



21 April 2015

Consumer Affairs
Ofcom
Riverside House
2A Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Dear Sean O'Hara,

Citizens Advice Service (Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland) and Consumer Council for Northern Ireland response to Ofcom's Stakeholder views on Postal Complaint Handling and Redress

As the statutory representative for consumers of postal services across England, Wales and Scotland, the Citizens Advice Service and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland are pleased to respond to Ofcom's policy review of the appropriateness and effectiveness of regulatory obligations concerning complaint handling and dispute resolution in the postal market.

The consumer advocacy bodies (Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland) work across the UK conducting research and gathering evidence on postal user needs to deliver strategic projects that contribute to improving the operation of the postal market for all consumers.

In issuing our response, we seek to ensure that the regulatory conditions for complaint handling for letter and parcel services encourage the sustainability of the universal service, as well taking account of the growing sector of e-commerce across consumer to consumer and business to consumer sales which continue to change the mail sector both domestically and internationally.

To ensure that mail services can continue to remain a reliable, accessible and affordable form of communication for consumers across the UK in a time of declining letter mail volumes¹, complaint handling and redress needs to be 'fair and reasonable' in providing security and confidence for consumers. Regulation of complaint handling also needs to strike a balance with both regulated and non-regulated postal operators who provide services to consumers in limiting the resource burden to manage complaint handling systems.

In order to support the views reached in this response, we have used a variety of primary sources of consumer information including cases received via the Citizens Advice

¹ Royal Mail Annual Report and Financial Statements 2013/14 <http://bit.ly/1z7NaxB>

Consumer Service helpline², a complaint handling survey³ and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) Bureaux case notes.

1) Do the existing complaint handling regulations (both CP Conditions 3.2 and 3.3) allow consumers to have access to information that enables them to:

a) complain effectively to their postal operator

In assessing the ability for consumers to complain effectively to their postal operator, we note that CP condition 3.2⁴ contains basic requirements for complaint handling in the postal market which require minimal regulatory compliance for all postal operators. While regulated postal operators are subject to additional requirements detailed in CP Condition 3.3.⁵

Yet, in order to enable consumers to complain effectively requires consumer to know how to complain which is made possible by the adequate visibility of operators' complaint processes and procedures, regardless of which category they fall into. Closely linked to this is ensuring complaint handling procedures are accessible to all consumers. It is also important that complaint handling processes are made clear and easy to understand so that complainants are not deterred from escalating their problem if necessary.

The consumer protection conditions for postal complaints can make a significant contribution by exploring further ways to improve visibility by looking at other markets and how they place requirements on service providers to ensure consumers are notified of the existence of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes.

For example, the Ofcom Approved Code of Practice for Complaints Handling for Communications Providers⁶ outlines how the complaint handling process must be transparent, effective, accessible and facilitate appropriate access to ADR. The Code provides minimum standards and a guidance which explains how Communication Providers can fulfil the requirements such as 'a Communications Provider's primary webpage for existing customers is intended to ensure that consumers can easily and logically locate a copy of the Code on their Communications Provider's website' and that consumers should not be unduly deterred from making complaints through intentional or

² The Consumer Service Helpline operates across England, Wales and Scotland.

³ A survey of consumer experience of complaint handling for letter and parcel services was issued via the Citizens Advice Guide in England, Wales and Scotland on March 31st 2015. The same survey was issued by CCNI via their website on March 31st 2015 and results were combined to provide UK-wide findings. This survey is currently ongoing and for the purposes of responding to this letter, the results were gathered up until 17th April 2015 when the total number of responses was 142. The survey is due to be completed at the end of June 2015. We are aware this is a low base for responses and not a substitute for robust research, but the survey was designed with the purpose to provide a snapshot of how consumers feel their needs are met regarding postal complaints and redress at the time of this call for evidence by Ofcom.

⁴ CP Condition 3.2: 'A postal operator shall establish, make available and comply with transparent, simple and inexpensive procedures for dealing with complaints of consumers of postal services, which facilitate the fair and prompt settlement of disputes'.

⁵ CP Condition 3.3 imposes several additional obligations on regulated postal operators including a complaints handling procedure; review of the procedure; record-keeping requirements for complaints; notice of referral to qualifying redress scheme; various associated requirements around publications and reporting of complaint handling procedures.

⁶ The Ofcom Approved Code of Practice for Complaints Handling: <http://bit.ly/1bkZNBV>

unintentional process obstacles to prevent consumers from contacting the CP to make the Complaint or to check on progress.⁷ As some Consumer Service case notes⁸ have highlighted that making a postal complaint around parcel services can be time consuming and complicated given the multiple potential players (trader, postal operator, sender and receiver) in the sending and delivery of parcels.

As highlighted by the Code established for Communications Provider's if complaint procedures are not adequately represented in consumer protection conditions for post, and complaint procedures not made clear by postal operators then this will significantly undermine a consumer's ability to effectively voice concerns about service issues and failure. Thus in considering the basic nature of CP condition 3.2 for all postal operators it is our view that there is scope for improvement which will benefit consumers. CP condition 3.2 can clearly be enhanced and brought closer in line with those attributes of CP condition 3.3 especially those which focus on the visibility, accessibility and transparency of complaint procedures and process as well as ensuring the responsive handling of consumer complaints.

CP condition 3.3 places more detailed complaint handling obligations on regulated postal operators, and our report *Delivering satisfaction: Complaint handling in the postal market*⁹ found some extent overlap with the British Standards key principles of good complaint handling.¹⁰ However, we also identified that the continual improvement principle¹¹, which stipulates the key role of accurate and meaningful data collection and analysis so that there is a continuous cycle of ongoing improvement to the quality of the service, could be better reflected in the regulatory framework which would help tackle the root cause issues. We concluded that CP 3.3 provides the foundation for postal operators to build upon and represent the minimum requirements. It is also equally important to assess whether the more robust conditions could be improved and if specific aspects can be strengthened. As in the Code established for Communications Providers, we feel that clearer guidance and focus on transparency, accessibility and consumer awareness of access to redress would be helpful to consumers and also build on trust in the use of postal services, which have expanded beyond letter services with the growth of e-commerce.

The UK Consumer Advocacy bodies believe it is important to understand the consumers' experience of complaint handling to establish if the current conditions are meeting consumer needs. In undertaking a survey of consumer experience of complaint handling in the postal sector across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the results suggest consumers experience barriers to complaining which could be affected by the accessibility and visibility of locating information. Currently our key findings show that:

⁷ Guidance Notes to the Ofcom Approved Code of Practice for Complaints Handling: <http://bit.ly/1yK6ebR>

⁸ See Citizens Advice Consumer Service case notes, issue 1 and 2 in Appendix 1.

⁹ <http://bit.ly/1yaGW2O>

¹⁰ BS 8477:2007 *Code of practice for customer service*. BS ISO 10001:2007 *Quality management. Customer satisfaction. Guidelines for codes of conduct for organizations*.

¹¹ The voluntary British Standard 10002, *Quality Management. Customer satisfaction. Guidelines for complaint handling in organisations* sets out good practice, guidelines and principles for organisations across all sectors. BS 847:2007 *Code of practice for customer service*. This is reflected in the voluntary British Standard regarding postal services as well.

- 82 per cent had experienced an issue with letter or parcel services in the last two years. Half of those (50 per cent) that experienced an issue with letters or parcel service did not go on to complain.
- 48 per cent of consumers do not go on to file a complaint because it is 'not worth the time and effort', followed by 23 per cent stating they 'do not know how to raise a complaint' (23 per cent).¹²
- 38 per cent of consumers indicated it was either difficult or very difficult to locate the information on how to complain, with 43 per cent indicating it was easy or very easy.
- In rating their experience of ease of understanding and efficiency of complaint handling process, 37 per cent of consumers indicated the complaint handling process was difficult or very difficult to understand, with 19 per cent indicating it was easy or very easy and efficient.
- When detailing in relation to their most recent postal problem over the last two years, consumers were asked to select from a list the postal operator involved in the problem. 61 per cent of consumers selected Royal Mail as the postal operator involved in their problem but these results are not surprising as Royal Mail is the designated provider of the universal service in the UK¹³ which handles the majority of letter and parcel mail volume in the UK¹⁴ and also adheres to more detailed complaint handling regulations.
- 14 per cent of consumers selected Yodel / Collect Plus, which is not subject to the same level of complaint handling obligations as regulated postal operators. 8 per cent selected MyHermes, 4 per cent selected DPD and 3 per cent selected Parcelforce.
- 10 per cent selected that they did not know who the parcel operator involved in their problem was, which points to the difficulty consumers have in undertaking the complaint process for a postal issue given the many parties who can be involved in letter or mail services, from postal operator, e-retailer, third party contracted parcel couriers and delivery pick up points.
- Although preliminary, the research highlighted that when asked if the postal issue related to an online purchase, roughly a quarter of consumers stated it did, a

¹² In the survey of consumers conducted across England, Wales and Scotland the 'Other' category was also listed as response and featured third highest (18 per cent). Reasons detailed included, 'Inadequate contact details. No complaint system'; 'I have complained before about open parcels, damaged parcels but I just get standard responses' and 'I am the sender and am not allowed to make a complaint yet as the parcel is not officially classed as lost until the 11th April although it was posted on the 20th March and sent tracked'.

¹³ Royal Mail has a duty to collect and deliver letters six days a week and packets and parcels five days a week to any address in the UK at affordable and uniform rates.

¹⁴ The volume of mail handled end-to-end by Royal Mail fell by 9.4% to 7.5 billion items, while the number items delivered by other operators more than tripled to 56 million. It represents less than 0.4% of total addressed mail.

quarter stated it related to an online marketplace issue and roughly half stated it did not.

Given the growth of e-commerce¹⁵ and the desire for a single market for parcels in the EU¹⁶, consumers and small businesses are likely to become more concerned about complaint handling for parcels as these could be higher value items as they continue to shop more online domestically and internationally. Parcel logistics also involve a complex logistics network, and knowing where the problem lies can be difficult for consumers as highlighted by this comment from the survey as to what their specific postal issue related to:

'Complex complaint. Parcel delivered to local [delivery access point]... it was taken back and attempted re-delivery while I was out trying to collect it from the [delivery access point]. I phoned [the postal operator] who assured me it would be delivered the next working day (Saturday). It did not arrive. Phoned again, they said it never left the depot!'

Parcel operators such as Yodel and MyHermes deliver to the end user through contracts with e-retailers, or by consumers sending parcels to other consumers, and their volumes of parcels continue to grow as e-commerce continues to grow¹⁷ in a competitive market. Yet as noted by this review they are not subject to the same level of complaint handling obligations as regulated postal operators. It has been noted in previous research by Consumer Focus Scotland that the resources expended in pursuit of a complaint correlates to the value of the item or service that is the subject of the complaint¹⁸, this could be reflected in low value mail items such as letter and cards, but could be different if a consumer issued an experience with a lost parcel worth a considerable amount of money as Consumer Service case notes have highlighted.¹⁹ Given this difference in the value of mail items, it should be noted that low reported complaint volumes equate to low incidences of issues across letters and parcel services, especially given that many parcel operators do not have to report complaint levels to Ofcom.

Therefore all postal operators should also be required to follow minimum standards for complaint handling. While the market can self-regulate to some degree and consumers may be able to choose which providers to deliver their parcels, or shop with e-retailers that they trust, this is not always the case and consumers in rural and remote areas may have less choice of operators and e-retailers to choose from.

As consumers send and receive more parcels in an increasingly competitive sector, where awareness of alternate means outside of USP offerings, it is important to consider whether the regulatory obligations placed on all postal operators provide an effective

¹⁵ Royal Mail's Full Year 2013-14 Results predicted a 4.5% to 5.5% increase in 2014-15 for business-to-consumer and consumer-originated parcels as a result of online shopping.

¹⁶ European Commission *Roadmap for completing the single market for parcel delivery* <http://bit.ly/1JYTrU1>

¹⁷ The IMRG UK e-Retailer Parcel Volume Trend has shown year on year increases in the numbers of orders despatched by UK e-retailers which could exceed 1 billion in 2015 if their forecast is met.

¹⁸ Consumer Focus Scotland, *Cause for Complaint*, June 2010, p.9. <http://bit.ly/1qnKkEJ>

¹⁹ See Citizens Advice Consumer Service case notes, issue 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix 1.

responsive complaint handling framework. As highlighted in the survey comments²⁰ below, it is not always the case an effective responsive complaint handling framework is working as well as it could:

'The person I spoke to would not go any further with my complaint despite me trying to explain that I felt my parcel had been damaged by excessive force despite being well packaged.'

'I was told my parcel was disposed of, then later after several emails I was advised it was given to a charity. [The postal operator] kept ignoring my questions. They won't answer if they opened the parcel or not. My details were inside as I was sending the parcel to get a refund and it contained my bank details.'

Many of the postal operators who send and deliver these items, whether through business to business services or business to consumer services, sit outside of regulated complaint handling requirements. Given the findings from the ongoing survey referred to on page three, as well as issues gathered across a range of regulated and non-regulated postal operators captured by the Citizens Advice Consumer Service Helpline included in Appendix 1, we feel more robust research into consumer experience of postal complaint handling by both regulated and unregulated postal operators is required.

Ofcom is well placed to consider this and should consider what lessons can be learnt from other markets it has regulatory responsibility for and more widely, in order to improve complaints handling in the postal market by ensuring consumers have sufficient access to the information that enables them to complain effectively.

Q. 1 b) where dissatisfied with the outcome take their complaint to ADR (only relevant for regulated postal operators)

Consumers are entitled to clear information identifying the presence of, and right to access, the external redress scheme if the matter cannot be resolved and the importance of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms is recognised in many markets as a fundamental feature of the complaint handling model across regulated markets. In the Communications Markets standards of complaint handling²¹ detail exists of how service providers should make consumers aware of option to seek resolution through ADR/Ombudsman schemes.

²⁰ Consumers were asked, 'thinking about the first contact you made regarding your complaint via any means (telephone, social media, letter, email), which of the following best describes what happened?' A range of answers were provided, which are listed in Appendix 1 and included the option to provide a long form answer.

²¹ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/telecoms/ga/complaints-handling-code.pdf>
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/telecoms/ga/complaints-handling-guidance.pdf>

The ADR service is a valuable component of the overall complaint-handling framework in the postal market for those consumers using regulated postal products. This is recognised by the CP conditions for regulated postal operators through the requirements that complaint procedures must describe complainant's rights to refer the complaint to the redress scheme when the complaint reaches deadlock or at expiry of specified time period. However, when considering whether the ADR service is accessible, the key questions that arise are:

- is the ADR scheme visible to consumers, and
- how can the CP conditions help make sure consumers can avail themselves of the scheme if they chose to?

Low usage by consumers has been a consistent theme since the establishment of the Postal Redress Service (POSTRS). In analysing POSTRS annual reports as part our report into complaint handling in the postal sector, the consumer frustration on the perceived powerlessness of Postal Redress Service (POSTRS) relative to postal operators was noted. In addition, the low number of POSTRS cases is likely due to low awareness of the scheme, restrictions on terms of reference, and premature contact.²²

This points to a need for greater awareness of the ADR and how it operates. It also indicates this aspect of the complaints process is not working as it should for consumers. Visibility of POSTRS is vital to help improve consumer awareness of ways to seek redress for unresolved postal complaints.

Ofcom should look at further ways to improve visibility of the ADR scheme through the complaint handling regulations by assessing approaches in other markets and how they place requirements on service providers to ensure consumers are notified of the existence of ADR schemes.²³

2) Are the obligations set out at CP Condition 3.3 balanced and fair, whilst allowing consumers to have access to the information (as described at Q1)?

It is important that these complaint handling obligations are met and they should not significantly burden the vast majority of regulated postal operators. However the disparity between CP 3.2 and CP 3.3 may have the unintended consequences of placing a greater range of requirements on much small local regulated postal operators compared to those requirements on postal operators which carry higher volumes of mail and have a more direct relationship with consumers whether they are senders or recipients of mail. As mentioned in response to question 1, we believe this disparity can be addressed by bringing 3.2 closer in line with 3.3 with careful regard for not placing undue cost burdens, which could be passed on to consumers in terms of higher costs.

3) Being mindful that CP Condition 3.2 lays down the minimum level of complaint handling requirements, should there be any additional requirements upon all or certain types of postal operators. If yes, then what

²² *Delivering satisfaction: Complaint handling in the postal market* Citizens Advice and CCNI (2014)

²³ The Ofcom Approved Code of Practice for Complaints Handling: <http://bit.ly/1bkZNBV>

should those requirements be? For example, should there be a requirement to provide contact details for the Citizen's Advice consumer helpline?

As discussed above there is scope to improve this to benefit consumers by bringing this requirement closer in line with those attributes of CP condition 3.3. For example²⁴ it is important to ensure that complaint procedures and process are:

- Visible – easy for consumers to locate
- Accessible – easy to understand and have various methods for consumers to make a complaint
- Transparent – clearly outline the complaint procedure in plain English including how to escalate the matter
- Responsive – provide information on timescales and have sufficient processes to deal with more vulnerable consumers.

The statutory UK postal advocacy bodies play a key role helping postal consumers across the UK and there are clear benefits in enhancing the current basic requirement so that any postal operators providing products/services to consumers as senders and/or recipients make the contact details of the relevant consumer advisory bodies available and visible.²⁵

The key benefits of independent advice from the statutory UK postal advocacy bodies include:

- Empowering consumers so they have a better understanding of which products and services better meet their needs helping reduce future detriment
- Supporting consumers when they need assistance with pursuing any problems they are experiencing
- Giving consumers more confidence so they can ensure their rights are respected when dealing directly with service providers on any issues by providing up to date guidance
- Increasing consumer awareness of what they can expect when pursuing a complaint and the availability of external redress if their issues remain unresolved.
- Supporting vulnerable consumers who seek assistance through the Extra Help Unit and CCNI

In relation to the last point, the statutory consumer bodies play a central role helping consumers in vulnerable positions which is a fundamental safety net embedded into the CEAR Act.²⁶ This underlines the need for consumers to be fully aware of the availability of independent advice especially when our current survey shows that one in ten (10 per

²⁴ Please note these are examples and it is important the regulations fully capture the principles of good complaint handling.

²⁶ Subsection (3) of the CEAR Act 2007 highlights the power of the Consumer Council to investigate or pursue complaints on behalf of vulnerable designated consumers
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/17/contents>

cent) feel that due to their personal circumstances they would require extra assistance when making a postal complaint.

Given our role, it is also concerning that our survey shows that less than one per cent of consumers surveyed stated they were told about the availability of independent advice who could help resolve their your complaint if not satisfied with the outcome from a list that included 'trading standards', 'consumer bodies' and 'alternative dispute resolution body, the Postal Redress Service (POSTRS)'.²⁷

4) In your opinion, is the definition of regulated postal operator still relevant today? If not, please support your views and set out how you propose that postal operators should be differentiated, if at all. Please feel free to submit any other information which you consider relevant to Ofcom's consideration of this matter.

The current postal complaint system is based on the postal market from a number of years ago – where letters volumes were higher than parcels. However, the definition of a postal operator is no longer limited to the conveyance of letters²⁸, and includes those operators who also receive, collect, sort and deliver postal packets as well as those who convey postal packets from one place to another.²⁹ Consumer protection has remained stronger for regulated postal operators. However, the complaints system needs to be more reflective of how the postal industry stands today – with the emphasis on both the non-regulated and regulated market given the growth in parcel volumes.

CP condition 3.2 relevant to postal operators can clearly be enhanced and brought closer in line with the attribute of CP condition 3.3 which places more detailed complaint handling obligations on regulated operators. However, further detailed consideration needs to be given to how postal operators should be differentiated beyond the scope of complaint handling obligation. As the definition of postal operators and regulated postal operators will have an impact on all areas of postal regulatory policy and Ofcom should consider a further consultation on this area.

At the EU level proposals for the implementation for a Digital Single Market Strategy will be unveiled in the coming months, and the Commission is committed to a more efficient market for cross-border parcel delivery. In order for this to happen, recommendations have included information platform on delivery services, e-commerce scoreboard on delivery and price performance, delivery aspects in e-commerce trust marks and improve parcel services in rural areas and interoperability of cross-border delivery operations.³⁰ Arguably all of these features if implemented would require postal operators to have enhanced systems for communicating with consumers and businesses including complaint handling processes.

²⁷ Consumers were asked to select all that apply, 'During the complaint process, were you given further details of organisations that could help you resolve your complaint if you were not satisfied with the outcome? Please select all that apply.'

²⁸ The Postal Services Act 2000 required that postal operators have a licence to convey letters that cost less than £1 or weighed less than 350g.

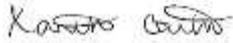
²⁹ Postal Services Act 2011

³⁰ WIK-Consult Study for the European Commission DG Internal Market and Services 2014

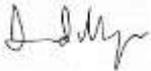
As the market will continue to change it is important that all postal operators have effective complaint handling systems which benefit consumers.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above further then please do not hesitate to contact us. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Ofcom to discuss the findings of our research when the survey closes.

Yours,



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Appendix 1

Citizens Advice Consumer Service complaints

Case note 1:

....I have been charged over £10 in phone calls and have seen from a Facebook group that [the postal operator] have given High Street vouchers in the past as a gesture of goodwill when phone bill charges are incurred. They have refused to provide me with anything although it is clearly their fault. I will now paste my letter sent to [the phone provider] as it explains the ordeal I went through, this has also been sent to [the postal operator] with a copy of my phone bill: I ordered a phone for an amazing £49.99. Bargain I thought. Wish I'd never bothered.

This is what happened... [The postal operator] tried to deliver on the Monday and Tuesday, I was unable to take delivery as I work in the week. I called and asked if I could change the address, have it left for me somewhere safe or with a neighbour. To this I was told no because [the phone provider] won't allow it. So I ask the parcel be sent Saturday when I would be home. The lady said this was ok and she would arrange it. The following day [the postal operator] attempted a third delivery. Seems the lady didn't do her job properly. So I called [the postal operator] and the advisor said he would arrange for Saturday. I called again on Friday because I have zero faith in the idiots at [the postal operator]. The advisor said the parcel would be with me Saturday. I waited in on Saturday between 7am and 9pm (as per the hours stated on [the postal operator] website). No-one showed. I called on Monday and logged an investigation with [the postal operator]; they still haven't got back to me about it. During this I sent at least 6 emails to [the phone provider], no-one replied. I called [the phone provider] phone number and at one time it hung up on me due to a lack of [the phone provider] advisors! I did at one point get one voicemail from [the phone provider] saying they would email me...they didn't. So I called [the phone provider] the seller]and was told I could change the delivery address. Great. Changed the address and thought I had it sorted for Thursday 11th September. Nope. [The phone provider] emailed me to say so and they would deliver Saturday....I never asked for that! Turns out [the postal operator] said as they had 4 failed attempts (I have no evidence they visited a 4th time so I think they just made that up) and refused to change address. So [the phone provider] just assumed id want another parcel sent on the Saturday, which I don't as I'm working. I also want nothing to do with [the postal operator].I would like compensation for the calls I've made to [the postal operator]. I have no idea how many or how long but it's a lot of time and money spent. I would also like compensation for the 14 hours I waited for [the postal operator] on the Saturday. I have just spoken to [the phone provider] and asked to cancel this mess and refund me; they said to speak with cancellations between 8am and 8pm. They also said they would send something to return the phone in after it's been delivered...AFTER ITS BEEN DELIVERED. They refuse to pay out for time wasted or phone bill charges...

Case note 2:

I took out an offer for a computer with broadband, I signed up for [phone provider] for [phone service] and broadband and they arranged for connection on 4/09/2014. [The phone provider] sent a router to me which states on its website that it could be posted through my letter box order... The router never arrived. I rang [the phone provider] customer services and they sent me out a new router.

On Saturday 06/09/2014 an incomplete delivery note from [the postal operator] was stuck to my letter box, the courier said they would make another attempt to deliver on Monday 09/09/2014, the left no contact details, as I was at work I contacted [the postal operator] on Sunday 07/09/2014 at 8am to request the parcel is sent to the [the postal operator] at the local [delivery access point], I also rang them on Monday 09/09/2014.

The courier did not appear to have attempted to make a second delivery to my home, they did not leave their contact details and they did not leave the parcel at the delivery access point. I have spent three days literally running around trying to find out where my router is. I assume the courier has stolen my parcel, yet no one appears to be accountable for the courier! I have received several unsatisfactory responses from [the postal operator] I would like my router so that I can connect to broadband and home and continue with my studies. I have had to use [an alternate phone provider] at an additional cost for several days even though I am now contracted to [the phone provider].

Case note 3:

I sold 2 wooden steamer garden chairs (£150.00) through [an online marketplace]. I filled the details in online but was somewhat confused as it asked how many items were to be delivered and I stated 1 parcel as I understood this to mean 1 delivery to the address stated. They were too large to fit in the courier's vehicle as one item, so had to be wrapped as two individual items. Both were identically labelled as only one label had been provided to be printed off at the time of order confirmation.

When the courier arrived to collect she did remark she could only scan one bar code but as both items were labelled identically they would be alright for collection.

My next communication was from the customer on 23/4/14 to say only one chair had been delivered. I had been tracking the parcel and have an email to say at what stage the items were, but at no stage did they mention that only one item was in situ. I immediately got in contact with [the postal operator] who sent me an email to deny all responsibility for the second item. The articles were accepted by my local courier, they were also accepted from her by the main courier, when tracking them from my end at NO point was I informed that they had been incorrectly labelled until my customer informed me of a missing item. They now claim that it is impossible to trace an article that had no label as the bar code of the original parcel has been deleted. I am at a loss as to how a parcel weighing 10kg and measuring 150cm can be mislaid in such a short time. They also cannot pay any compensation as their rules state any compensation can be for one parcel only and one was delivered in accordance with their conditions.

Can you advise me as to whether I have any rights as I realise there was a misunderstanding of their conditions which I do not feel were very clear. Is the onus not with the courier once they have accepted the goods into their keeping to honour their delivery promise?

Case note 4:

Hi, If you're not the right people to advise on the below can you point me in the direction of someone who is? Thanks I sent a package via [the postal operator] worth £250, and they delivered it to the wrong address and can't recover it. I claimed against them that this was a result of negligence which caused them to breach the contract as I can't be expected to foresee they would hand it over to an unauthorised person. I don't consider it to be lost in transit as they have confirmed in writing, along with an admission of negligence, that they know where it was delivered to and have that person's signature on the proof of delivery. They're restricting their liability to £50, and say this is reasonable as they did not know the value of the goods. Can they do that? I pointed them to the unfair contract terms act which explains you can't restrict liability for negligence or breach of contract unless it's reasonable - is their justification that they didn't know the goods value a reasonable one? It's worth mentioning that upon purchasing their services, I could not declare the value (I wasn't given the option).

Case note 5:

Client came in re an issue with the [the postal operator]. She had ordered items to the value of £44.52, with free postage because of the value of the order. The parcel was left in her recycle bin which was emptied while client was away from home. Client had to reorder the items and pay the same amount again. She complained to the [postal operator] and received a letter of apology which admitted fault and offered client compensation of £20. Client has not cashed the cheque and wants full compensation. She feels she is entitled to it since there is proof of delivery and fault has been admitted by the [postal operator]. Client [escalated the issue in line with the postal operator complaints procedures] and received a reply on 12 February stating that the maximum amount of compensation that she could be awarded under the [service used] was £20. Client wondered about contacting the Postal Redress Service.

Appendix 2

Complaint Handling in the postal sector survey

- 1) Where do you live in Great Britain? (Randomised)³¹
 - a. England
 - b. Wales
 - c. Scotland

- 2) What is your age?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55-64
 - f. 65 and over
 - g. Rather not say

- 3) Do you feel that due to your personal circumstances you would require extra assistance when making a postal complaint?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to say

- 4) Have you experienced a problem with letter or parcel services in the last two years? (If you have experienced more than one problem, please answer in relation to your most recent problem).
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 5) Thinking about the last time you had a problem with a letter or parcel service, which statement below best describes the issue? (Randomised)
 - a. Damaged parcel
 - b. Letter delivery loss
 - c. Letter delivery delayed
 - d. Damaged letter mail
 - e. Parcel delivery delayed
 - f. Charged the wrong price for letter or parcel service
 - g. Parcel delivery loss
 - h. Unsecure parcel delivery
 - i. Other (please specify)

- 6) Did this relate to an online purchase? (Randomised)
 - a. Yes, an online retailer
 - b. Yes, a seller in an online marketplace (e.g. eBay or Amazon)
 - c. No

- 7) Please select from the following list the postal operator involved in this problem. (Randomised)
 - a. DPD
 - b. Parcelforce

³¹ This question was not asked in Northern Ireland.

- c. Yodel / CollectPlus
- d. DHL
- e. DX
- f. MyHermes
- g. Whistl (formerly TNT)
- h. Mailboxes Etc.
- i. Royal Mail
- j. Don't know
- k. Other, please state if known

8) Did you go on to file a complaint about your problem?

- a. Yes
- b. No

9) Which one of the statements below best describes your reason for not filing a formal complaint?
(Randomised)

- a. Did not know how to raise a complaint
- b. Did not have the tracking number or certificate of posting
- c. Not worth the time and effort
- d. The sender of the letter or parcel dealt with the problem
- e. Other, please describe

10) How did you find out where to make your complaint?

- a. Found details on the website, where I made my purchase
- b. Postal operator website
- c. Sought advice from a consumer organisation
- d. Checked my receipt or order confirmation
- e. Other, please describe

11) What method did you use to make your complaint? Please select all that apply.

- a. By post
- b. Postman/Delivery Officer or at Sorting Office
- c. Online complaints form
- d. Post Office
- e. Social media e.g. Twitter or Facebook
- f. Telephone
- g. Email
- h. Other, please describe

12) "How would you rate your experience of locating the information on how to complain? (Scaled answer)

- a. Very easy
- b. Easy
- c. Neither easy nor difficult
- d. Difficult
- e. Very difficult

13) "How easy to understand and efficient was the complaint handling process? (Scaled answer)

- a. Very easy
 - b. Easy
 - c. Neither easy nor difficult
 - d. Difficult
 - e. Very difficult
- 14) Thinking about the first contact you made regarding your complaint via any means (telephone, social media, letter, email), which of the following best describes what happened?
- a. The first person I contacted resolved my complaint
 - b. The first person I contacted assured me they would resolve my complaint without me needing to take further steps, but this did not happen
 - c. The first person I was in touch with said someone would look into my complaint and would be in touch (and someone did email, call, send letter or social media response)
 - d. The first person I was in touch with said someone would look into my complaint and would be in touch, but no one was
 - e. The first person I was in touch with could not or would not deal with my complaint but referred me to another part of the business that could
 - f. The first person I was in touch with could not or would not resolve my complaint and refused to refer me to someone else, even though I requested this
 - g. The first person I was in touch with could not, or would not, resolve my complaint and did not offer to transfer me to someone else and I also did not ask to be helped further
 - h. Other, please describe
- 15) What is the current status of your complaint?
- a. Completely resolved
 - b. Partly resolved
 - c. Not resolved at all
 - d. Don't know
- 16) If resolved, how long did it take to resolve the formal complaint?
- a. Resolved upon contact
 - b. 5 days or less
 - c. 5 to 14 days
 - d. 14 to 30 days
 - e. 30 days or more
 - f. Other, please explain
- 17) How satisfied are you with the handling of your complaint? (Scaled answer)
- a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very dissatisfied
- 18) How satisfied were you with the outcome of your complaint?(Scaled answer)
- a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

- d. Dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

19) Overall, even if not yet resolved, how much time have you spent actively pursuing your complaint (including time taken for emails, telephone calls etc).

- a. Please record the time in hours and/or minutes below:

20) When you made your complaint, were you given further details of organisations that could help you resolve your complaint if you were not satisfied with the outcome? Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, consumer body
- b. Yes, trading standards
- c. Yes, alternative dispute resolution body, the Postal Redress Service (POSTRS)
- d. No
- e. Other, please specify