

4. Sending post

Sending a letter or parcel introduces choices and decisions for consumers. Key factors are:

- what they're sending - is it restricted or prohibited, or valuable, is there a weight limit
- the speed their item will travel at
- how much to spend on postage
- where they'll post the item
- which postal operator to use
- protecting their item - packaging and insurance

Watch [Royal Mail's top tips](#) for getting your mail ready to send.

4.1 Checklist for sending an item

4.2 Surcharges

4.3 Delivery services linked to online marketplaces

4.4 Returns












4.5 Security

4.6 Customs

4.7 British Forces Post Office

4.8 Articles for the Blind

4.1 Checklist for sending an item

	Take a photo of your item to show it's condition before you packaged it
	Check the address and write it clearly
	Include a return address, ideally on the back of your item
	Check what you're sending isn't restricted or prohibited
	<p>Make sure it's wrapped and packaged properly. Add a warning if your item is fragile:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRAGILE - HANDLE WITH CARE • DO NOT BEND
	Check your item's size and weight
	Take a photo of your item to show how you packaged it
	<p>Choose a service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how quickly do you want it to arrive • what cover do you want
	Pay for postage
	<p>Decide where to post your item:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postbox Post Office Pick Up Drop Off location Parcel collection
	Get proof of posting



4.1.1 Take a photo of the item

A photograph or video can show the condition of the item before it's packaged. No need if only posting a letter or card.



4.1.2 How to address an item

Each item needs an accurate address. Royal Mail's Address Finder tool lets people type any part of an address and match it with the postcode. People can use the tool up to 50 times a day.

Write the full address including postcode. It must be clear, legible and visible - on the front of the item or on a label attached to the front.

Royal Mail advice is for senders to:

- put the address in the centre of the front face of the item
- write addresses aligned to the left
- not use any commas or full stops
- only use capital letters for town and postcode
- write the postcode on a line of its own.

For example:

Example Name
House name or number and road name
Locality name if one exists
TOWN
POSTCODE

Don't obscure or make the address difficult to read. An address in the right format, in the right place, helps Royal Mail sorting machines process mail quickly.

For international addresses, use capital letters for the locality name, zone number or Post Office box number and country. Write the country in English. For example:

Example Name
House name or number and road name
LOCALITY NAME and ZONE number if one exists
COUNTRY



4.1.3 Include a return address

It's best to put this on the back of the item so it doesn't get confused with the destination. It means Royal Mail can return your item if there's a problem, and they won't need to open it to see who it's from.

Royal Mail recommends the return address goes on the back for international items. This is so it doesn't get confused with the destination address.



4.1.4 Check the item isn't prohibited or restricted.

Some items can't be posted for legal or safety reasons:

- prohibited items items that can't be posted
- restricted items can be posted - the sender must follow the postal operator's rules and package the item correctly.

Transport legislation makes everyday items like aerosols, nail varnish and perfumes, dangerous goods. Parcel companies might class what seem like everyday items as restricted. It's the sender's responsibility to check if an item is prohibited or restricted.

Post Office staff might ask about the contents of a parcel to make sure it's safe to post. Royal Mail's prohibitions and restrictions leaflet is available in post offices and online.

Sending restrictions

Please be aware of the following restrictions when sending an item with Royal Mail.

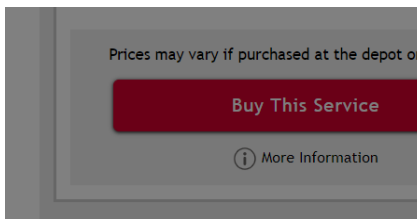
- [Package sizes](#)
- [Prohibited and restricted items](#)
- [COVID-19 home test kits](#)

Checking parcel contents is part of the process for buying postage online. How and when postal operators and parcel comparison sites do this varies. They usually ask buyers to tick a box to confirm the contents aren't restricted or prohibited. For example:

Royal Mail - buyer must click link to view information

I confirm that I have entered the correct weight for the items being sent and that I am not sending any item which is [prohibited or restricted](#) in the UK or overseas. *

Parcelforce - buyer must click 'more information' icon to view restrictions



[FULL LIST.](#)

Restrictions

An individual parcel weight limit is 30kg, but there is no maximum consignment weight for all options except Post Office drop off and Post Office recipient pick up where the maximum weight limit is 20kg. Maximum dimensions of 1.5m length and 3m length and girth combined.

For a full list of prohibited and restricted items, visit [here](#)

Hermes - buyer must click to say they're not sending a prohibited item and agree to terms

Doesn't contain any prohibited items

Doesn't exceed your chosen weight option

Doesn't go over the maximum size

I agree to the [terms and conditions](#)

Pay now

Fewer than 1 per cent of consumers click through to read the terms and conditions before they buy online. Not reading terms for online postage sales might mean a claim isn't allowed if there's a problem.

4.1.4.1 Consequences of not following restrictions and prohibitions rules

There's different rules for sending items abroad:

- Royal Mail, or other UK postal company, has restrictions and prohibitions
- each country has its own restrictions
- there might be international sanctions in place.

It's the sender's responsibility to check all the rules.

Sanctions are restrictions to stop the supply of goods, services, finance and knowledge. They can apply to individuals, organisations or countries. An item might get disposed of if the sender doesn't follow the sanctions rules. And the relevant authorities might investigate the sender.

The 'Sending country guides' on the Royal Mail website allow senders to check what's allowed. The government publishes information about current sanctions on gov.uk.

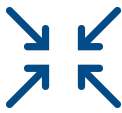







4.1.5 Wrap and package the item securely

Sending a card or letter is straightforward - pop it in an envelope. Sending a parcel needs a bit more time and thought. Packaging needs to be tough enough to:

- travel in different vehicles
- visit more than one sorting hub
- ride several miles of conveyor belt
- go through automatic scanners.

Inadequate packaging can affect eligibility for compensation so it's worth getting it right.

Think about...		Use....
	Size of packaging	a box or bag that doesn't leave lots of space inside, closes easily and keeps its shape. shredded paper or polystyrene chips to fill any space inside the package
	Sharp edges or odd shapes	a padded envelope or wrap before putting into a box
	Weight of the item	a bag or box that's strong enough
	If it might be fragile	appropriate wrapping so the items don't touch each other, or the side of the container a fragile or do not bend sticker
	How secure it is	parcel tape to seal all edges and openings a piece of paper with the sender's name, address and phone number and the destination name and address
	How it's labelled	correct address format something to cover up labels on reused packaging



4.1.6 Check the item's size and weight

The cost of postage depends on how:

- quickly the item gets delivered
- heavy the item is
- much compensation is available if it gets damaged or lost.

The cost of Royal Mail First and Second Class (including Signed For) also varies by format (shape, size and weight):

- Letters - up to 100g, 24cm long x 16.5cm wide x 0.5cm thick
- Large letters - up to 750g, 35.3cm long x 25cm wide x 2.5cm thick
- Small parcels - up to 2kg, 45cm long x 35cm wide x 16cm deep
- Medium parcels - up to 20kg, 61cm long x 46cm wide x 46cm deep
- Parcelforce services are available for larger items
- Rolled and cylinder shaped items have different restrictions



4.1.7 Take a photo

Proof of how the item was packaged and addressed will be important if it gets lost or damaged. A photograph or video can show this.



4.1.8 Speed and cover

Delivery speeds and protection for problems vary between delivery services.

Royal Mail aim to deliver:

- First class (including Signed For) - the next working day after posting
- Second class (including Signed For) - within 3 working days after posting
- Special Delivery - by 1pm the next working day after posting
- Incoming items from the EU - within 5 working days after posting
- Incoming items from rest of the world - within a reasonable period
- Outgoing items to the EU - fast services within 5 working days after posting, slow services within 30 days after posting
- Outgoing items from rest of the world - fast services within 7 days after posting, slow services within 72 days after posting
- Articles for the Blind - the next working day after posting

Deliveries - in the UK and abroad - are affected by issues and incidents. Royal Mail publishes service updates for the UK and an International Incident Bulletin.

Royal Mail standard services include compensation up to £20. Special Delivery is for sending valuables and offers more cover:

- Special Delivery by 9am - up to £50
- Special Delivery by 1pm - up to £500.

Valuables are defined in Royal Mail schemes. The definition includes money, jewellery, tickets, vouchers, postal orders and unused stamps.

The extra protection must be part of the original sale - it can't be added afterwards. Standard cover for other parcel delivery companies varies. They also offer cover up to the value of the item.

Check what's included and excluded for both standard and extra cover. Fragile items are often excluded from compensation.

Parcel comparison sites allow consumers to compare prices offered by different delivery companies. Comparison sites include Parcel2Go, parcelhero, ParcelCompare, Parcel Monkey, My Parcel Delivery and ParcelBroker. This isn't an exhaustive list and the consumer service doesn't recommend specific services or companies.

Consumers can check comparison site terms and conditions to see if:

- they contract directly with the site
- the site acts as an agent for the chosen delivery company.



4.1.9 Pay for postage

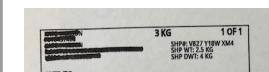
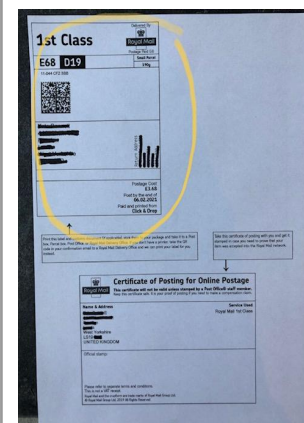
Postage is how much it costs to send an item. Something gets stuck to, or printed on the item, to show payment of the right amount of postage. Stamps and postage labels get stuck to items. Franking marks, postage paid impressions get printed onto items. Prepaid stationery comes with a postage paid impression.

It's free to send some items - Articles for the Blind and freepost addresses. Freepost addresses are paid for by the recipient. It's a Royal Mail service for businesses - users buy an annual licence and then pay postage for responses.


VAT doesn't apply to USO services. Royal Mail call this 'VAT exempt' in their policies.




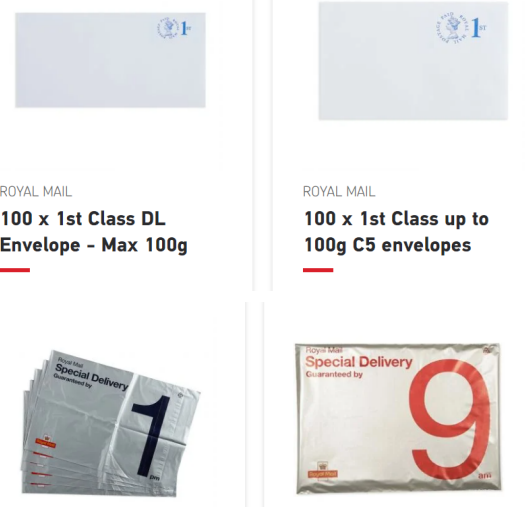
- stamps - buy online, at a post office or from a retailer
- can buy first class, second class and signed using a credit account - allows sender to post items without prepayment
- some 2nd class stamps issued with barcodes from 23 March 2021



- postage label
- generated by online postage applications, Post Office branches or a franking machine
- pay online, at a post office or by franking machine for Royal Mail services
- pay online for other delivery company services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • franking (sometimes called 'metered') • pay by loading credit on to franking machine - credit used to pay postage on an item by item basis • must get a licence from Royal Mail and follow franking scheme t&c and scheme t&c
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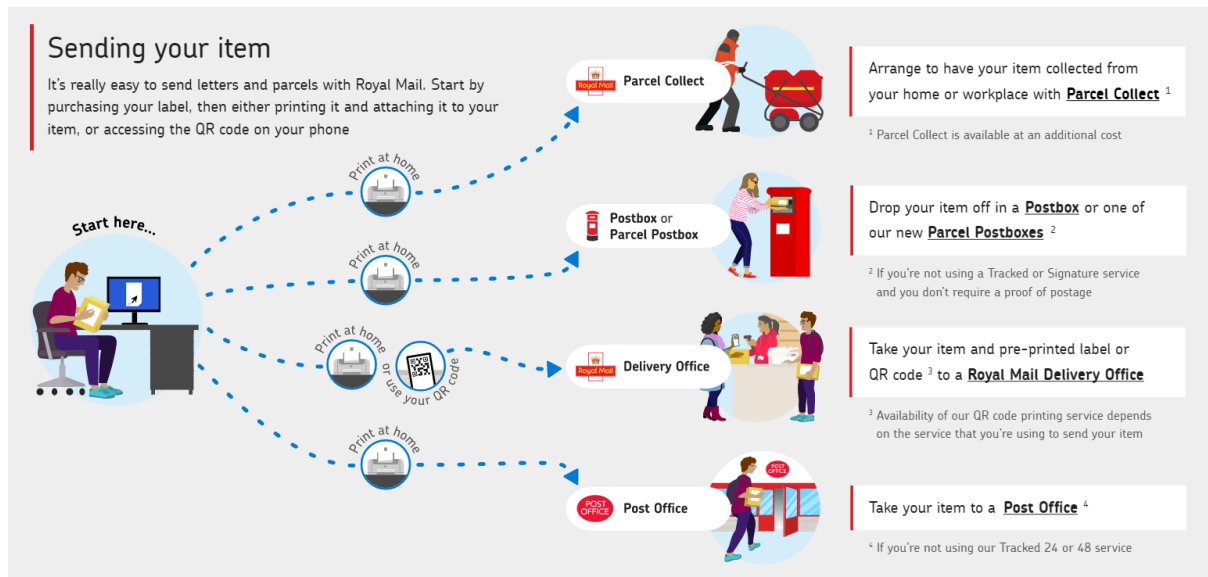
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postage paid impression • print postage directly onto labels or envelopes • pay with an online business account
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 <p>ROYAL MAIL 100 x 1st Class DL Envelope - Max 100g</p> <p>ROYAL MAIL 100 x 1st Class up to 100g C5 envelopes</p> <p>ROYAL MAIL Pack of 5 C3 Special Delivery Guaranteed by 1pm Envelopes</p> <p>ROYAL MAIL Pack of 5 C4 Special Delivery Guaranteed by 9 am Envelopes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepaid stationery • first or second class paper envelopes, service specific plastic envelopes
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4.1.10 Decide where to post the item

Items are posted - or sent - by taking them to a drop off point or getting them collected from home. Royal Mail drop off points are post boxes, delivery offices and post offices. Drop off points for other operators are shops and parcel lockers. This infographic shows different options for posting items with Royal Mail.



Source: <https://send.royalmail.com/>

Post boxes

Ofcom's definition of letter boxes uses the words 'pillar box, wall box or other receptacle'. A pillar box is a traditional free standing letter box. Wall boxes - letter boxes within walls - designed to be easy to empty from inside a post office. Lamp boxes attach to lamp posts and were introduced to meet a demand for more convenient posting facilities.

Royal Mail must provide enough post boxes so 98% of premises have a post box within half a mile.

Royal Mail maintains most post boxes, which are usually red. Some are different colours to represent sporting achievements:

- gold - Britain's 2012 Olympic and Paralympic champions
- white - the England men's and women's teams holding the ICC Cricket World Cup winners' titles simultaneously in 2019

Private post boxes are authorised for use as a post box but owned and maintained by someone else. For example, a post box inside a supermarket.

Royal Mail introduced parcel post boxes in 2019 - they have a bigger opening so parcels fit in. The advantage is 24/7 availability but not getting proof of postage is a disadvantage. It's safest for a consumer to send their parcel in a way that they get proof of postage.

Royal Mail collects post from post boxes and post boxes as part of the USO. They collect post Monday to Saturday. The information on a post box tells people when the next collection is. Collections happen throughout the day and times vary depending on the area. Monday to Friday collections are:

City or town	9am to 6:30pm
Areas with lots of businesses - known as commercial	9am to 7:30pm
Very rural areas - for example, where there aren't many people	9am to 4pm
Rest of the UK	9am to 5:30pm

Saturday collections are 7:30am to 1:30pm. Royal Mail temporarily introduced Sunday collections and extra Saturday collections to support the national Covid testing programme. The extra collections were from priority postboxes - identified by a special sticker.

Collection exemptions

There's no collections:

- on public holidays
- in geographical conditions or circumstances Ofcom agrees are exceptional.

Royal Mail's ability to collect from some locations might be restricted by access or security issues, or a customer request. Royal Mail must follow Ofcom rules for these situations. The rules cover:

- reporting to Ofcom
- notifying customers
- appeals and reviews
- how to set up alternative collection arrangements.

Reasons Royal Mail might need to remove or stop collecting from a post box include:

- a risk to the safety of Royal Mail staff

- a reason to believe mail in a particular post box isn't secure
- building work means it's not possible to access a post box
- re-routing of traffic means it's dangerous to collect
- the land owner asks Royal Mail to remove a private post box
- a road traffic accident damages a post box.

When this happens, a notice on the post box tells people:

- why the box is moving or collections are stopping
- if the stop to collections is temporary or permanent
- where the nearest 3 alternative posting facilities are.

Royal Mail consults with people like local councils, land owners and engineering contractors. They aim to finish relocation and repair within reasonable timescales, usually 6 months.

Royal Mail tries to give 4 weeks notice of these changes. But events out of their control - like when a post box gets damaged or stolen - mean it's not always possible.

Exceptions in place for over 12 months are reviewed annually. Royal Mail has to complete the review and publish it on their website by the end of June each year. The information must include the:

- post box reference and postcode area
- exception that's been applied and when it started
- actions needed to overcome the exception
- date collections are expected to start again.

Individuals can use a 3-stage appeal process if they don't agree with a Royal Mail collection exemption.

Stage 1: Review of Royal Mail's decision

- Customer has 3 months to appeal from when they get the decision.
- Appeals must be in writing and the customer must explain why they want a review.
- Royal Mail has 1 month to complete the review.
- Customer gets written confirmation of Royal Mail's stage 1 review decision.

Stage 2: Review of Royal Mail's Stage 1 review

- Customer has 1 month to appeal starting from when they get the stage 1 decision
- Royal Mail has 2 months to complete the review.
- Customer gets written confirmation of Royal Mail's stage 2 review decision

Stage 3: Ofcom review

- Customer has 1 month to appeal starting from when they get the stage 2 decision
- Ofcom reviews the case and decides the outcome. They don't have a set timescale but try to resolve things as soon as possible. Ofcom's decision is binding.
- Ofcom communicates their decision to the customer and Royal Mail.

Customers can move to the next stage if they don't get Royal Mail's written decision in the defined timescale.

The appeals process ends when either:

- the customer and Royal Mail agree on the collection exception(s)
- the customer doesn't refer the appeal to the next stage in the right timescale
- Ofcom notifies both parties of their decision.

Other ways to send post

Post office

Buy postage and drop off items at the counter or self service kiosk. Consumers who send post at a post office get proof of posting, which can help later if there is a problem.

Royal Mail buildings - customer service point, delivery office, mail centre

Drop off:

- any UK mail that's got the right postage on it
- items with Click and Drop postage and postage bought on the Royal Mail app
- franked mail.

Royal Mail must provide enough access points - post offices and Royal Mail buildings - so 95% of people are within 5km of a place to drop off items that:

- are too big for a post box
- are going Special Delivery

- need proof of posting.

Business collection

A non-USO service where a business pays Royal Mail to collect their post.

Pick Up Drop Off (PUDO) point

Somewhere consumers can send or receive parcels. They're often a bank of parcel lockers, convenience stores or dedicated parcel shops.

Collect @ home

A postal operator collects mail from the sender, usually for a fee.

Drones

Drones - unmanned aerial vehicles - carry packages to a specific location and don't need a pilot. Drone operators can watch several drones at once to track each package for collection and out for delivery.



4.1.11 Get proof of posting

Proof of posting is something to confirm an item was posted and the date of posting. It includes:

- a certificate of posting - receipt from a post office or printed as part of Click and Drop postage
- an email or text message from a delivery company confirming drop off
- a receipt from a PUDO point

Proof of posting for tracked services will include a reference number.

4.2 Surcharges

Some delivery companies make the same charge for delivery to any customer, regardless of where that customer lives or where the goods are to be delivered. Other delivery companies charge different rates depending on the delivery location, or in some cases they exclude certain locations from delivery.

Locations it often costs more to send an item to - called a 'surcharge' - include the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Anglesey.

4.3 Delivery services linked to online marketplaces

People who sell on online marketplaces usually need postal services to send items. Buyers might need to arrange collection of an item if it wasn't sold with postage.

Some delivery companies and online marketplaces allow people to link their accounts. Online marketplaces use their bargaining power to offer cheaper prices to their customers. Delivery companies auto-complete sender and addressee details using information from the marketplace account. Transaction reference numbers are sometimes included in the postage label. Examples include:

- eBay linking to Royal Mail postage labels
- eBay Packlink - a price comparison platform that allows UK sellers to buy postage labels
- Royal Mail connected storefronts - Click and Drop postage links with Amazon, eBay, Etsy, notonthehighstreet, Shopify, WooCommerce, Big Commerce and Magento
- Parcelforce bulk parcel delivery solutions

Integrated services rely on the user agreeing to data sharing between marketplace accounts. Users agree to terms and conditions of the service provided.

4.4 Returns

Retailers must tell online shoppers who has to pay return postage costs. This applies if consumers change their mind, not if what they buy online is faulty. And this information must be available before the consumer commits to the sale.

Large retailers usually provide free returns. Options often include return-to-store and prepaid delivery labels for Royal Mail or PUDO locations. But not all retailers have physical stores or can afford these costs.

Prepaid returns mean the retailer is responsible for the return as it travels to them. Consumers just need to remember to get proof of posting.

A consumer paying for a return is responsible for it as it makes its way through the postal network. Factors to consider include:

- speed - how quickly the return gets to the retailer
- tracking - able to monitor progress of the return
- proof of posting - evidence the item has been returned
- proof of delivery - evidence the retailer has received the return
- insurance that covers the contents - cover if the item is lost or damaged
- drop off location - convenience of drop off location.

The value of the return and consumers' individual circumstances and the value affect their choice.



4.5 Security of post

Mail moves around the postal network as it's received, collected, sorted and delivered. Royal Mail must keep mail safe all the time and regularly review their policies. This is called 'mail integrity' and covers:

- the staff they recruit, train and discipline - including franchisees, agents and subcontractors
- premises, vehicles and equipment they use
- recording all reports of loss, theft, damage or interference with mail.

These rules apply to postal operators who use Royal Mail's network and handle mail items up to 250mm wide, 25mm thick and weighing no more than 750g. This means:

- USO services - letters, postcards, large letters and small untracked parcels
- other delivery companies who access Royal Mail's network at any point up to final delivery.

Postal operators handling more than 250,000 USO postal packets a year must report to Ofcom and the consumer advocacy bodies every year. The report must include total numbers of:

- loss, theft, damage or interference incidents
- mail items involved in the incidents
- prosecutions for offences related to incidents.

Ofcom sets rules for dealing with miscollected and misdirected letters - the Postal Common Operational Procedures. The rules say postal operators must return any miscollected letters - free of charge - to the intended operator or the customer. Code identifiers mean postal companies can identify one another.



4.6 Customs declaration form

Items sent abroad need to follow the shipping rules of the destination country. Local customs authorities use customs forms on items to check:

- the goods are allowed
- if any taxes or duties need paying.

Letters, postcards and document-only packages don't need a customs declaration form.

Senders must fill in a customs declaration form for:

- small packets and packages containing goods or gifts
- packages containing goods to the Channel Islands
- customers sending books to several destinations

Form CN22 is for goods worth up to £270 - there's 2 versions of this form:

- with a barcode - for International Standard or Economy
- without a barcode - for International Tracked, Signed or Tracked & Signed

Form CN23 is for goods worth over £270. Consumers sending their items at a post office can:

- ask for an adhesive plastic envelope to fix the customs form to their package

check with post office staff if the item needs 1 or 2 copies of the form.

Customers must take care filling in the form - mistakes might mean the item gets delayed or returned.

4.7 British Forces Post Office (BFPO)

Senders can use the BFPO to send mail to:

- serving armed forces personnel and their families
- an employee of the Ministry of Defence or another official organisation allowed to use BFPO

The government publishes:

- a full list of BFPO locations, numbers and postcodes for the Ministry of Defence
- a BFPO services guide

4.8 Articles for the blind

Articles for the Blind is a scheme for blind and visually impaired customers who are:

- registered as blind under the National Assistance Act 1948
- certified as partially sighted by an ophthalmologist, doctor or ophthalmic optician.

Charities who help these people can also use Articles for the Blind.

The scheme means its free to use First Class and International Standard to send:

- books, printed materials, letters and relief maps
- audio equipment and electronic media
- equipment like magnifiers, mobility aids and harnesses for guide dogs.

The scheme applies to mail items weighing up to 7kg.

Senders must:

- write ARTICLES FOR THE BLIND clearly on the front of the item
- address the item to a named individual
- include a return address
- leave the item unsealed - so it can be inspected

Royal Mail might allow sealing if the contents are fragile - customers can call them on 0345 607 6140 to check. Or post office staff will check contents and seal the package. They'll also issue proof of postage.