



## Post Office News - April 2018

### **Citizens Advice reports on disabled people's access to postal services**

Research from Citizens Advice looks at the experiences and needs of people with a range of conditions and impairments when accessing postal services. Our new [report](#) examines each stage of a customer's journey, from ordering online and home delivery to collecting, posting and returning parcels.

Our research shows disabled people are more likely to use the post as a means of contacting others than non-disabled people (62% v 52%). And post offices are particularly important to disabled consumers, with 29% of disabled people using a post office at least once a week.

We report on the most important issues for disabled people and focus on the personal experience of disabled people. Whilst we found many examples of good practice, some disabled people still face significant barriers to accessing postal services. These range from people missing deliveries because they haven't had enough time to get to the door to physical obstacles at post offices and parcel shops.

Citizens Advice will be working with retailers, couriers, parcel shops and Post Office Ltd to discuss the changes they can make to improve the experience for disabled people. For further details also see our [blog](#) or contact [gemma.byrne@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:gemma.byrne@citizensadvice.org.uk).

### **Post Office raises telecoms prices**

The [price](#) of some Post Office broadband and line rental packages are [rising](#) by up to 8% on 1 May. Calls packages will increase by up to 33%. The Post Office will waive its usual early termination charges for customers cancelling within 30 days of receiving a price change notification letter. [Other](#) telecoms providers have also recently raised their prices.

Post Office Ltd (POL) [says](#) it offers some of the lowest line rental and cheapest call rates in the market, and is one of the only providers to offer a fixed low price broadband service. It also states the Post Office has the advantage of offering in person, cash bill payments through the branch network.

Telecoms currently makes up 14% of total POL [revenue](#), increasing by 3% between 2016 and 2017. Last year's increase was due rising income from HomePhone and broadband services. Although e-top up and phone card revenue fell in a generally declining market.

### **Scottish focus on Post Office banking**

Concerns about the impact of bank branch closures continue to be discussed in parliament. A Westminster [debate](#) on banking in North Ayrshire again highlighted the role post offices can play in plugging the gaps. But MPs also raised concerns about the suitability of post offices in providing banking services, including issues around the suitability of premises, range of services and privacy.

Responding for the government, Treasury Minister John Glen MP stressed the size of the post office network and said 99% of personal customers and 95% of business customers can access their accounts at post offices. He said he would keep pushing the banks and the Post Office to do more to raise awareness of this service.

Separately, a Scottish parliamentary committee has launched an [inquiry](#) on the impact of bank closures on local businesses, consumers and the Scottish economy.

### **MPs concerned about high delivery charges in Scotland**

The latest Ofcom [figures](#) show almost a quarter of adult internet users now buy a physical product online at least once a week. Many of these transactions go through a post office at some point - 38% of consumers [use](#) a post office to return mail order purchases and 21% to collect items.

But MPs and consumer bodies are increasingly concerned about the high fees often charged for delivery to Scottish island communities and the Highlands. At the Scottish Affairs Committee [inquiry](#) into delivery charges, Trading Standards described surcharging as a 'substantial quality of life issue' which also affects small businesses.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) told MPs that on average people are asked to pay at least 30% more than in other parts of mainland Great Britain. Although consumers in northern Scotland are more dependent on online retail because of their distance from high street shops, CAS [research](#) finds 83% would be buying more online if it wasn't for the surcharge.

Citizens Advice Scotland recommends that parcel companies should consider collaborating to reduce their operating costs in the Highlands and Islands, driving down the prices charged to all consumers.

### **Taxes for cross-border e-commerce**

Some countries are starting to [charge](#) taxes for inbound cross-border e-commerce, as national governments are concerned that international online shopping may be undermining the tax base and disadvantaging local businesses.

Since March, a 25% VAT has been charged on all mail items to Sweden from outside the EU Customs Union. In addition, Post Nord will charge an administrative fee to cover the cost of making a customs declaration. Where recipients refuse to pay the VAT and the fee, the consignment will be returned to sender.

From July 2018 a 10% tax will be charged on almost all overseas online purchases by Australian shoppers. Whilst in Ukraine, new rules limit consumers to 3 tax-free parcels a month and subsequent parcels are subject to taxes of over 30%.

### **Other post developments around the world**

- **Ireland** - An Post proposes to [restructure](#) its post office network. Under the plans, post offices would be located within 3km of urban residents and in all villages with more than 500 inhabitants.
- **France** - La Poste is [opening](#) 2 post offices at airports, with 24 hour access to self service machines providing a range of postal services and cheque and cash deposits. Separately, the French postal service is [broadening](#) its role by offering more government services. Delivery workers can now help people fill out tax forms at home. Postal workers also act as driving test examiners, putting learner drivers through the theoretical parts of their driving tests at post offices.

- **Germany** - Hermes, Germany's largest independent postal service for deliveries to consumers, is introducing peak [surcharges](#) for shipments in November and December.
- **Europe** - The European Commission is to set up a website to enable consumers and businesses to [compare](#) parcel delivery prices. This will include domestic and cross border tariffs between member states and between providers.
- **Russia** - Russian Post has 42,000 post offices, but Russia's 9,000 alternative parcel shops and 850 parcel terminals now [handle](#) 15% of parcels. The number of parcel shops and parcel lockers is expected to rise, although currently no towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants are covered by parcel shop networks.
- **United States** - First Class mail volumes have fallen by 40% in the last 15 years. In the face of a continued decline in letter volumes, and generally falling revenue, the US Postal Service (USPS) is looking to for innovative ways to [integrate](#) digital features into physical pieces of correspondence mail. The USPS also plans to partner with state and local governments to offer [government](#) services.

### **More on Citizens Advice post policy work**

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