

5. Receiving post

Mail gets delivered to consumers and businesses by:

- Royal Mail
- parcel delivery companies
- leaflet distributors
- local businesses and interest groups, councillors and MPs.

Letters, leaflets and small parcels usually come through the letterbox. Larger parcels and tracked items usually get handed over. People expect or want most items they get, others are a surprise.

Recipients can often specify where they'd like a particular item leaving. They can also arrange an alternative delivery point - for example, a PO box instead of their home address.

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5.1 Delivery points

5.1.1 Royal Mail Delivery to Neighbour

Items Royal Mail deliver are considered 'delivered' when they deliver:

- or attempt to deliver to the postal address on the item
- to the person named as the addressee on the item
- to an alternative delivery point - at the addressee's request or an Ofcom approved location.

Alternative delivery points an addressee might request include:

- a particular neighbour
- an area of their property - for example, behind the gate or in the porch
- with reception of the building they work in.

Unsuccessful attempts to deliver are considered 'delivered' when Royal Mail gives the addressee the choice of:

- redelivery
- collection from a post office, delivery office or other Ofcom approved location.



A neighbour's property is an Ofcom approved delivery and collection point. Royal Mail calls this Delivery to Neighbour:

'We class a neighbour as someone who lives near to the address on the item. They may be a next-door neighbour or someone else who lives nearby.'

Our post people use their own judgement about which neighbour to approach or whether to approach a neighbour at all. They'll use their familiarity with their walk, previous experience, and signs of occupation such as a car in the drive, or an open window.'

It's an opt-out scheme so it applies to all residential addresses. Anyone who'd prefer to opt-out can tell Royal Mail by filling in an online form. They'll get an opt-out sticker to display on or near their letter box.

Royal Mail don't leave all types of items with a neighbour:

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1st and 2nd class ● 1st and 2nd class Signed For ● Standard parcels ● Articles for the Blind ● International items that don't need a signature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Special Delivery ● International items that need a signature ● Items sent using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ID verification service - must get delivered to named addressee ○ age verification service - if a neighbour looks under 25 and can't provide appropriate ID ○ Do Not Redirect service ● Social Security post ● Citations sent from the Scottish Courts via Royal Mail Signed For

Items they don't leave with neighbours go back to the customer service point. The addressee gets a red 'Something for you' card and can either collect the item or arrange a redelivery.

Liability for the item stays with Royal Mail until the addressee receives or collects it. So a recipient can make a compensation claim to Royal Mail if the item left with a neighbour gets lost or damaged.

5.1.2 Alternative delivery points customers can arrange

Redirection, Post Restante and Keepsafe are Royal Mail's addressee services that deliver the universal service requirements. They also offer PO - post office - boxes.

Customers can nominate a 'safeplace' for deliveries if they're not in. Safeplaces are used by Royal Mail and other delivery companies.

Redirection

- Mail is redirected from the addressee's old address to their new address in the UK or overseas, or a PO box
- A paid-for service available for 3, 6 or 12 months
- Apply online or at a post office - takes up to 5 days to set up
- Royal Mail put a sticker with the new address details over the address label during the sorting process
- Concessionary prices for customers on Universal Credit

Post Restante

- Mail is delivered to any participating post office free of charge
- Use the service for up to 3 months - designed for travellers who don't have a permanent address in the location they want to receive mail
- Items sent within the UK are kept for 2 weeks, items from abroad for 1 month
- Address format for Post Restante items is:

Addressee name
POST RESTANTE
Post office name
Full post office address
Post office postcode
Country (if applicable)

- UK residents need their passport and proof of address to collect mail. Overseas residents need their passport.

Keepsafe

- A way for people to keep their home and identity safe while they're away
- Royal Mail keeps any mail and delivers it when people return
- Apply online - can take up to 5 days to set up

It's easy to apply for a Keepsafe online and we will get you set up as soon as we can, though it could take as long as 5 days.

PO box

- A way for people to keep their home address private
- Mail can be collected from the local delivery office or delivered from the PO box to the addressee

Safeplace

- A secure, waterproof area of the property - out of sight but accessible for delivery
- A nominated neighbour

Customers are usually able to specify delivery instructions during the order process and/or after the item's been despatched. Communications between despatch and delivery are called 'inflight' communications. This is usually between the customer and retailer or customer and delivery company. Problems can happen if delivery instructions don't get transferred to the delivery person.

The delivery company will leave a card to tell the customer something's in their safeplace. Or they might send an email or text message. Sometimes they'll take a photo of the item in the safeplace.

Pick Up Drop Off (PUDO) points

A PUDO point is an external location, often a bank of parcel lockers, convenience store or dedicated parcel shop, where consumers can send or receive parcels.

A locker bank is a piece of infrastructure in a public place. Consumers access the locker to send or receive parcels. For example, InPost and Amazon lockers.

A convenience store PUDO is a local retail outlet contracted by parcel carriers to provide consumers with parcel services on its Behalf.

A parcel shop is a business whose primary purpose is to provide consumers with parcel services. For example, Mail Boxes Etc.

Some PUDO networks are exclusive - one delivery company works with one retail network. This was how the post office and Royal Mail worked. But in 2020 the post office signed its first non-exclusive deal with Royal Mail. It gives online retailers - and the delivery companies they use - access to the UK's biggest parcels pick-up and drop-off network.

5.1.3 Age or identity verification on delivery

Age verification

Parcels containing corrosive substances, knives and other bladed items can only be delivered to a person aged 18 or over.

Identity verification

Delivery of items sent using an identity verification service can only be delivered to the named addressee.

5.2 Delivery exceptions

The universal service means Royal Mail has to make deliveries Monday to Saturday. Ofcom allows an exception to this rule in:

- certain geographical conditions
- circumstances Ofcom says are exceptional.

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

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

5.2.1 How to appeal against a delivery exception

Customers can use a 3-stage appeal process if they don't agree with:

- Royal Mail's reason for not delivering 6 days a week
- the alternative delivery arrangements offered.

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 delivery arrangements for the address(es)
- the customer doesn't refer the appeal to the next stage in the right timescale
- Ofcom notifies both parties of their decision.

5.3 Charges before items get delivered

5.3.1 Charges for items coming to the UK from abroad

Items posted to the UK from abroad all go through customs. This includes anything new or used that's:

- bought online - direct from the seller or through an online marketplace
- bought abroad and posted back to the UK
- received as a gift.

Customs checks make sure:

- an item isn't restricted or prohibited
- the UK collects the right tax and duties.

Duties - or tariffs - are taxes charged on imported goods. VAT, customs and excise duties and UK global tariffs can apply to goods sent to the UK. Duties are calculated by Border Force on behalf of HMRC.

Online marketplaces include tax and duties in the price they charge. Delivery companies collect these charges for other sales and gifts. They can add a handling fee to the charges - for example, Royal Mail charges £8.

VAT is a UK tax included in the price of goods and services

Customs duty is a charge on alcohol, tobacco and goods worth more than £135

Excise duty is a charge on alcohol and tobacco

UK global tariff is a charge on imported goods that's set by country the goods are imported from

	Charged on	How much is charged	Who pays
VAT	All goods except gifts worth £39	VAT rate for	Online marketplace

	or less	goods	Seller if sold direct to buyer Recipient if gift worth more than £39, alcohol or tobacco
Customs duty	Alcohol and tobacco of any value Goods worth more than £135	Check with HMRC	Recipient
Excise duty	Alcohol and tobacco of any value	Check on gov.uk	Recipient
UK global tariff	Imported goods	Check on gov.uk	Importer

	VAT	Customs	Excise
Gifts worth £39 or less	⊗	⊗	⊗
Gifts worth more than £39 and less than £135	✓	⊗	⊗
Gifts worth more than £135	✓	✓	✓

Delivery companies will send the recipient a bill to explain:

- how much the charges are
- when the charges need paying by - usually around 3 weeks.

Items get sent back if the charges aren't paid.

Recipients can ask for a refund of charges if they:

- think the charges weren't calculated right
- return goods.

They claim by filling in form:

- [BOR 286](#) if Royal Mail or Parcelforce delivered the goods
- [C285](#) if another postal company delivered the goods - there's 3 different links to start the claim process in this form. This is because sellers can use different types of customs software - FPO, CHIEF or CDS. Users need to

ask the seller which customs software they used so they fill in the right claim form¹.

5.3.2 Charges for underpaid postage

If the sender hasn't paid enough postage the delivery company can:

- charge a fee
- hold the item until the fee gets paid.

This applies to Royal Mail and other operators.

Royal Mail charges a flat fee according to the size of the item. The fees range from £1.50 - £3.50. Charges for other operators will be in their terms and conditions.

5.4 Proof of delivery

Tracked services offer proof of delivery, defined as:

'A copy of a signature, or other evidence from the recipient to confirm receipt, obtained on delivery of a postal packet'

Other evidence includes:

- the name of the person who accepts the item
- a photograph of the item on the doorstep.

Proof of delivery might include age or ID verification for some services.

There's no proof of delivery with non-tracked services.

5.5 Mail not getting delivered

Not getting mail might mean:

- mail is getting stolen
- mail is getting delivered to the wrong address
- staff shortages are affecting deliveries.

¹ [Advice from HMRC via online chat 1/1/21](#)

It's against the law and Ofcom rules to interfere with mail.

5.6 Misposted and re-posted items

Misposted is when mail gets delivered to the wrong address. It's caused by a mistake:

- on the address label
- sorting or delivering the mail.

Recipients often re-post misposted items - known as 'return to sender'. Royal Mail returns re-posted items to the sender if:

- the original service used was a *us* service
- the original address gets crossed out
- there's a clear instruction to return
- the return address gets written on the item and is in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man.

They'll also return items they get back from overseas postal operators.

Recipients sometimes re-post items they've received for a previous occupant. The mail item needs to get the intended recipient not the sender. Royal Mail call this 'forwarding' or 'unofficial redirection'. They don't have an obligation to deliver re-posted items with 'please forward to' requests.

5.7 Undeliverable mail

Mail might not get delivered if no-one is available at the time of delivery. The item might need a signature or be too big for the letterbox.

Royal Mail will try to leave the item:

- with a neighbour - if the addressee hasn't opted out of Delivery to Neighbour
- in a safeplace - if there's one in the delivery instructions.

Other delivery companies will also try delivering to neighbours and following delivery instructions. And they might choose to leave an item somewhere else - for example, behind a gate or inside a bin.

A card will be posted through the addressee's letter box to let them know:

- who tried to deliver something
- where the item's been left or how to arrange redelivery.

5.8 Unwanted mail

Unwanted mail often gets called 'junk mail. It might be:

- for a previous occupant
- delivered to the wrong address
- solicited - this means it's asked for, or the sender has the recipient's permission to use their details in this way
- unsolicited - this means it's not asked for
- leaflets and advertising from local political parties and businesses
- scam mail.

Royal Mail has to deliver all addressed mail. This includes mail addressed to 'the occupier' and mail that's personally addressed.

It's a criminal offence to open someone else's mail.

5.8.1 Mail for a previous occupant

- Previous occupant should arrange redirection for their post
- Recipient can return to sender or pay postage to re-post

5.8.2 Mail delivered to the wrong address

- Recipient can return to sender
- Recipient can hand deliver - if that's an option

5.8.3 Solicited and unsolicited mail

It isn't possible to stop all unwanted mail but there are actions recipients can take to reduce how much they get.

Sign up to the Mailing Preference Service

- a free service that lets consumers get their names and home addresses removed from mailing lists
- the 'consumer file' stores details of people who've signed up
- stops solicited mailings from members of the Data & Marketing Association (DMA)
- can help reduce unsolicited mailings from companies that aren't DMA members
- using the consumer file is part of Advertising Standards Authority rules

Check consent given to organisations sending unwanted mail

- individuals have a right to restrict how organisations use their data

- recipients can check the permissions they've given to organisations - for example, about contacting them and sharing their details

Opt out of Royal Mail's Door to Door service

- stops all unaddressed mail delivered by Royal Mail
- Door to Door is Royal Mail's leaflet distribution service - businesses pay Royal Mail to deliver their leaflets with the post
- 6 weeks to take effect and needs renewing every 2 years
- opt out by sending a completed opt out form to Royal Mail

Opt out of the 'open' electoral register

Local electoral registration officers manage electoral registers. They keep 2 registers – the full electoral register and the open (edited) register.

- the 'open' electoral register is the version that's available to anyone who wants to buy a copy
- the register is updated monthly
- opt out on gov.uk or by contacting the local electoral registration office

Opt out of getting mail from charities

- sign up to the Fundraising Preference Service
- stops unwanted mail from charities
- starts 28 days after charity gets request from Fundraising Preference Service

Sign up to the Bereavement Register

- free service to stop marketing mail sent to someone who has passed away
- 6 weeks to take effect

5.8.3 Scam mail

Scam mail is covered in section 7

5.9 Lost mail

Royal Mail keeps mail for:

- 18 days - if they couldn't deliver it or there wasn't enough postage
- 21 days - if there's a customs charge to pay

They keep mail at the local customer service point. If it doesn't get collected they return it to the sender by the same service used to send it.

Mail without any sender details gets sent to Royal Mail's national returns centre. They open the item. If there's sender details inside they return to sender - unless the contents are newspapers, magazines or advertising.

Items without any sender details are kept for 1 month in case there's a customer enquiry. If they're not claimed after 1 month they're disposed of.

Any passports sent to the national returns centre or found in the Royal Mail network are returned. UK passports get sent to HM Passport Office. Foreign passports get sent to the UK-based embassy.

Terms and conditions for other operators will explain how they handle lost mail.

5.10 Damaged mail

Mail sometimes gets damaged between posting and delivery. Royal Mail - and other postal operators accessing their network - have to keep records of all reports of loss, theft, damage or interference with mail.

The rules for compensation claims for damage tell people how to claim. Rules for used services are in the Royal Mail schemes. The rules for Royal Mail's non-used services and other operators are in the terms and conditions.