



Post Office News - July 2017

Performance across new and old post office models

As the Post Office is reaching the end of the biggest period of change in its history, Citizens Advice has [reviewed service standards](#) across the majority of branch types in the network. We commissioned 1,813 mystery shopping visits to post offices throughout GB between February and March 2017 and found that that the new branch types are performing in line with, or better than, traditional post offices:

- Disabled access is better at larger and new post office models but too often facilities that should be available are not being correctly advertised, signposted or provided
- Waiting times were lowest in traditional sub post offices, Post Office Locals and Mains. Shoppers visiting these branches were most likely to be served immediately. Shoppers were most likely to queue and queue for the longest at Crown and former Crown branches
- Single appropriate recommendations were provided by the majority of staff, after prompting across all mail scenarios. But staff were largely dependent on further prompting to reach the correct recommendation
- Parcel collection, banking and government services were available in the majority of visits. But 1 in 5 shoppers were unable to deposit cash

In our [report](#) we make a number of recommendations to improve the performance of post offices in the following areas:

- Clear communication and provision of hearing loops and portable PIN pads in branches
- Reducing queues at Crown and former Crown post offices
- Reviewing training to ensure staff are asking appropriate questions to determine consumers' needs before providing a single correct recommendation
- Ensuring branches are correctly delivering the full range of banking services

Parcel delivery services in the online shopping market

Internet shopping has grown significantly in recent years, and around 4 in 10 consumers now use a post office for mail order-related transactions. In a new [report](#) Citizens Advice explores consumer experience of online shopping delivery.

We found that nearly 7 in 10 online shoppers have experienced a problem with parcel delivery services in the last year, including delayed, lost and damaged parcels. Problems with failed delivery are also common, partly due to a lack of safe spaces and pick-up points for people who cannot wait in for parcel.

Access to redress is limited by low awareness and take up among consumers. This is exacerbated by a lack of clear information from many online retailers and parcel delivery companies about how to seek redress and a sometimes poor quality service when consumers do take action.

EU makes progress on cross-border parcel delivery regulation

The Council of EU Ministers has [agreed its position](#) on the European Commission's draft regulation on cross-border parcel delivery regulation. It calls for a website to be established which will display the different cross-border delivery rates on offer from parcel operators, making it simpler for consumers to compare and choose the service that suits their needs. Companies will also be required to provide different sets of information to national regulators, enabling them to assess and address market failures. Small operators will be excluded from the obligation so as to not impose an unduly excessive administrative burden.

The regulation's objectives are to increase pricing transparency and enhance regulatory oversight of cross-border parcels, boosting e-commerce under the single market. The UK Government has previously indicated its [strong support](#) for EU action in this area, and flagged the optimum outcomes as supporting British e-retailers to expand, increasing competition in e-retail and providing consumers with access to a wider range of products. More consumers in the UK shop online than in any other EU Member State. The UK e-commerce market is also the largest in the EU - worth [£133 billion in 2016](#).

The Commission [first proposed](#) the regulation in May 2016. To enter into law, the regulation needs to be approved and adopted by both the Council and the European Parliament. Citizens Advice will continue to monitor its passage through the EU legislative process, as well as the potential outcomes for UK consumers.

No change to ministerial arrangements for post

The General Election on 8 June resulted in a [hung Parliament](#), with a minority Conservative government being returned to power supported by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Greg Clark has been reappointed as Secretary of BEIS, and Margot James will remain as Minister for small business and consumers including responsibility for postal affairs and Royal Mail. Labour MP Gill Furniss will also stay on as Shadow Minister for postal affairs.

In its election manifesto, the Conservative party pledged to safeguard the provision of consumer and small business services in rural areas through post offices, while the Labour manifesto promised to prevent further Crown branch closures. The DUP manifesto did not make reference to postal policy.

Post developments around the world

- **Ireland** - National postal operator An Post has made [arrangements](#) to extend the frequency of parcel deliveries during the week. Consumers will now receive deliveries on weekday evenings as well as Saturdays. In addition, the company will increase the number of attempted redeliveries before directing customers to collect at a mail depot, from 1 to 3. Customers will be able to request that their parcels are left with neighbours or at another location.
- **Switzerland** - Swiss Post has released a [new app](#) called 'My Local Services' as part of a pilot programme running in 4 local government areas. The app integrates information about municipal services and events on a single platform, and will also provide access to physical services such as orders for official documents.
- **Canada** - Canada Post has partnered with PayPal to create an integrated shipping and payment system for small businesses. Users will be able to print parcel labels and pay for delivery online through their PayPal account, then schedule pickup from Canada Post, saving them the trouble of visiting a post office.

Citizens Advice annual report published

We have published the [annual report](#) on our consumer advocacy work, setting out what we did in the postal and energy markets in England and Wales in 2016/17. We report against the priorities set out in the work plan published at the start of 2016/17.

Citizens Advice consumer work plan 2017/18

Citizens Advice has a formal role representing consumers in the postal and energy markets, and this includes our post office policy work. Our work [plan](#), which sets out our agenda for improving markets for consumers, is available online.

Thank you to those who responded to our consultation. We take the views of stakeholders seriously and considered carefully the [feedback](#) we received, and have made revisions to reflect this.

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

As part of our role as the consumer champion for post, we host a quarterly conference on post office issues. If you would be interested in joining the group, please contact Annabel.Barnett@citizensadvice.org.uk.

