran everyone through training intended to improve our customer service skills. Based on the book "Gung Ho!: Turn On the People in Any Organization" by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles. A slightly uncomfortable story about a native American helping a new manager improve productivity at a factory.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF AVERAGE WORKING DAY

12. Since this is now 20 years ago. I barely remember my average working day. Calls were routed to you, you wouldn't know what the call was about until you received it, each was handled with the goal being to have a high "first-time fix" rate. That is, the intention is to solve calls without escalating them.

TYPE OF CALLS

13. Calls fell into three categories. General help "how can I do X?", General technical help "My X isn't working". Post-office specific help. Almost always to do with cashing up "The till says I should have £200 but I don't".

14. Cashing-up days were a marathon. Calls were generally longer and more involved. There was limited support that the helpdesk could offer for two reasons. One practical: we weren't there in person. If someone says they've counted the money and it has a particular total. There's no way to verify this or not. The second: we never went through cashing up ourselves. So, you could help in the abstract but any other experience to help had to be built up by handling many calls - learning on the job.

15. Some callers would be angry and argumentative when calling. Others would work with you. There was no ability on the helpdesk to look under the hood. The till hid the operating system it ran on. And the helpdesk had no access to its internals or to views other than those the Post office staff could access.

16. Those calls generally revolved around having the caller print out the system's record and then check the office until they reported everything was OK. I have no recollection of anyone ever reporting back any analysis of the frequency of calls from different offices or individuals.

17. I remember feeling a responsibility to help the callers. Particularly when dealing with potential hardware errors at remote offices. Sometimes staffed by elderly callers. You knew an engineer callout would take some days to happen and wanted to help them solve the problem themselves. I remember one caller telling me she was in her eighties. Asking her to go under the desk and remove and re-seat the monitor cable. Worrying during the long gap that followed that they were stuck under the desk, luckily they were not.

18. I also remember that, unlike in subsequent roles providing support for people in office-based jobs, the range of technology skills was much wider. I.e. the

expectation that someone was familiar with the technology they were using was less valid on Horizon than on my next role at Fujitsu supporting the Magistrates Courts. This would appear in various ways. I recall it was common that you would ask a caller to reboot their till, and in reality, they would turn the monitor off and back on again. Not unheard of in subsequent roles but less common. Of course, I can't rule out that my ability to guide a caller grew over time and that was what affected the frequency of that class of mistake.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

19. Technical calls were generally resolved by guiding the caller through to a resolution. Rebooting a till or reseating a cable. If not then you would escalate to an engineer visit.

20. General help calls would be resolved by asking others in the office. If we had a knowledge base to reference I don't remember it.

MANAGEMENT

21. The call centre was managed much like the non-technical call centres I'd worked on. Goals were to help people as quickly as possible. We were not incentivised to find out ways in which the system didn't work. In contrast to later technical roles, where the assumption was that the system often didn't work and we should identify those errors. I don't remember any discussion about how the Horizon system might be at fault. Certainly, my calls and their outcomes were monitored and I never received feedback that for example, I should have escalated a call when I didn't. My assumption has always been

that Fujitsu had contractual obligations to not have errors (i.e. would have to give money back) and so had no incentive to find them.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SUBPOSTMASTERS

22. Attitudes towards subpostmasters varied on the helpdesk. Generally speaking, we wanted to help people. I can't speak for everyone of course. I remember one story of a frustrated agent losing their job because they had told a frustrated subpostmaster that they could speed the system up by spinning the hourglass on the screen with their finger. And an area manager arriving to visit and discovering the postmaster doing just that. I don't know if that was apocryphal or not. But, like other customer service jobs, attitude to customers is a matter of perspective. You can choose to think that you're having a hard day because the customer is being difficult. Or that you're having a hard day because you're not solving their problems.

KNOWLEDGE OF BUGS, ERRORS, OR DEFECTS

23. I was not aware of bugs or errors in the system. Other than that it was sometimes slow. It was my first technology job and so I was not aware that this was unusual. But in my subsequent experience, there is always a list of errors longer than you can fix and part of the work is prioritising what to fix and how to balance that with improving the system. That was simply not the case on the Horizon Helpdesk. Therefore it was either a flawless system or the flaws in the system were not acknowledged. If it was a flawless system it is the only one that has ever existed. It is possible that the flaws were discussed, prioritised and fixed without the involvement of the help desk.

24. In my view the folk working on the helpdesk did their best to help the callers.

Certainly, that was my goal. However, they were doing so within a flawed

socio-technical system. The goal was customer service provided with a view

to having the lowest cost and not the greatest impact. The helpdesk should

have had ready access to people with hands-on experience running a post

office and did not.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed **GRO**

Dated: _____22/03/2023_____