



By email

**Dame Melanie Dawes**

Chief Executive

Ofcom

Riverside House

2a Southwark Bridge Road

London

SE1 9HA

April 10 2025

Dear Ms Dawes,

As Ofcom consults on proposals to reform the universal postal service, Royal Mail, NHS England, NHS Providers, Healthwatch England, National Voices and the Patients Association are writing to set out how we have been working together to ensure that any changes do not lead to worse outcomes or experiences for patients, and that the needs of the public and NHS organisations are met.

**Reform of the universal service**

The Ofcom consultation sets out why change is needed to modernise the postal service whilst protecting the choice of price, speed and reliability for everyone across the country. Alongside reforms to protect the financial sustainability of the universal service, Royal Mail is also working to drive improvements in quality and reliability of services to meet the needs of all postal users.

**The importance of NHS letters**

There is an increasing move towards digital NHS communications via email, texts, telephone or the NHS App. However letters remain crucial, particularly for those who may be digitally excluded for a variety of reasons.

The late delivery of NHS letters puts people at risk of missing important test results, time-critical appointment information, and any last minute changes to their appointments. Along with patient safety risks, missed appointments are costly to the NHS and disrupt the delivery of care to other patients.

While we recognise that public feedback to Healthwatch England, National Voices and the Patients Association highlights experiences of people in England not being sent important NHS

correspondence in a timely fashion<sup>1</sup>, we also want to set out the work being done to deliver for the NHS and patients.

### **Delivering for the NHS and patients**

Since Ofcom published its call for input on the future of the universal postal service in January 2024, we have been working together to understand the impact of the proposed reforms to the postal service and to ensure that these changes deliver for the NHS and patients.

NHS organisations use a wide variety of postal services, with no standardised approach. Royal Mail and the NHS have therefore been working together to ensure NHS organisations continue to have a choice of both price and speed when sending letters, and to improve how NHS letters are sent to patients across the UK.

Reliability is of vital importance to NHS providers and patients, and whilst all mail is important, not all is urgent. NHS providers recognise that they must ensure they are sending patients' post out within the right timeframe and it is up to them to determine what service they use to enable that.

To help with this, NHS England and NHS Providers have produced guidance for NHS organisations<sup>2</sup>, including a case study, to increase awareness and uptake of the variety of Royal Mail services for the timely delivery of NHS letters.

We are also pleased to announce that we have mutually agreed the introduction of a new Royal Mail NHS-specific barcode. Where Royal Mail quality of service performance targets are not being met, this barcode will mitigate the impact on NHS letters by helping to optimise their delivery at times of local and national disruption.

### **Next steps**

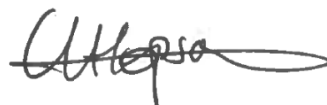
Ofcom has set out its regulatory process on universal service reform, with a decision expected in summer 2025.

While we are not pre-empting any decisions Ofcom may make, we, the undersigned, will continue to look at ways to improve how we work together to ensure that any reform reflects the needs of the NHS and patients. Our priority remains that NHS patients receive their post on time and ensuring the NHS has a choice of price and speed of delivery.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Gilthorpe, Chief Executive, Royal Mail




Chris Hopson, Chief Strategy Officer, NHS England

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<sup>1</sup> [Lost in the System: the need for better admin. The King's Fund, Healthwatch England, National Voices, 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Delivery of Patient Letters: an opportunity to improve patient access and productivity, NHS Providers, 2025](#)



Saffron Cordery, Interim Chief Executive, NHS Providers



Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England



Jacob Lant, Chief Executive, National Voices



Rachel Power, Chief Executive, The Patients Association

Cc.

Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Jonathan Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for Business and Trade