

# The Postal Consumer Experience

Postal consumers and the Network Transformation Programme in Northern Ireland

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# 1 Executive Summary

1.1 This report outlines postal consumers' experience in Northern Ireland (NI) of the Network Transformation Programme (NTP) and focuses on:

- The consultation process, how important it is to postal consumers and awareness levels of the process; and
- The quality of service postal consumers receive after the branch moves and changes to either a Post Office Main or Post Office Local. Two indicators are used to measure the quality of service:
  - customer satisfaction levels; and
  - whether postal consumers feel the service is better, worse or about the same as before.

1.2 The report highlights the main findings from independently commissioned research. This involved interviewing consumers accessing postal services at the new operating models.

## Main Findings

1.3 The consultation process is highly valued by and important to postal consumers, but over half are not aware that Post Office Ltd carries out a consultation about its proposals.

1.4 Overall the two quality of service indicators showed there are many aspects working well for postal consumers. For instance, there are high levels of satisfaction with longer opening hours, the new location and access to the counter. The majority are also getting at least the same level of service and, for some the service has improved. This is good news for those accessing the postal service at the Post Office Network in NI.

1.5 There are also improvements that can be made to the quality of service postal consumers receive. At a Post Office Main longer opening hours and access into the new premises can work better. At a Post Office Local the in-branch experience can be improved. We discuss these in more detail opposite.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

1.6 There is an opportunity to make the consultation process and quality of service work better for postal consumers. To achieve this:

- **Post Office Ltd should seek to increase postal consumer awareness of the consultation process.** Improving awareness will mean more postal consumers will be able to share their views and Post Office Ltd can build a branch network that better meets their needs.
- **Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail should work together to look at ways to improve postal consumer awareness of longer opening hours for those visiting Post Office Mains.** Nearly half of those visiting a Post Office Main did not know about the longer opening hours. Greater awareness among postal consumers which can increase usage of these branches will benefit postal consumers, Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail.
- **Post Office Ltd should improve access into Post Office Mains for postal consumers.** Investigating why postal consumers feel access into Post Office Mains is worse than before compared to Post Office Locals is important. For example, obstacles at the entrance may be impeding access. Understanding this will enable further improvements to the postal consumer experience and taking action will benefit those with disabilities.
- **Post Office Ltd should take action to make Post Office Locals work better for postal consumers.** It should focus on the attributes with lower satisfaction levels and where postal consumers feel the service is worse than before especially when compared to the performance of the main model. These are:
  - The layout of the post office;
  - Privacy;
  - Queuing;
  - Staff knowledge; and
  - Customer service.

- **Royal Mail should explore how it can help improve the in-branch postal consumer experience.** There may be an opportunity for Royal Mail to review or explore how it can make its postal pricing tariffs easier to understand for postal consumers and staff. Any improvement to this will have a beneficial impact on improving staff knowledge and will help to ensure consumers chose the right postal product. It may also help to reduce queues at post office counters as staff will be able to deal with customers more effectively and efficiently.

1.8 The Consumer Council looks forward to working with Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail to deliver the best possible outcomes for postal consumers.

## 2 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report outlines postal consumers' experience of the Network Transformation Programme (NTP) and makes recommendations on how to make it work better for consumers accessing the postal service through the Post Office Network in NI.
- 2.2 When considering the postal consumer experience the Consumer Council focuses on two key areas:
  - **The consultation process.** The report considers the importance of consulting with postal consumers and discusses their awareness levels of the process; and
  - **Quality of service.** The report explores the quality of service postal consumers receive. It looks at their satisfaction levels and whether they feel the service is better, worse or the same as before across a number of service attributes.
- 2.3 The report concludes by making recommendations for Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail to consider, which would help improve the postal consumer experience in NI.

### 3 Background

#### The role of post offices and access to universal postal services

- 3.1 The Post Office network is a vital access point to the universal postal service<sup>1</sup>. Previous research<sup>2</sup> shows how important access points are to consumers in NI. For instance, over nine in 10 (93%) said easy access to a post office or post box was the most important part of the postal service. This means consumers felt access to a post office was even more important than uniform pricing across the UK (85%). Therefore any changes to the branch network will be an area of interest for consumers here.
- 3.2 Post office branches are situated within many local communities across NI, which helps Royal Mail offer universal service products and services to consumers. The network consists of 477 branches<sup>3</sup>. As shown by Table 1, over two thirds (68%) of the branches are located in rural communities and 15% are located in urban deprived areas. These are higher than the UK average. These branches provide access to the universal service within the communities that need them most.

	Northern Ireland	UK
Rural	68%	54%
Urban	17%	35%
Urban Deprived	15%	11%

- 3.3 The most popular service consumers use at their local post office is the postal service. Previous research<sup>4</sup> shows that sending parcels and letters are the most used products with three quarters (75%) saying they visit the post office for this purpose. The Post Office network is clearly important to postal consumers in NI.
- 3.4 Additionally, with fewer postal consumers sending letters using post boxes<sup>5</sup> and the growth in the parcel market<sup>6</sup>, post offices are even more important than before for consumers so they can access the postal service.

#### The Network Transformation Programme

- 3.5 The Consumer Council recognises the need to restructure the post office network so it becomes sustainable and we welcome the UK Government’s investment, which is helping to modernise branches across NI<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.6 However, the NTP must produce a modernised branch network which meets the needs of postal consumers. This is particularly important with the role post offices play in the changing postal market where branches are vital access points to parcel services for many consumers.
- 3.7 The Consumer Council acknowledges that Post Office Ltd has taken steps to support the changing needs of postal consumers. For instance by:
  - Offering access to postal services over longer opening hours;
  - Introducing the ‘Drop and Go’ service for regular postal users including those sending parcels; and
  - Providing access to the Royal Mail Local Collect service for items ordered online from participating retailers by consumers, which are delivered by Royal Mail.
- 3.8 This indicates the network is developing to benefit postal consumers now and in the future.

1 Delivery of letters six days a week (and for parcels five days a week, Monday to Friday) to all addresses in the United Kingdom at an affordable and uniform tariff.  
 2 The postal consumer perspective: Experiences and perceptions of, and attitudes to, the postal service and Post Office network in Northern Ireland. Consumer Focus Post. March 2013.  
 3 Network Report 2015. Post Office Limited. April 2015.

4 The postal consumer perspective: Experiences and perceptions of, and attitudes to, the postal service and Post Office network in Northern Ireland. Consumer Focus Post. March 2013.  
 5 <http://www.royalmailgroup.com/royal-mail-improve-access-postboxes>  
 6 [www.royalmailgroup.com/sites/default/files/The%20outlook%20for%20UK%20mail%20volumes%20to%202023.pdf](http://www.royalmailgroup.com/sites/default/files/The%20outlook%20for%20UK%20mail%20volumes%20to%202023.pdf)  
 7 Approximately £1.98 billion from 2012 – 2018.

## Post Office Local and Post Office Main

- 3.9 The NTP means post offices are changing to more cost effective operating models. The new models are Post Office Local and Post Office Main. A major benefit of the new models is that they are open over longer hours, which should improve consumer access to postal services.
- 3.10 The Local model is typically located within existing retail premises such as an established shop or garage, operating from a shared counter position and provides postal services over longer opening hours. Parcelforce International products are not available at this type of branch unless it is upgraded to a Local Plus.
- 3.11 The Main model is typically located in larger towns and cities. It offers a full range of postal services from a dedicated post office counter within retail premises such as larger convenience stores or supermarkets. Additionally, postal services are available over longer opening hours at an existing retail counter.
- 3.12 So far approximately 244 of the 477 branches have converted or are in the process of converting to one of the new models<sup>8</sup>. This consists of 147 branches changing to the Local Model<sup>9</sup> and 97 branches changing to the Main Model. This means over half of the network has been affected by the transformation programme.
- 3.13 Additionally, many post offices have changed location as part of the transformation programme. Approximately 90 branches have moved to different locations within their community, with the majority of relocations (68) taking place in rural communities.

- 3.14 These new models mean many consumers are accessing postal services through new branch formats, potentially over longer opening hours and at different locations within their local community, so it is important to better understand how they are working for postal consumers.

## Consulting and engaging with postal consumers

- 3.15 The NTP is an opportunity to listen to postal consumers, act on their feedback and build a branch network which benefits them and serves their changing needs.
- 3.16 Post Office Ltd's consultation and engagement activity is critical to this as postal consumers can provide their feedback before a final decision is made on a proposed change to a post office.
- 3.17 The consultation and engagement process is an important mechanism for postal consumers. But it is vital to find out more about how important it is for postal consumers and their awareness levels of the process. We consider this in Section 5.

<sup>8</sup> Correct as of May 2016.

<sup>9</sup> This includes 60 Local Plus branches.

## Concerns about the quality of service

- 3.18 Since the beginning of the programme many of those visiting post offices to access postal services have provided their views. For example, during 2014-15 an average of 77% of respondents confirmed they visited their branch to access postal services.
- 3.19 Consumers using postal services express concerns about the quality of service. They are concerned the service will be less satisfactory than before. More specifically the most frequently raised concerns include:
- The location of the new branch and issues with access into the new premises;
  - The suitability and layout of the new premises;
  - Ease of access to the counter, longer queues and lack of privacy; and
  - Staff knowledge and customer service.
- 3.20 These concerns are more pronounced when the proposal involves a change of location and a move into a new retail environment. Therefore it is crucial to find out more about the quality of service postal consumers receive at the new models once the branch moves to its new location. We consider this in Section 5.

## 4 Methodology

- 4.1 Research for this report involved an independently commissioned survey. Millward Brown carried out 417 face-to-face exit interviews at eight different post office locations across NI. These interviews took place between 24 October and 17 November 2015.
- 4.2 Interviewing took place across branch opening times and on different days. These interviews were conducted with consumers using the Local and Main model. Table 2 provides a breakdown.

**Table 2. Number of interviews carried out at the Main and Local model**

Post Office Model	Number of Interviews
Main	207
Local	210
Total	417

- 4.3 Selected branches were operational for at least six months. This allowed sufficient time for any implementation problems to be resolved. It also provided postal consumers with sufficient time to become familiar with their new post office model. The eight relocations represent 20% of the eligible branches which met the selection criteria.
- 4.4 Millward Brown considered this approach suitable to capture robust data.
- 4.5 Analysis of sample shows 75% of respondents were visiting the new post office to access postal services. This means 308 consumers were visiting the post offices for this purpose.

## 5 Findings

5.1 This section is divided into two parts. In the first part we discuss the importance of the consultation process to postal consumers and their awareness levels. The second part looks at the quality of service postal consumers receive after the branch moves to its new location. In the chart and tables we identify those areas that are working well in green and those areas that can be improved are highlighted in red.

### The Consultation Process

5.2 The Consumer Council believes that consulting and engaging with postal consumers is an important activity which helps Post Office Ltd to understand their views. However, getting a better understanding about how postal consumers feel about the consultation process and their awareness levels of this is vital.

5.3 Our research shows the consultation process is important to postal consumers. Nearly nine in ten (86%) believe it is important to consult on the proposed relocation of the branch.



# 86%

**feel it is important to be consulted on proposed relocation of the branch**

5.4 Additionally, three in five (60%) say the location of the post office is the most important aspect to consult upon. This demonstrates the value of getting the views of postal consumers.



# 60%

**say the location of the post office is the most important aspect to consult on**

5.5 However our research shows over half (56%) were not aware of this process so this area that can be improved.

# 56%

**not aware of consultation process**



5.6 Improving awareness of the consultation process has a key benefit. It increases the probability that postal consumers will provide their feedback. This will allow Post Office Ltd to better understand their needs and to help make the Post Office Main and Local models work better at their new locations.



## Quality of Service

5.7 The quality of service indicators we use to help measure the postal consumer experience are customer satisfaction levels and whether postal consumers feel the service is better, worse or about the same as before. For these two indicators we focus on the following service attributes:

- Longer opening hours;
- Location and ease of access into the premises;
- Suitability of premises and layout of the post office;
- Ease of access to the counter, privacy and queuing; and
- Staff knowledge and customer service.

We discuss these two indicators and the associated attributes in more detail below.

### Longer opening hours

5.8 Longer opening hours are a key feature incorporated into the design of the new models and it can improve access to postal services.

5.9 Our research shows longer opening hours are working well for postal consumers. Table 3 demonstrates that overall nearly everyone visiting both models is satisfied (99%) with this feature and no-one is dissatisfied.

Table 3. Percentage satisfied or dissatisfied with longer opening hours			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Longer opening hours</b>			
Satisfied	99	99	98
Dissatisfied	0	0	0

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included.  
Base: 308

5.10 Overall a significant proportion (55%) of postal consumers feel the new opening hours are better than before which shows this key feature is benefitting them as shown in Table 4.

5.11 However, a greater proportion visiting the Post Office Local (79%) say it is better than before compared to the Post Office Main (41%). An explanation may be those visiting a Post Office Main are not aware of access to the postal service at the retail counter outside of the branches' main opening hours. We discuss this in more detail at paragraph 5.14.

Table 4. Percentage who say the opening hours are better, worse or about the same as before			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Longer opening hours</b>			
Better	55	41	79
Worse	1	1	17
About the same	41	57	3

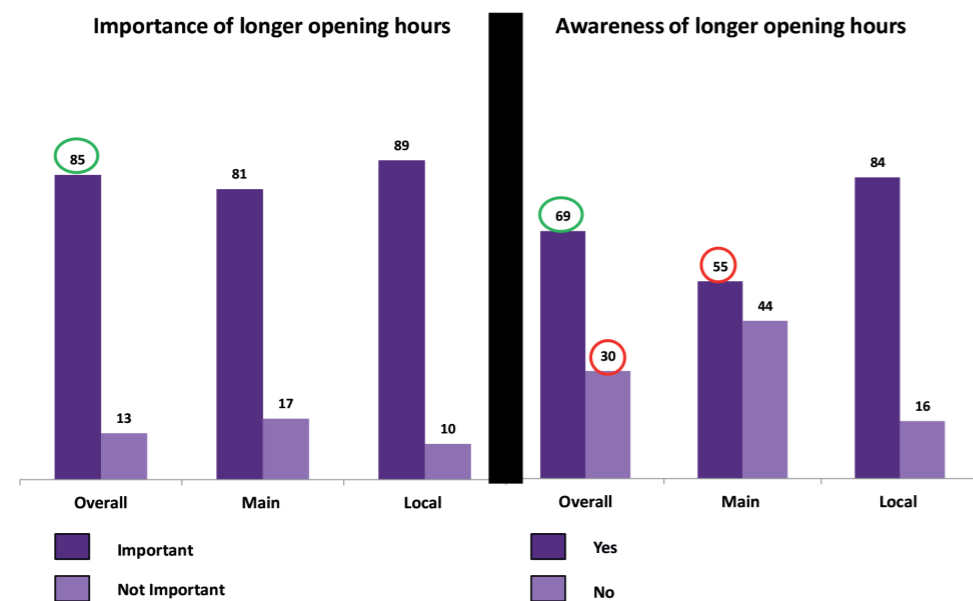
Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included.  
Base: 308

5.12 It is also essential to identify how important longer hours are to postal consumers and to establish their awareness levels of this key benefit.

5.13 Figure 1 illustrates the overall majority (85%) feel it is important to offer services over longer hours. Also, over two thirds (69%) were aware of the longer opening hours. This is positive news but leaves room for further improvement.

5.14 Yet, as indicated above, awareness of longer hours can be improved especially for those visiting a Post Office Main. Figure 1 shows nearly a third (30%) of postal consumers were not aware of the longer opening hours at the new models. However, those using the Post Office Main had the lowest levels of awareness (55%). This suggests Post Office Ltd should focus on improving awareness of the longer opening hours offered by Post Office Mains.

**Figure 1. Importance and awareness of longer opening hours**



Base: 308

**Location and ease of access into the premises**

5.15 Consumers typically raise concerns during the consultation process about where the post office is moving to. These concerns usually involve the less convenient location of the proposed new premises. Additionally, difficulties getting to the new location are highlighted, for example, lack of suitable car parking facilities especially for people with disabilities.

5.16 Consumers also identify other problems which they feel will reduce access into the new location. This can include walking across busy garage forecourts and obstructions located at or close to the entrance of the new premises.

5.17 It is important to assess how the new location and access into the premises is working for postal consumers after the branch relocates.

5.18 Our research shows the new locations are largely working well for postal consumers. Table 5 demonstrates overall the majority are satisfied with the convenience of the location (90%) and ease of access into the new premises (88%). For the most part these aspects are delivering for postal consumers.

5.19 However, improvements can be made to the ease of access into the premises for those visiting a Post Office Main. These postal consumers are more dissatisfied with ease of access into the premises (12%) compared to those visiting a Local Post Office (5%). Focusing on this area will help the Main model work better for postal consumers.

Table 5. Percentage satisfied or dissatisfied with the convenience of location and ease of access into the new premises			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Convenience of location</b>			
Satisfied	90	88	91
Dissatisfied	7	8	6
<b>Ease of access into the premises</b>			
Satisfied	88	85	91
Dissatisfied	8	12	5

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Neither satisfied or dissatisfied category is not included.

5.20 Most postal consumers (88%) feel they are getting at least the same quality of service in terms of location and ease of access into the premises since the post office moved. Table 6 shows that overall a third (33%) say it is better and over half (55%) say it is about the same. These results are encouraging.

5.21 Yet, Table 6 also shows over one in seven (14%) visiting the Post Office Main felt ease of access into the premises was worse than before. Gaining a better understanding as to why this is the case will allow Post Office Ltd to take steps to further improve the level of service.

**Table 6. Percentage who say the convenience of location and ease of access into the new premises is better, worse or about the same than before of location and ease of access into the new premises**

	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Convenience of location</b>			
Better	33	53	14
Worse	10	12	8
About the same	55	34	76
<b>Ease of access into the premises</b>			
Better	31	44	17
Worse	11	14	8
About the same	57	41	74

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included.

**The suitability and layout of the new premises**

5.22 Consumers' main worry highlighted during the consultation process is that some premises are not suitable to host a post office as they are too small and the layout makes it more difficult for them to access the post office once inside the premises. Therefore assessing how postal consumers feel about the suitability and the internal layout of the new location will help understand how these features are working.

5.23 Our research shows while the majority of postal consumers are happy with suitability (87%) and layout of the premises (80%) things can work better. As shown by Table 7, a greater proportion visiting a Post Office Local are unhappy with these features compared to those going to a Post Office Main. Particular attention should be given to improving the layout of Post Office Locals.

**Table 7. Percentage satisfied or dissatisfied with suitability of premises and layout of the post office**

	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Suitability of premises</b>			
Satisfied	87	88	85
Dissatisfied	9	7	11
<b>Layout of the Post Office</b>			
Satisfied	80	83	77
Dissatisfied	17	1	18

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Neither satisfied or dissatisfied category is not included.

5.24 Similar to satisfaction levels, Table 8 shows the suitability and layout of the premises can work better for those visiting a Post Office Local. A greater proportion visiting a Post Office Local (17%) say the premises is less suitable than before compared to those visiting a Post Office Main (10%). Also, nearly one in four (23%) feel the layout is worse than the previous branch. Again Post Office Mains perform better with 15% saying it is now worse. Post Office Ltd should focus its efforts on improving the postal consumer experience at Post Office Locals.

**Table 8. Percentage who say the suitability of premises and layout of the post office is better or worse**

	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Suitability of premises</b>			
Better	27	36	17
Worse	14	10	17
About the same	57	53	63
<b>Layout of the Post Office</b>			
Better	26	33	19
Worse	19	15	23
About the same	58	52	55

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included.

**Ease of access to the counter, privacy and queuing**

5.25 These attributes affect the in-branch experience so it is crucial there is a better understanding about the nature and extent of any issues. Indeed, consumers raise concerns through the consultation process about the ease of making their way to the post office counter, the levels of privacy and longer queues once the post office moves to its new location.

5.26 Encouragingly, our research shows many postal consumers are happy with these aspects of their in-branch experience. The overall majority are satisfied with the ease of access to the counter (89%) and queuing (83%).

5.27 But improvements can be made too as shown by Table 9. Those visiting Post Office Locals are significantly more dissatisfied (29%) with privacy compared to those visiting a Post Main (11%).

**Table 9. Percentage satisfied or dissatisfied with ease of access to the counter, privacy and queuing**

	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Ease of access to the counter</b>			
Satisfied	89	90	88
Dissatisfied	7	8	8
<b>Privacy</b>			
Satisfied	72	83	61
Dissatisfied	20	11	29
<b>Queuing</b>			
Satisfied	83	85	81
Dissatisfied	9	8	11

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Neither satisfied or dissatisfied category is not included.

5.28 Table 10 also shows making privacy levels work better for postal consumers visiting a Post Office Local is a key area. A third (33%) say privacy is worse than before which is significantly higher than those visiting a Post Office Main (12%). Clearly, improving privacy levels for those visiting Post Office Locals will significantly reduce the proportion unhappy with this feature.

5.29 Additionally, reducing queuing times at Post Office Locals would benefit postal consumers. One in five (20%) say it is worse than before whereas the Main model performs much better with only 8% saying that queuing is worse.

Table 10. Percentage who say ease of access to the counter, privacy and queuing is better or worse			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Ease of access to the counter</b>			
Better	22	33	12
Worse	13	12	14
About the same	63	54	72
<b>Privacy</b>			
Better	16	22	10
Worse	22	12	33
About the same	60	65	55
<b>Queuing</b>			
Better	22	27	17
Worse	14	8	20
About the same	61	62	60

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included

5.30 Dealing with these areas negatively affecting the Post Office Local will reduce the difference in the postal consumer experience between the two models. This should be a priority area for Post Office Ltd.

5.31 The Consumer Council recognises Post Office Ltd takes privacy issues seriously when designing the store layout and by training new staff on the importance of privacy. Recently, the Consumer Council became aware of an approach taken locally by Post Office Ltd when designing the counter area, which aims to reduce its customers' privacy concerns<sup>10</sup>. This involves

including additional partition at the counter area. This is one area Post Office Ltd could investigate further to establish how effective this is and whether other areas would benefit from this approach.

### Staff knowledge and customer service

5.32 When the post office moves location consumers can express concerns about the perceived loss of staff knowledge. They also worry about getting a poorer level of customer service.

5.33 Encouragingly, our research shows that customer service (94%) and staff knowledge (94%) are among the top performing areas for postal consumers with the overall majority happy with these features. Table 11 also illustrates those visiting a Post Office Main have the highest satisfaction levels. This is positive news for postal consumers.

Table 11. Percentage satisfied or dissatisfied with customer service and staff knowledge			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Customer service</b>			
Satisfied	94	99	90
Dissatisfied	2	1	4
<b>Staff knowledge</b>			
Satisfied	94	99	89
Dissatisfied	2	0	5

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included

5.34 Additionally, Table 12 shows positive results with these features. Overall nearly one in five say customer service (17%) and staff knowledge (19%) are better compared to the previous location.

<sup>10</sup> Network Transformation Programme Case Handling Activity, April 2016.

5.35 Yet, improvements can be made to the Local model. Nearly one in five (17%) say staff knowledge has got worse since the move and 13% say the level of customer service has deteriorated. In comparison the Main model performs much better with no-one saying staff knowledge or the level of customer service has got worse. Table 11 also shows there is room to improve staff knowledge satisfaction levels.

Table 12. Percentage who say customer service and staff knowledge is office is better, worse or about the same as before			
	Overall (%)	Main (%)	Local (%)
<b>Customer Service</b>			
Better	17	16	19
Worse	6	0	13
About the same	75	84	66
<b>Staff Knowledge</b>			
Better	19	18	20
Worse	9	0	17
About the same	71	82	60

Base: 308

Note: Figures do not add up to 100 as the Don't Know category is not included

5.36 Clearly continuing to monitor the quality of staff knowledge and customer service at Post Office Locals is vital to identify any issues so that Post Office Ltd can take remedial action to improve the postal consumer experience.

5.37 One explanation for the poorer performance of the Local Model may be the complex nature of the postal product pricing structure. For instance, in a previous study over one in ten consumers (13%) said they wanted easier to understand pricing for parcel products. Staff knowledge may also be affected by complex pricing so Post Office Ltd should make sure the new operator's staff have sufficient knowledge of all postal products. Royal Mail could also play an important role by reviewing or exploring how it can make its postal pricing tariffs easier to understand for postal consumers and staff. This would positively affect staff knowledge and help postal consumers choose the right postal product.

## 6 Conclusions

### The consultation process

6.1 Postal consumers feel consulting on proposed changes to a post office is an important activity and it is imperative that their views are sought on the new location. Also, many postal consumers are unaware of the consultation process so this is one area which can be improved.

### Quality of service

6.2 There are high levels of overall postal consumer satisfaction with the transformation programme across a number of service attributes. For instance with longer opening hours; the new location; ease of access to the counter; customer service and staff knowledge.

6.3 Also, the overall majority of postal consumers feel they are getting at least the same level of service as before across different service attributes. The best performing attributes which postal consumers feel have improved since the post office relocated include the longer opening hours; the new location; and ease of access into the premises.

6.4 There are many positive aspects of the programme but the service postal consumers receive at Post Office Mains and Post Office Locals can improve further.

6.5 There is the opportunity to further develop the postal consumer experience when visiting Post Office Mains by:

- Increasing postal consumer awareness of the longer opening hours; and
- Improving ease of access into the premises.

6.6 Improving the quality of service at Post Office Locals should remain a priority. This can be achieved by focusing on the attributes with lower satisfaction levels and where postal consumers feel the service is worse than before especially when compared to the performance of the Main model. These attributes are layout of the store; privacy; queuing; staff knowledge and customer service.

## 7 Recommendations

7.1 There is an opportunity to build on what is working well so postal consumers fully benefit from the NTP. Below we make recommendations on how to improve the consultation process and the quality of service at Post Office Mains and Locals.

### 7.2 For the consultation process:

- Post Office Ltd should seek to increase postal consumer awareness. Considering the importance postal consumers attach to this process, improving awareness will benefit the programme as they will be able to provide more feedback on future proposals. This means Post Office Ltd can be more responsive to postal consumers needs and build a branch network that better meet their needs.

### 7.3 For the quality of service:

- Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail should work together to look at ways to improve postal consumer awareness of longer opening hours for those visiting Post Office Mains. This will mean more postal consumers will make use of this key benefit by accessing postal services over longer hours. This will also benefit Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail. They should consider developing a joint strategy to deliver greater awareness among postal consumers which can increase usage of these vital access points.
- Post Office Ltd should improve access into Post Office Mains for postal consumers. Investigating why some postal consumers feel ease of access into the premises is worse compared to those visiting a Post Office Local is important. This will allow Post Office Ltd to take action to improve the postal consumer experience.

- Post Office Ltd should take action to make Post Office Locals work better for postal consumers. Successfully improving the postal consumer experience will also bring the quality of service closer to level received at Post Office Mains. Post Office Ltd should focus its efforts on the following areas:

- Layout of the post office;
- Privacy;
- Queuing;
- Staff knowledge; and
- Customer service.

- Royal Mail should explore how it can help improve the in-branch postal consumer experience. There may be an opportunity for Royal Mail to review or explore how it can make its postal pricing tariffs easier to understand for postal consumers and staff. Any improvement to this will have a beneficial impact on improving staff knowledge and will help to ensure consumers chose the right postal service. It may also help to reduce queues at post office counters as staff will be able to deal with customers more effectively and efficiently.

7.4 The Consumer Council is committed to working in partnership with Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail to deliver the best possible outcomes for postal consumers in NI.





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Consumer Council Northern Ireland



ConsumerCouncil