

The Laws of Unintended Consequences

Chris King writes:

The laws of unintended consequences are the most frequently enacted by legislatures since policy decisions and regulations often produce unanticipated and unexpected outcomes. This is clearly the case following Denmark's changes in postal arrangements which came into force on 1 January 2026.

In July 2024 I wrote in *FEPA News* about the changes being introduced by the Danish Postal Service as it adapts to the digital world. The article was originally published in Vol 133 No. 1513 of the *London Philatelist* in March 2024 and it concluded by saying, that it is certain that Denmark's reforms will be closely watched by other postal providers and governments - and it doesn't look good for stamps - or philatelists.

On 27 June 2023, following broad agreement on the future of postal services, Thomas Danielsen, then Danish Minister of Transport, announced that The Government (that was the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party and the Moderates), the Liberal Alliance, the Conservative People's Party, the Social Liberal Party, the Alternative and the New Conservatives (all of whom were in opposition) "have agreed on a deal that suits today's postal market ... the universal service obligation, which currently gives PostNord a special status, will cease. This means that citizens can look forward to greater freedom of choice."

"At the same time, the agreement includes a special arrangement for the small islands, which can look forward to better service than before. Under the agreement, investment will be made in facilities for parcels and letters on all small islands, so that here too it will be possible to choose freely who will deliver letters and parcels. In addition, the state will continue to support mail for the blind and international post. Tenders will be launched in these areas."

Since then, Martin Pingel, PostNord's Head of Stamps, left his post at the beginning of 2026, and PostNord ceased its letter service in Denmark. This has largely been taken over by a company called DAO, which is a newspaper and magazine delivery company, and is the only letter delivery business remaining.

The anticipated competition has not appeared, but Danes seem pragmatic about the change, as 97% of the Danish population over age 15 are already enrolled in MitID, the national identity system which links citizens to services, and 95% use the Digital Post app.

DAO received approximately 15,000 complaints in the first month, and users have reported missing or delayed letters, with some deliveries taking 4-8 weeks instead of the promised 5 days. Organisations such as Ældre Sagen, The Danish Association for the Elderly, have expressed concern that the shift disproportionately affects the approximately 271,000 Danes who still rely on physical mail for critical documents like hospital appointments and vaccinations.

On the other hand, DAO's prices are slightly lower than PostNord's were, and there have been surveys indicating that DAO is faster than PostNord, delivering 99% of domestic letters within five days compared to PostNord's 90%. However, real-world user reports in early 2026 have been more critical of consistency. It would be helpful if there was a published independent assessment.

51% of the company is owned by JP/Politikens Hus, founded on 1 January 2003 as a merger between Politikens Hus and Jyllands-Posten, two Danish newspaper companies, which together own a variety of print and digital media companies. 32% is owned by JFM, formerly Jysk Fynske Medier, Denmark's second-largest media group, which publishes 15 daily newspapers and over 40 weekly publications. The remaining 17% is owned by Berlingske Media, which produces Berlingske, Denmark's oldest newspaper, and other print and digital media. The latter is now owned by Amedia, a Norwegian media group, which owns over 100 mainly local and regional newspapers in Norway, and has now expanded into Sweden and Denmark.

dao

DAO is an abbreviation for Dansk Avis Omdeling, literally Danish Newspaper Delivery, founded on 1 January 1921, and delivering newspapers across Denmark during the night. With the demise of the PostNord letter service, DAO now delivers parcels, magazines, letters, and newspapers, usually before seven in the morning, every day, 365 days a year.

The company has produced a number of labels for its letter service, and offers different service levels with two weight steps. Everything above 250 grammes must be sent as a parcel.

Standard International - advertised as a 4-16 business days service.

White/blue labels: For letters less than 100g DKK 46 (€6.16/£5.35) or 100-250g DKK 92 (€12.31/£10.69).

Standard Domestic - advertised as a 2 to 5 business days service.

White/red labels: For letters less than 100g DKK 23 (€3.08/£2.67), or letters 100-250g DKK 46 (€6.16/£5.34).

Standard Domestic Plus - advertised as a 1 to 2 days service.

White/orange labels: For priority delivery less than 100g DKK 36 (€4.82/£4.18) or 100-250g DKK 59 (€7.90/£6.86).

There is a next day priority service and an inland only registration service.



DAO labels in use April 2026: Courtesy of Nordfrim A/S www.nordfrim.com

Finally, there is a service for the blind, or partially sighted, which allows for certain items to be sent free of charge. These include materials such as Braille (embossed literature), large print texts, and audio recordings. The package must be clearly labelled *Blindeforsendelse* and include a return address so the sender can be identified if needed.



For mail sent outside Denmark DAO has contracted with the Austrian post, and all external services are routed via Salzburg, both for incoming and outgoing mail. The Austrian post uses labels and handstamps to mark its contribution to the service. This routing has led to items taking up to six weeks to deliver. Magazines and journals seem generally to follow this route, but there are no date stamps on any mail that this author has seen, so it is not easy to demonstrate the speed of the service.

Some Danish companies such as Den Danske Bank have routed overseas post via PostNord in Malmö to save time, or to provide a more certain service.



DAO label with Salzburg post office label applied in transit to London.



Salzburg postal details printed on magazine cover sheet from Aller Media, Denmark sent to London.

Registration

DAO cannot send registered mail outside Denmark, nor can they process incoming foreign registered post. These continue to be handled by PostNord, which also continues to offer a domestic packet and parcel delivery service. To avoid the detour via Salzburg, it may be practical to send items to Denmark as registered mail.

Within Denmark, including the Faroe Islands, no item of commercial value can be included in a DAO registered letter. It has to be sent as a parcel. There are examples of registered letters being sent to the Faroe Islands being returned.

PostNord rules state that registered items may contain only documents, money, or bearer securities for international destinations. If the shipment contains goods or other items, it must be sent as a parcel. They offer a service to all countries worldwide - including the Faroe Islands and Greenland - but not within Denmark.

This is affecting stamp and postcard dealers, and there is an example of several letters containing postcards sent from Denmark on 13 January, being returned to Denmark on 29 March, having been stopped in Austria, because the contents were other than paper. There is obviously some rethinking needed.

It is not just the postal services which have been affected, there are other unforeseen consequences.



The mail coach from Hamburg pulls in at the post office in Købmagergade, 1845, painting by Rasmus Christiansen (1863-1940).



Changing horses, 1845. Painting by Rasmus Christiansen (1863-1940), from the Post & Tele Museum collection. Stamp booklet issued 28 May 1998 for the opening of the new postal museum in Købmagergade, Copenhagen.

ENIGMA

PostNord was founded on 24 June 2009, following the merger of Post Danmark A/S and Posten AB (Sweden), combining the postal services of both countries into a single business originally named Posten. In 2014, the company sold the historic postal building at 37 Købmagergade in Copenhagen, which was the Denmark's oldest post office and its Post and Telegraph Museum from October 1998, for 400 million kroner (circa \$60 million) to a pension fund. The building has since been converted into a complex of shops and offices.

The postal museum reopened in a new location at Øster Allé, Copenhagen, as *enigma - Museum for Post, Tele og Kommunikation* in January 2017. It continues to be run by Post/Tele Museumsfond, founded in 1996 by Post Danmark A/S and TDC A/S, the largest Danish telecommunications company, with the aim of preserving and promoting Denmark's history of communication. The museum is funded primarily by grants from its founders. PostNord replaced Post Danmark A/S, and it is not clear from the last published annual report (25 March 2025) whether membership of the board will change in the future. Several members are current or previous PostNord executives.

Immediate consequences include the acquisition of the PostNord stamp collections by the museum in perpetuity. However, the museum's large archive, storage of which was paid for by PostNord, now has to be moved to another location for which ENIGMA itself must pay. This affects the museum budget, and the discouraging standard reply to online and email enquiries now reads:

ENQUIRIES REGARDING THE COLLECTION & LIBRARY

Please note that the museum is currently unable to respond to new enquiries or accept new items and other materials. ENIGMA does not receive public funding and does not offer public access to the museum's library and collection. Academic enquiries are only accepted via email and will be answered if the museum's resources permit. Emails are retained for 3 months after receipt, after which they are deleted if the museum has not been able to process the enquiry.

Danmarks Filatelist Forbund (The Danish Philatelic Federation)

The consequences of PostNord being no longer responsible for letter mail in Denmark has caused serious problems for Danmarks Filatelist Forbund, although it is true to say that there have been financial challenges at DFF for quite some time. There have also been board changes recently. In 2025, the Federation surveyed its membership and the results are gradually being published. Around 20% of the responses were from people who are either not members of a club, or are members of a club outside the federation. The DFF conducted reader surveys regarding *Dansk Filatelistisk Tidsskrift*, the Federation journal, in 2017, with 217 responses, and in 2007, with 630 responses. This time there were 717 responses, compared to a total combined individual membership of about 3000. Two items stand out from the federation's reports:

Library

"The library appears to be a service with limited demand. Only 10% of respondents reported borrowing materials, although 98% of those who did had a positive experience. Among those who have not used the library, two-thirds indicated that they simply had no need for its resources.

Given the low demand and the ongoing costs associated with maintaining the library, particularly rent, the DFF Board has decided to discontinue this service."

DFT - Dansk Filatelistisk Tidsskrift - The Association's Magazine

"The survey focused on a potential shift from print to digital format. About one-third of respondents had read the magazine online. Among these, most found the experience comparable to the printed version, although approximately 25% considered it worse.

Overall, there is clear resistance to a fully digital version and this issue will be discussed further at the representatives' meeting in September, alongside other potential cost-saving measures."

Further Consequences

More decisions have followed, reported in DFT in February and April this year.

PostNord was critical to DFF's finances. The Federation offered a cancellation service for the company, and sold mint stamps to its membership and to others. With no stamps being produced in Denmark, there is a reduced income which has resulted in a radical rethink, reported in the April issue of DFT, which is summarised as follows:

Office Operations & Premises

- Terminate part of the floor space used by the office in Birkerød.
- Clear out two basement rooms and the first-floor office.
- Vacate all first-floor premises at the DFF office and amend the lease from 1 April 2026.
- Work towards closing the physical DFF office entirely by the end of 2026.
- Reduce office telephone hours to Mondays and Tuesdays from 10:00-12:00.

Financial & Cost-Cutting Measures

- Dispose of material no longer necessary for DFF operations.
- Sell stock of new publications to Fyns Frimærke Service.
- Terminate agreements with PostNord regarding postage cancellation and stamp sales.
- Close the online shop (Newstamps).
- Temporarily keep the webshop active to complete final administrative matters.
- Conduct a clearance sale of second-hand publications and recycle remaining stock.

Publications (DFT Magazine)

- Review income and costs related to publishing and distributing DFT.
- Continue publishing DFT in print form until a representatives' meeting in September.

Staffing & Volunteers

- Reduce paid staff to a minimum.
- Discontinue regular volunteer tasks at the DFF office.
- Limit future volunteer involvement to special events only.

Library & Archival Changes

- Close the DFF library.
- Reject selling individual books and periodicals to members due to the complexity of the task.
- Return UPU-related work to ENIGMA.
- Return borrowed books to ENIGMA.
- Transfer selected library materials (circulars, notices, research notes) to Dansk Posthistorisk Selskab (The Danish Postal History Society) for digitisation and public access.
- Sell the entire remaining DFF library to Ulf Stenquist of Göta Frimärken.

DFF is not the only philatelic federation to have no premises and limited staff, but it is a radical change compared with the situation only a decade ago, and is a salutary warning to organised philately everywhere. Change comes gradually and then suddenly.

The DFF library has gone to a good home, and will remain largely intact, but libraries are not just for lending; they are a public good and a long term resource which is well placed to survive a magnetic pulse. A specialist library is part of a nation’s history. At the very least, the library might have been offered first to Kjøbenhavns Philatelist Klub (KPK), or to Det Kongelige Bibliotek (The National Library) in Copenhagen. Perhaps it was?

We often talk about the size of the philatelic world; according to ChatGPT, eBay listed on 20 March 2026:

Worldwide Stamps	1.0-1.5 million	General world issues and mixed country
United States Stamps	700k-1.2 million	One of the largest national categories
United Kingdom / British Colonies	250k-450k	Includes Commonwealth
Europe (other countries)	300k-500k	Germany, France, Italy, etc.
Asia	200k-350k	China, Japan, India, etc.
Australia & Oceania	120k-220k	Australia, New Zealand, Pacific
Canada	120k-200k	Canadian issues
Latin America	80k-150k	Mexico, Brazil, etc.
Africa	60k-120k	Often colonial-era issues
Topical Stamps	250k-400k	Themes (animals, space, sports, etc.)
Covers (First Day, Postal History)	250k-400k	Envelopes, FDCs, postal history
Collections / Mixtures / Lots	300k-500k	Albums, kiloware, bulk stamps
Errors, Freaks & Oddities	30k-60k	Misprints, rare varieties
Back-of-Book	80k-150k	Revenues, postage dues, officials
Other Stamps	50k-100k	Miscellaneous or uncategorized

There must be customers for the vendors, and eBay is not the only market place. Scandinavia has Tradera, there are other regional on line sellers, and then there’s Delcampe.

The major auction houses are selling a wealth of material, often at very good prices, and smaller houses say that they are very busy, which may be due to demographics. The box trade at fairs and exhibitions also seem to be busy.

So while there are collectors, organised philately is struggling to maintain itself, particularly in some parts of Europe. How can this be? It seems unlikely that we are heading for a world where online events are the norm, and all libraries are digital. It is hard to imagine that such a world would be good for society in general, and individuals in particular. While Ofcom, a regulator, reported that in the United Kingdom, only 5% of the population have no access to the Internet, there are other recent reports that people value disconnection from digital tools after work. It would be a mistake for philately to embrace the digital world entirely, only to discover that the analogue world has become fashionable again.

This piece began with unintended consequences, and ends with a warning that we should expect the unexpected. No one in Denmark thought that the consequences of the end of the Universal Service Obligation would be a new domestic letter monopoly, and new challenges for the National Philatelic Federation and the Postal Museum.

The lesson for philatelic federations, clubs and societies might be to plan and think ahead now, to develop their audience and to reach out to a wider public, because change can, and usually will, come more quickly than expected.