

Reference: 01822846

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

14 June 2024

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about Royal Mail postbox collection times.

We received this request on 20 May 2024 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI Act).

Your request

"I am writing to ask Ofcom to release Royal Mail's collection time data for its c. 115,500 postboxes.

As the watchdog responsible for overseeing the postal sector and protecting customers, we would be grateful if Ofcom could share the collection times for all Royal Mail post boxes broken down by year since 2014."

Our response

Before we set out the information we hold, we thought it would be helpful to first provide some background information about Royal Mail's postbox collections processes and how they are assessed as part of measuring Royal Mail's quality of service performance.

Since 2014 Royal Mail has made changes to collection arrangements for its postboxes under its 'Collection on Delivery' programme, which involves collections being undertaken by postmen and postwomen when they are on their delivery routes, rather than at the end of the day. Under this programme, Royal Mail is still retaining a smaller, core network of post boxes with end-of-day collections.¹

Postboxes included in the 'Collection on Delivery' programme are set to show a 9am (or 7am on Saturdays) collection time, but the actual collection time could be anywhere between 9am and when the postman or postwoman finishes their round (approx. 3pm).

The impact of these variable collection times is taken into account in the assessment of Royal Mail's quality of service performance. In particular, this assessment is based on data from a survey run by an external company, independent from Royal Mail, which recruits a panel of private individuals and businesses across the UK who post items of test mail to each other and record when items were sent/received. These surveys are carried out in accordance with relevant statistical standards. The data from the surveys is then reviewed by an independent auditor.

¹ Also known as the 'Postbox Strategy', we considered this as part of our [2022 Review of Postal Regulations](#) (paragraphs 5.167 and 5.181).

As part of this assessment, the independent survey company uses data from the tags used inside the test mail items which show when the test item passed into the Royal Mail network, as well as the time that the person collecting from the relevant postbox scanned the barcode on the inside of the box when they made the collection, to record when the item was received.

In terms of the information Ofcom holds related to postbox collection times, we receive confidential information from Royal Mail on a weekly basis which sets out the planned, in progress and recently deployed changes to postbox collection times, including those postboxes that are being incorporated into its Collection on Delivery programme. This information is provided to meet Royal Mail's regulatory obligation to provide Ofcom (and Consumer Advocacy Bodies) with advance notice of changes to postbox collection times.²

Ofcom does not therefore hold the information requested, as even taken in its totality the information we receive does not contain the full list of collection times for Royal Mail postboxes dating back to 2014. Rather, Ofcom holds numerous data sets that represent a subset of all Royal Mail's postboxes at a given point in time. That subset represents, as noted above, the postboxes in respect of which there are planned, in progress or recently deployed changes to collection times. The collection times for individual boxes recorded in a particular data set are therefore historic as at the relevant time, and later data sets will not necessarily include the current collection time of a particular postbox.

The current postbox collection times are published by Royal Mail as part of its "Services Near You" search tool found on its website [here](#). We understand that the information provided to Ofcom is not used to populate this website. To the extent that any information on the "Services Near You" tool is contained in the information Ofcom holds, that information is exempt from disclosure under section 21 of the FOI Act, as it is reasonably accessible via Royal Mail's website.

Regarding other information Ofcom holds on postbox collection times, this is also exempt from disclosure under section 44 of the Act, as we are prohibited from disclosing it under section 56 of the Postal Services Act 2011 (PSA 2011). Section 56 of the PSA 2011 prohibits us from disclosing information relating to the affairs of a business without a disclosure gateway applying, such as having the business' consent. None of the disclosure gateways apply here. Section 44 is a total exemption and does not require a public interest test.

We hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

²

See Designated Universal Service Provider condition 1.10.2(d).

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).