

Question

Do you agree that there should be an exception to the universal service (i.e. no deliveries or collections) on 1 January 2022? Please explain your answer.

Response

Scotland's Citizens Advice Network is an essential community service that empowers people through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential, and independent advice. We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help, and we change lives for the better.

Citizens Advice Scotland has a duty to advocate on behalf of postal consumers in Scotland at both a local and national level. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on an exception for Royal Mail from USO deliveries and collections on 1 January 2022 in Scotland.

Royal Mail is required to provide a universal postal service six days per week, Monday to Saturday. This obligation does not apply on public holidays. 1 January is generally a public holiday in Scotland although, when this date falls on a Saturday, the following Monday is ordinarily designated as the official public holiday. The effect of this is that Saturday 1 January would be a normal working day on which Royal Mail would be required to deliver and collect letters. CAS recognises that 1 January is usually a public holiday in Scotland when it falls on a weekday. As a result, Royal Mail is requesting an exception from Ofcom.

As with last year's similar consultation, CAS is generally content with this proposal. However, any proposed change to services must not detrimentally impact consumers, particularly those in rural areas and vulnerable groups.

As such CAS would recommend that before the exception is granted/declined:

- Royal Mail should be asked to consider any particular impact this exemption might have for consumers, particularly those in rural areas and vulnerable groups.
- Ofcom and Royal Mail should consider whether there was any relevant customer feedback on impacts of last year's similar USO exception
- Any complaints data regarding any exemption should be shared with Ofcom and advocacy bodies across the UK including CAS, to inform any future consultation exercise.

We understand that Post Offices will be closed on 1 January 2022, and also that demand for postal services is expected to be low on the relevant dates, reducing the potential impact on customers. CAS also welcomes Royal Mail's commitment to continue collections of COVID test kits from priority post boxes during the festive period.

If the exception is granted:

- It must be clearly communicated to consumers and businesses across Royal Mail's channels well in advance of 1 January 2022.
- This includes on their website, social media, in operational statements to large business consumers, and at customer service points.

- We would encourage Royal Mail to request that Post Office branches display posters advising of all non-service days and ensure their Horizon System alerts counter staff (UK-wide) that deliveries to Scotland will not take place on Saturday 1 January, particularly for premium services such as Special Delivery, which are unlikely to arrive within the normal timeframe.