

Tax Credits Claim pack research summary

Background

HMRC's Tax Credits Communication Strategy focuses on developing clear and logical communications products for tax credits customers to help them understand what they have to do and when.

We have previously developed and tested tax credits key messages that customers understand and respond to. Using these messages, we developed two trailblazer products for the Tax Credits Claim Pack:

- TC600 Notes – *Getting your tax credits claim form right*. Redesigned guidance notes to help customers to fill in their claim form.
- Folder. A new initiative to encourage customers to keep their papers in one place, and educate them about the tax credits cycle.

Research aims

The research objectives for the new TC600 Notes were to measure and compare against the existing Notes to identify if they:

- lead to fewer errors on the claim form (and therefore speed up payment to customers)
- are user-friendly and understandable
- have any trouble spots – for example, what customers seek help for and when.

The objectives for the folder were to find out if customers:

- take any key messages from the folder, and, if so, which ones
- would keep the folder, and, if so, whether they will store their tax credits paperwork in it
- would use the folder as an easy access point for information – for example, the helpline number, the change of circumstances message.

Testing the products

Participants received a Tax credits Claim Pack which contained the old, current or new claim form, corresponding or no guidance notes, and some also had the new folder. At the end of the testing stage, participants received alternative guidance notes as a comparison to the ones they used to complete the claim form.

Qualitative depth interviews were conducted after the form completion. Completed claim forms were marked and analysed for error by comparing the participants form against correctly completed forms supplied by HMRC.

Main Findings

TC600 claim form

The form is the primary method of communication. Regardless of a participant's attitude to form filling, they generally start with the form and only deviate when they come to a barrier.

Participants found part 5 'income details' section the most difficult aspect of the form.

Just over half (54%) of the all forms contained at least one validation error. The majority of these validation errors occurred because participants didn't complete the fields.

96% of all the forms contained at least one general error.

Participants who used guidance notes made less validation errors overall. However, they were slightly more likely to make general errors.

24% of respondents made 13+ validation or general errors on the form. Those participants making a high number of errors on the form are more likely to be aged 16-24, have no formal qualifications and are HMRC segment 'Unaware'.

TC600 Notes

Just over half (55%) of all participants referred to any guidance notes during the test – the form is the primary communications piece, and customers only refer to the notes if they get stuck.

The new guidance notes were seen as significantly more helpful and easier to understand than the original or current guidance. Participants generally:

- preferred the new notes and found them easy to follow
- thought the pictures of the form in the guidance were particularly valuable
- considered the balance of information in them as 'just right'.

Participants are more likely to use the new guidance notes as they appear more accessible than the current guidance, and this helps to reinforce positive perceptions of HMRC and transparency.

The new guidance was significantly more likely to be used in the future than the current notes.

Participants were more likely to refer to guidance notes for help with sections 3-5 of the form. Those with the new guidance notes had the least problems understanding any sections of the notes.

Folder

The folder is perceived as professional, and the majority (75%) of participants said they would probably or definitely keep the folder, but a minority were concerned about waste.