



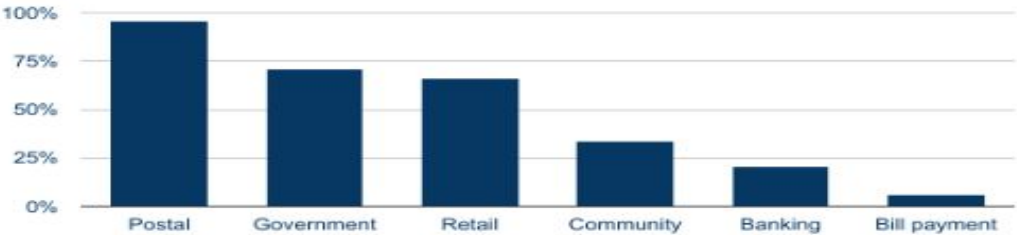
Post Office News - August 2017

How do people use post offices today?

A new landmark [report](#) from Citizens Advice looks at how consumers use post offices today. The research, based on 3,000 telephone interviews, finds the vast majority of consumers (97%) and small businesses (93%) are using post offices.

Most consumers use postal services, including letters and parcels. Nearly 3 in 4 consumers access at least 1 government service, such as government forms, passport checking, benefit withdrawals. 1 in 5 use banking services and 1 in 3 use the less formal community services. Few consumers now pay their utility bills at post offices.

Services used by consumers at post offices:



Despite the recent increases in opening hours, people mostly visit post offices during traditional opening times, although 24% have visited outside Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm. Consumers say that proximity to home is the most important reason why they use key services at post offices.

Distinct demographic groups tend to have different needs from post offices. Older people buy more stamps, people on low incomes are most likely to pay bills or access council services. Banking services are used more in rural areas.

Modelling shows impact of post office restructuring programme

As the UK's post office network approaches the end of the largest restructuring programme in its history, new Citizens Advice [research](#) finds the majority of the population will have seen changes to their local post office.

According to our analysis, by April 2018, nearly 8 out of 10 people's nearest post office will be one of the new types - a Post Office Main or a Post Office Local. Our modelling indicates the post office network will meet all the 'access criteria' set by the government.

However, our research shows that the access criteria, measured 'as the crow flies', is a measure of distance which does not reflect the lived experiences of consumers who travel to post offices by road. Over 15 million people live more than twice as far from their nearest post office than they do as measured by the criteria. Moreover, the criteria measure locations but not services. This could become an issue if services provided by post office outlets are curtailed in future.

Citizens Advice scrutiny of post office changes 2016-17

Citizens Advice scrutinises every proposal to franchise a Crown post office or relocate a post office under the current post office restructuring programme (Network Transformation). We meet with Post Office Ltd (POL) each week to recommend improvements before a final decision is made.

In 2016-17, we examined 297 relocation proposals and agreed improvements with POL in nearly 9 in 10 cases, on a range of issues including:

- Access to new premises (54% of cases) - eg additional lighting; security CCTV; engaging with the local authority to review dropped kerbs, provide disabled parking or pedestrian crossings
- Access into/inside premises (42% of cases) - eg adding a permanent ramp or temporary ramp, increasing door width, easing of heavy doors, changes to the store layout
- Products and services (8% of cases) - POL agreed to expand the services offered at the branch

See our [blog](#) for further details of Citizens Advice's post office change monitoring role.

Experience of benefits claimants using the post

The majority of the population (71%) use post offices for letter post, and new Citizens Advice [research](#) focuses on the experience of benefits claimants using the post. Our study shows:

- Half (49%) of people receiving benefits have used the post to administer them in the last 2 years
- Many people (53%) are paying to use postal services to communicate with government, even when Freepost is available
- 1 in 10 have encountered at least 1 problem in last 2 years. The most common issues are letters being delayed or never arriving at the government department
- When problems with using post to administer benefits arise, they can cause significant difficulties for people, including delays in payments and financial stress

Royal Mail cuts online parcel price and trials doorstep mail collections

Royal Mail has lowered the cost of sending a 2nd class medium parcel (2-5kg) by over 50% from £13.75 to £6.29, for postage bought online only. The reduction applies for 3 months between 17 July and 16 October.

Royal Mail [states](#) that the trial is designed to test the popularity of the price, rather than being a trial of the online channel, and that the price is only available online because it's easier for Royal Mail to execute. The move brings Royal Mail's 2nd class parcels price in line with those of alternative couriers such as [myHermes](#).

Recent Citizens Advice [research](#) shows that currently only 4-5% of individuals and 2-6% of small businesses pay for parcel postage online. This compares to over 9 in 10 residential (93%) and small business (91%) consumers who use a post office to send parcels.

Royal Mail is also [triallying](#) a new doorstep mail collection service for residential customers in four postal areas over the next 2 months. This is the first time that Royal Mail postmen and women have collected letters and small parcels directly from residents in urban areas while on their delivery rounds. Customers can give 1st or 2nd class stamped or online postage paid letters and small packets to their postman or woman for delivery, instead of taking them to a post box or post office.

Post developments around the world

- **Ireland** - New [research](#) shows 12% of Irish consumers have experienced issues with up to 10 of their online deliveries in the last year. The most common delivery issue was late arrival of a parcel.
- **Netherlands** - The Dutch government [reports](#) the postal market in the Netherlands has shrunk by 35% over 5 years due to the rise of digital communication. The parcel market has increased by 81%. To ensure the financial viability of the national postal service, the number of delivery days per week could be decreased or service providers required to collaborate.
- **Finland** - Posti, Finland's national postal service, [says](#) it will no longer deliver regular mail on Tuesdays. Posti said that Tuesdays are the day with the least amount of regular mail and deliveries are being reduced in order to avoid rising distribution costs. Last month the Finnish government approved a change to Finland's Postal Act which will permit Posti to reduce mail deliveries to 3 times a week in some urban areas.
- **Canada** - The Canadian government has deferred a [decision](#) on whether to restore door-to-door mail delivery to all homes until the end of 2017. In 2013, the previous government announced that doorstep deliveries would be phased out and replaced by community mailboxes. In opposition, the current government was critical of the policy, and on taking office placed a moratorium on any further conversions to community mailboxes.
- **Australia** - The Ombudsman for Small Business and Family Enterprise is launching an [investigation](#) into the prices Australia Post charges small businesses to deliver parcels. Although the national postal operator offers volume discounts for big customers, the ombudsman is concerned that the lack of options for smaller players is hampering growth in the domestic e-retail market.

More on Citizens Advice post policy work

- See our section on the Citizens Advice [website](#)
- Follow our Twitter account for regular updates: @CABPost

Post Offices Advisory Group meeting dates

Wednesday 18 October 2017*

Friday 8 December 2017

Thursday 1 March 2018

Friday 8 June 2018

(*this has been moved from initial date of 15 September)

Meetings are 10.45am - 2.30pm at:

Citizens Advice, 3rd Floor North, 200 Aldersgate Street, London EC1A 4HD