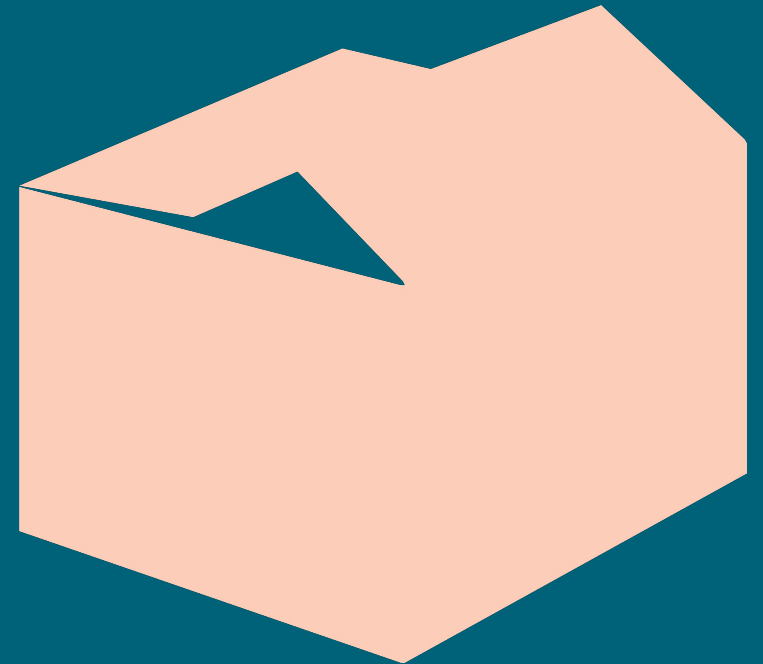


# The missing link:

Why parcel companies must deliver for disabled people

**citizens  
advice**

Charlotte Witsø  
Laura Clark



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# Summary

Online shopping and home delivery can be essential for many disabled people, but when parcel deliveries go wrong they can face significant harm.

2 in 3 disabled people in the UK experienced problems with their parcel deliveries in the past 12 months.<sup>1</sup>

Many disabled people find shopping in physical stores challenging. This could be because shops are inaccessible, they require extensive travel to get to, or because the store environment triggers stress and anxiety.

But we know that home deliveries aren't working for disabled consumers.

And, when things go wrong, there are serious practical, emotional and physical impacts.

Many of these issues with home deliveries arise because disabled people can't tell delivery companies about their accessibility needs in a simple way.

At Citizens Advice, we believe disabled people should have equal access to the parcels market.

That's why we're calling on delivery companies and retailers to allow disabled people to specify their additional delivery needs.

This will remove some of the barriers disabled people currently face when getting a parcel delivered.

*"Missing deliveries in general is just a constant reminder that you have a disability and how useless you can feel being disabled."*

**Antonia**

## Our recommendations

Citizens Advice is asking parcel delivery companies to do 2 things in the next 12 months:

1

**Enable disabled people to specify their accessibility needs** and pass these onto the driver making the delivery

2

**Clearly publish accessibility information** about their Pick-Up and Drop-Off (PUDO) points online



Click here to watch a video summary of our research

# Background

The spending power of the 11 million disabled people living in the UK and their households - the 'purple pound' - is almost £250 billion a year.<sup>2</sup>

Online shopping has become an essential part of people's lives and is unavoidable if you want access to the best products at the lowest prices.

Disabled consumers in particular can be even more reliant on online shopping.

For people with limited mobility, many high street shops can be difficult, or impossible, to enter.

For others, physical shops can be hard to navigate, and interacting with retail staff may be challenging.

Many people with mental health problems report that a busy retail environment heightens their levels of stress and anxiety.

For these reasons, and many others, having goods delivered to their home is the more suitable option, or the only option, for many disabled people.

But for these same reasons, when parcel deliveries go wrong disabled people can face significant harm.

As the watchdog for postal consumers, Citizens Advice is well placed to explore barriers disabled people face in the parcels market.

This report brings together our most recent research on disabled consumers' experience of parcel deliveries and sets out 2 practical solutions.

*"Shopping online is far easier for me because you can't always get access into the shops...It's far easier to flip me phone or laptop."*

**Charlotte**

## 2 in 3

disabled people had a parcel delivery problem in the last year<sup>3</sup>

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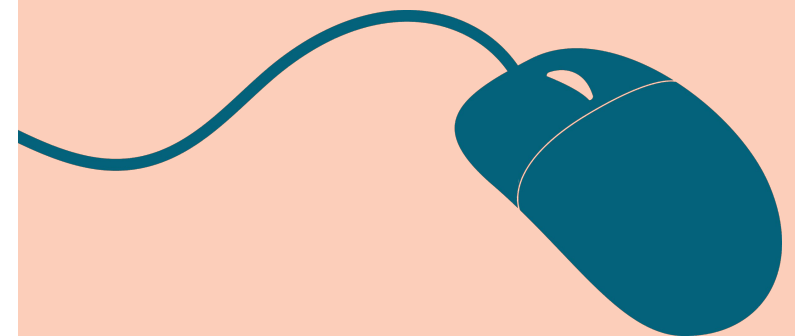
## 1 in 5

disabled people shop online because they can't gain access to physical shops<sup>4</sup>

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## 2 in 5

of people whose impairment affects them a lot shop online once a week or more<sup>5</sup>



**We spoke to  
disabled people  
about their  
experiences of  
receiving parcels**

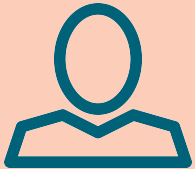


# Methodology



## November 2017

Survey of over 900 disabled and 990 non-disabled consumers about their experience of parcel delivery



## February 2018

Qualitative interviews with disabled people, delivery companies and disability organisations



## August 2018

Follow-up survey asking what information disabled people would like to tell their delivery companies



## September 2019

Online community with disabled people who had a delivery problem in the last 6 months

In-depth interviews with 6 participants from the online community

Following our previous research on this issue, in summer 2019 we commissioned BritainThinks to carry out qualitative research with disabled people who have experienced issues with parcel deliveries.

Citizens Advice undertook this research to understand:



The barriers disabled people face in the parcels market



How parcel delivery problems affect disabled people, both emotionally and physically



How delivery companies can remove the barriers disabled people currently face in the parcels market

We began with an online community of 23 disabled people who had experienced a delivery problem in the last 6 months.

This is an online platform where participants are asked questions about their experiences and can respond in a range of interactive ways.

We were able to find out about people's lives, and how problems with parcel deliveries affected them.

The participants were recruited based on a range of criteria related to demographics, their health condition and their shopping behaviour.

They took part in the online community from 3 different locations in England and Wales.

- Lancashire and Greater Manchester
- South Wales
- Greater London

We then undertook 6 filmed in-depth interviews to get a more detailed understanding of the problems people had experienced and what changes would help them.

# Here's what we found



# Disabled people don't have equal access to parcels

Disabled people face a number of barriers when getting parcels delivered, such as:

- ⊗ Missing deliveries because they're not given enough time to get to the door
- ⊗ Not being able to retrieve their parcel because it's left in an inaccessible location
- ⊗ Feeling rushed or anxious when signing for parcels

Disabled people might need more time to get to the door for a variety of reasons. For example, they might have limited mobility. Or their anxiety might mean they need to take a moment before they feel able to open the door.

If the delivery driver doesn't know this, they might leave before disabled people have a chance to open the door, meaning the consumer doesn't get their parcel.

Some find that parcels are left in locations they can't reach - for example high up on a ledge, or under a ramp. For wheelchair users in particular, this can make it impossible to retrieve the parcel without someone else's help.

We spoke to Denise, who's visually impaired. She finds it difficult to sign for parcels as she struggles to see where she's signing. She often feels rushed to sign and would like drivers to know that she needs a bit more time to do this.

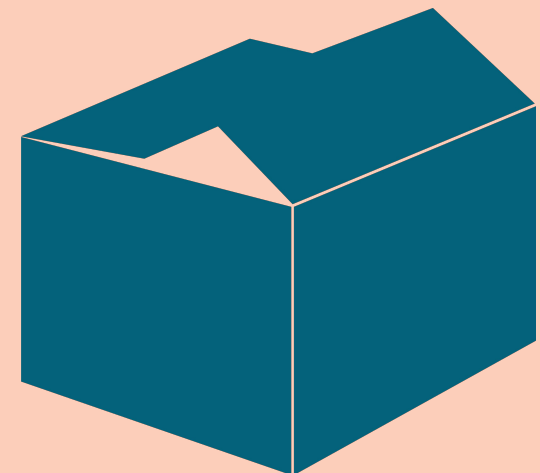
There are many different problems disabled people experience when receiving parcels. However, usually the problems occur because the delivery company doesn't have the information they need to make reasonable adjustments.

*"My health problems can slow down the length of time it takes me to get to the door, I know they have to deliver so many in a day, but they should take into consideration health issues and the elderly."*

**Andy**

*"I miss 6 out of 10 deliveries, just because it's such a long process to get from here to downstairs...to tell them that I'm here."*

**Antonia**





# Case study: Charlotte's story

Charlotte lives in Blackpool. She became a quadruple amputee 3 years ago after losing her limbs as a result of sepsis.

She finds it difficult to get to, and move around in, shops. Charlotte therefore relies on home deliveries and orders items online up to once a week.

*"[Shopping] online is far easier for me because you can't always get access into the shops. That's my biggest fear when going there. And making sure you can get around the shops when you're in there, that's the other one."*

**Charlotte**

Because of her condition, she needs more time to get to, and open, the door when she gets a parcel delivered. She also needs the parcel to be left in an accessible and easy-to-reach place.

Charlotte experiences issues with parcel deliveries because she's not able to tell delivery companies about her needs in a simple way.

Recently, a parcel was left under Charlotte's accessibility ramp. This meant she wasn't able to pick it up on her own. Her attempts to retrieve the parcel only led to it being pushed further out of reach. It was a rainy day and she had to wait for several hours for someone to come and help her. This made her feel frustrated and upset.

In general, parcel delivery issues make Charlotte feel helpless and vulnerable.

Charlotte says that being able to inform delivery companies of her accessibility needs would give her more independence. It would also reduce the emotional stress she typically experiences when receiving parcel deliveries.



**Click here  
to watch  
Charlotte's story**

# Parcel problems are more than just an inconvenience

Problems with parcel deliveries can have a range of practical, emotional and physical impacts.

Not only do disabled consumers face barriers when getting parcels delivered to their home, they can also struggle when collecting the parcel after a failed delivery.

For example, having to go to a Pick-Up and Drop-Off (PUDO) point raises a host of issues for disabled people: from getting to the location, to whether or not it meets their accessibility needs.

Having to rely on friends or family members to help retrieve the parcel, or to go to a PUDO, can be frustrating. It can reduce someone's sense of independence.

Parcel problems can also have an effect on disabled people's mental and physical health.

The negative physical and emotional effects often go hand-in-hand. And, sometimes, make each other worse.

**Mental health:** Worries or concerns around the delivery can cause anxiety.

**Physical health:** For some disabled people, stress can make their physical symptoms worse.

For some people experiencing anxiety, it's important to be able to prepare for the delivery and know when to expect it.

Missing a delivery means they may have to go to a neighbour to collect a parcel, which can also trigger feelings of anxiety or panic.

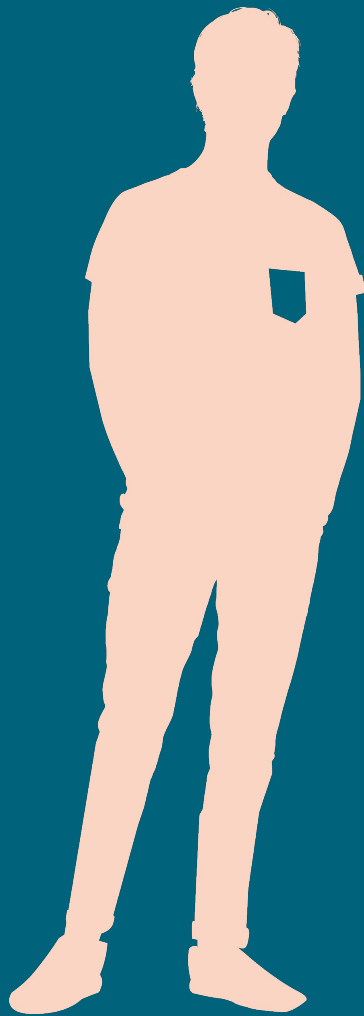
*"The **physical impact** is that whenever I get stressed or upset, it worsens my condition and I instantly get a nausea/anxiety sickness feeling..."*

*The **emotional impact** is probably the greatest - feeling useless, being upset at my disability and a reminder that I am unable to do things I once took for granted. It makes me very upset."*

**Antonia**



# Case study: Zaheer's story



Zaheer lives in Rochdale with his wife and kids.

Zaheer has a very severe form of eczema, which means it's hard for him to move around because his skin is inflamed and painful. He has to be careful not to rip the skin any more when he walks around.

He says he often feels self-conscious and anxious about his health condition.

He relies on online shopping and home deliveries because of the anxiety he feels when interacting with shop assistants in physical stores.

Zaheer finds it difficult to answer the door in time because of his condition. This means he often ends up missing parcels even when he's at home.

He also feels rushed and anxious when dealing with delivery drivers. This stress has a physical effect on him because it causes a flare-up of his eczema.

Zaheer struggles when items are delivered to neighbours because he feels too anxious and self-conscious to interact with them to collect the parcel. One time, Zaheer had to ask his wife to go and collect the parcel, which affected his mood and made him feel down.

Zaheer told us it would make a big difference if he could inform delivery companies of his needs and make sure that drivers are aware of his circumstances.

*"Having problems with parcels is not just an inconvenience..."*

*It just messes the day up, it messes my health up, and it's something that's not needed"*

**Zaheer**



**Click here  
to watch  
Zaheer's story**

# Disabled people want to specify their accessibility needs

Overall, disabled people told us they want to let their driver know about their additional delivery needs.

This could happen at the point of purchase with the retailer or post-purchase with the delivery company.

The most important thing is that this information is captured at some point in the customer journey and is passed on to the driver so they can make a reasonable adjustment.

*"For the driver to have more of an understanding that this person has a disability, it would give me peace of mind...*

*So they understand that there might be some delay in me answering the door. **It's about being able to pass that information on.**"*

**Zaheer**

Delivery companies must allow their drivers to wait longer at the door if necessary to meet the needs of disabled customers, and must not penalise them for doing so.

Based on our research, Citizens Advice thinks the solution could look something like this:

<p><b>Options for delivery:</b></p> <p>Would you like to designate a safe space for your parcel?</p> <p>Would you like us to deliver to a neighbour?</p> <p>Do you have any additional delivery needs?</p>	<p><b>Please let us know if we should do any of the following:</b></p> <p>Please be patient - I need a bit longer to get to the door</p> <p>Please be patient when you interact with me</p> <p>Please knock loudly</p> <p>Please leave the item somewhere easy to reach</p> <p><b>Do you have any other additional delivery needs?</b></p> <p>Please let us know if you have any other delivery needs</p>
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# Case study: Antonia's story

Antonia lives in London. She loves fashion and orders things online a couple of times per week.

She has multiple sclerosis and spends most of her time indoors. She relies on home deliveries because she can't visit physical shops on her own.

Antonia often misses deliveries. Because of her health condition, it takes her longer to get down the stairs and answer the door. Often by the time she gets to the buzzer to tell the driver she's there, the driver has already left.

Missing deliveries affects Antonia in 2 ways. When she gets stressed or upset, it worsens her physical condition.

It also has an emotional effect. It makes her feel useless and upset at her disability.

If Antonia misses a delivery and it's taken to Pick-Up and Drop-Off (PUDO) point, it's very hard for her to get the item.

She's not able to pick it up on her own, so she has to rely on someone to come with her.

Where possible, Antonia reaches out to delivery companies directly to inform them of her accessibility needs, but she often feels ignored.

Being able to specify her needs in a simple and straightforward way would make a big difference to her, mentally as well as physically.

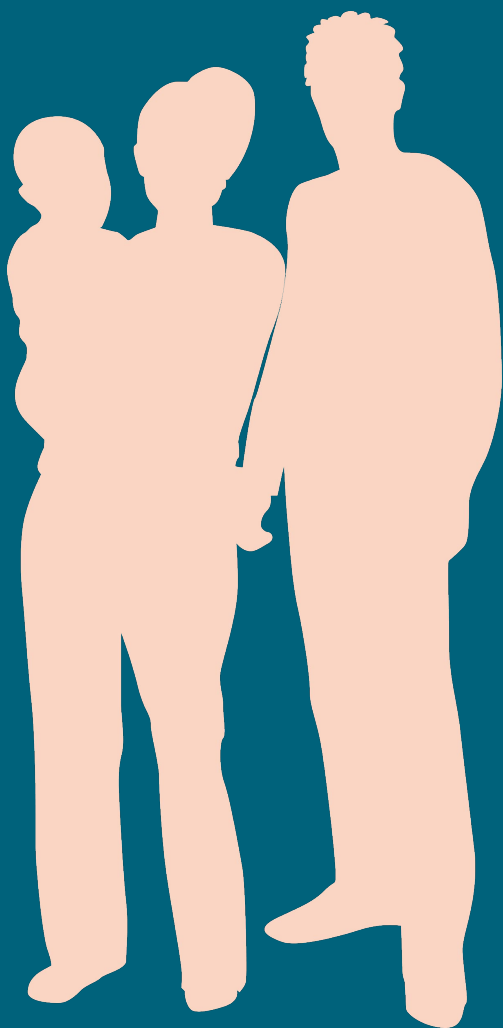
*"I think missing deliveries in general is just a constant reminder that you have a disability and how useless you can feel being disabled.*

*And that is just upsetting and demotivating and harsh to accept in general."*

**Antonia**



**Click here  
to watch  
Antonia's story**



# People want accessibility information about PUDOs

Our research found that if they have to pick up a parcel from a Pick-Up and Drop-Off (PUDO) point, disabled people want granular accessibility information to help them plan their journey.

Understanding whether a PUDO can cater to their needs allows disabled people to make an informed choice about where to pick up their parcel.

It also avoids the disappointment, stress and cost of a wasted trip.

For example, information about the availability of hearing loops at PUDOs can help a person who uses a hearing aid to find the right PUDO for them.

People with experience of mental health problems told us they want to know when PUDOs are at their quietest so they can plan their journey around quiet times.

Where some information is available online, we'd like this to be more detailed.

For example, a wheelchair symbol doesn't explain what the exact accessibility features are. It would be more useful to know whether there is level access, automatic doors, accessible parking etc.

It's all about providing disabled people with the information they need to know if a place will cater for their needs.

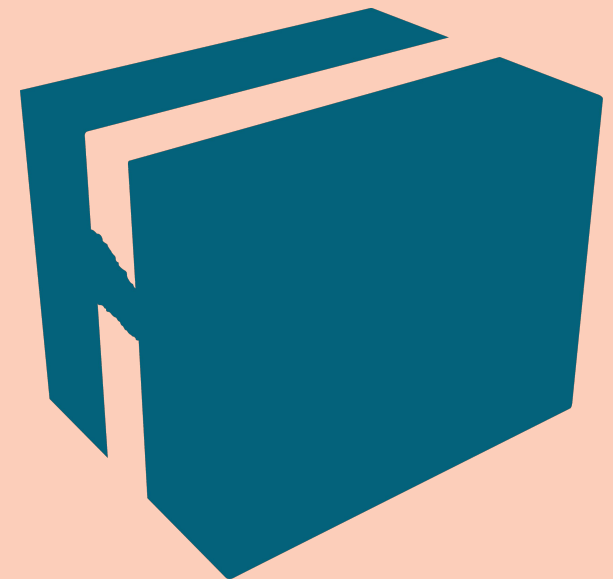
*"I would definitely like this ...accessibility symbols with detailed description [would] definitely help me decide which place is suitable for me."*

**Dinesh**

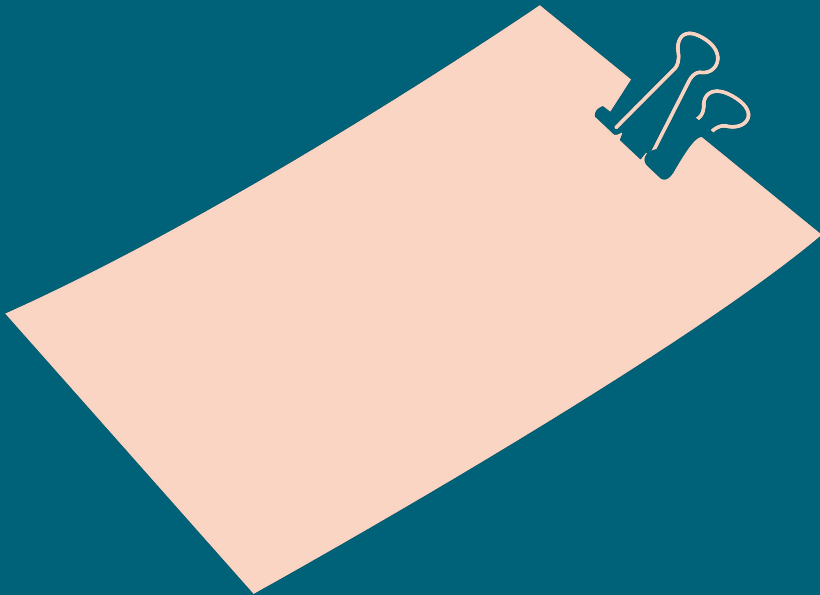
*"This would make a huge difference to me, being a wheelchair user as part of what scares me going into town and why I shop online is the accessibility."*

***If this information was available, I think I would use pick up points more to my advantage."***

*Charlotte*



**We asked parcel  
delivery companies  
to make 2 changes**



# Citizens Advice is asking delivery companies to do 2 things in the next 12 months

1

Find a way to **enable disabled people to specify their accessibility needs**, and to pass this information on to the driver making the delivery

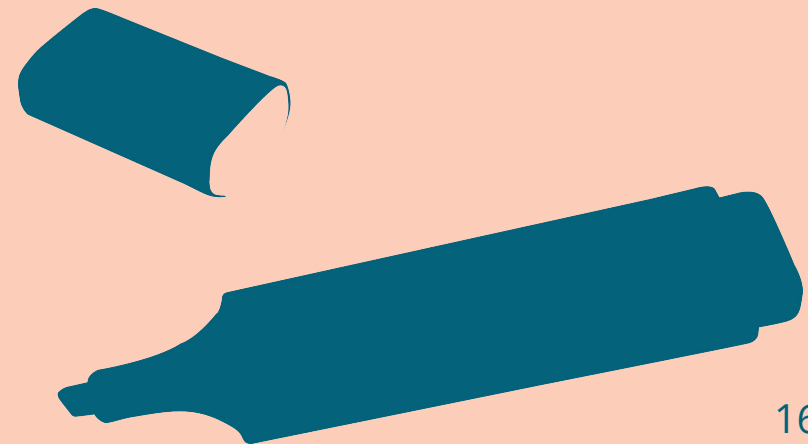
2

Where applicable, **clearly publish accessibility information** about their Pick-Up and Drop-Off points online

Charlotte says allowing disabled consumers to specify their needs would be a win-win:

*"I suppose it costs the companies more, not only to resend the item, but to pay for the couriers as well, so you know, at the end of the day, it's a win-win situation, if there was more information there for the courier in the first place."*

Charlotte





# 6 companies have committed to making improvements

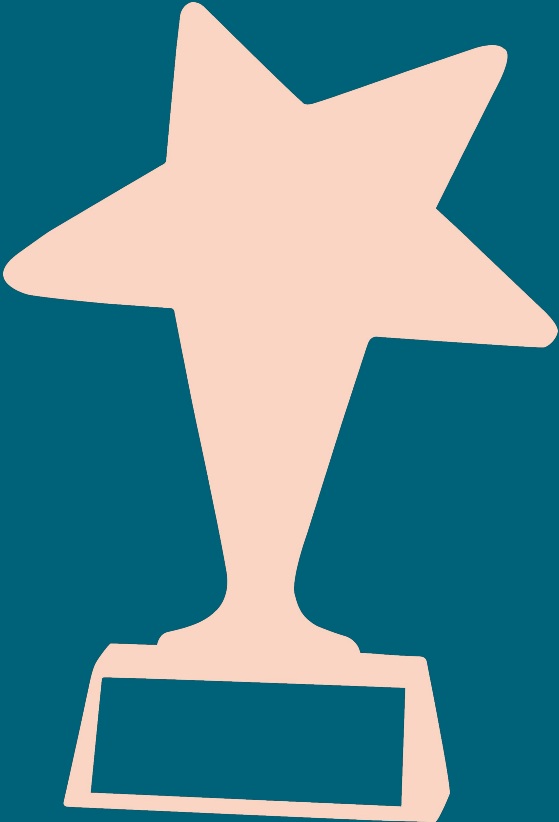
We approached UK parcel companies and asked them to commit to finding a way to allow disabled consumers to specify their accessibility needs in the next year.

We also asked them to publish more granular information on the accessibility of their PUDOs.

**We're pleased to announce that 6 companies have committed to doing so.**

**By making this commitment, these companies show they are working towards removing some of the barriers disabled people face when getting parcels delivered.**

Company	Committed?
DHL Parcel	✓
Menzies	✓
Gnewt	✓
DPD	✓
Parcelly <sup>6</sup>	✓
Hermes	✓
Parcelforce	✗
Royal Mail	✗
UPS	✗
Yodel	✗
Amazon	✗



# Next steps



**6 months**

Interim progress report



**1 year**

Final progress report



**Christmas 2020**

Disabled people should be able to specify their needs when ordering parcels

Citizens Advice will continue talking to and working with parcel delivery companies over the next year.

We'll be checking in with those who have made a commitment to see how things are going. We'll also continue talking to those who haven't committed yet, to try and encourage them to do so.

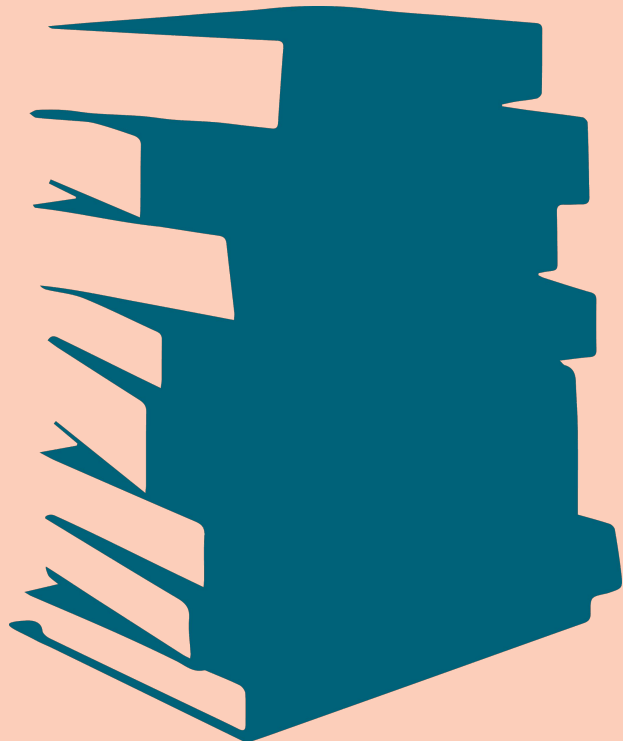
We'll publish an interim progress report half-way through next year, setting out what progress delivery companies have made.

Finally, at the end of 2020, we plan to publish a final progress report to announce which companies have implemented changes.

**By Christmas-time next year, we want to see real change being made and disabled consumers finally being able to specify their accessibility needs in a simple and easy way.**



# Appendix



1 - Citizens Advice, The market which isn't delivering: How the parcels market is failing consumers, 5 Dec 2019.

2 - Department for Work and Pensions, [Call for more retailers to become Disability Confident](#), 1 Feb 2018.

3 - Citizens Advice, The market which isn't delivering: How the parcels market is failing consumers, 5 Dec 2019.

4 - Citizens Advice, The market which isn't delivering: How the parcels market is failing consumers, 5 Dec 2019.

5 - Citizens Advice, The market which isn't delivering: How the parcels market is failing consumers, 5 Dec 2019.

6 - Parcelly is a network of carrier and retailer agnostic Pick-up and Drop-off locations. Citizens Advice have asked Parcelly to sign up to the 2nd part of our pledge: making accessibility information at PUDO points more granular.

**Free, confidential advice.**

**Whoever you are.**

We help people overcome their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.



**[citizensadvice.org.uk](https://citizensadvice.org.uk)**

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