

Annex 5E: The unusability of HMRC's CH2 "on screen" forms

Child Benefit is not a low profile service¹ – parents of newborns are not a group who suffer from policy neglect,² nor are they 'time rich'.

The second most downloaded form³ on GOV.UK is the form for claiming Child Benefit⁴ with 1.068 million "unique downloads"⁵ in 2020 despite only 640,000 children being born a year.⁶ HMRC collect no data on which versions of the form are submitted to HMRC,⁷ although the excess is close to the 459,000 downloads of the "on screen" version.

In 2021, the web page⁸ for claiming Child Benefit has one option for parents of newborns to "print then fill in" and post back, with a second form to "fill in on screen". In the current digital world,⁹ if you click on the link to the "on screen" form, you are presented with a PDF which states:

Please wait...

If this message is not eventually replaced by the proper contents of the document, your PDF viewer may not be able to display this type of document.

You can upgrade to the latest version of Adobe Reader for Windows®, Mac, or Linux® by visiting http://www.adobe.com/go/reader_download.

For more assistance with Adobe Reader visit <http://www.adobe.com/go/acreader>.

This reliance on a 'PDF-only' approach appears to be an entrenched legacy of consultants,¹⁰ whether System Integrators or Adobe sales teams, who cared more about their ongoing revenues than "user needs*".

The instructions further down the web page show the service *knows* the user experience is flawed:

"If you're using an older browser, for example, Internet Explorer 8, you'll need to update it or use a different browser. Find out more about [browsers](#).

You'll need to complete the form fully before you can print it. You cannot save a partly completed form so we suggest you gather all your information together before you begin to fill it in. The form includes help text to help filling it in."

That help text will tell you that even the "fill in on screen" form requires the completed form to be printed. **If parents of newborns don't have a printer how do they claim Child Benefit?**

¹ Such as the NCC1 form - see Annex s???

² We covered that aspect in Annex 5D and a form covering the Home Office: <https://medconfidential.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/5D-Digital-failure-HO.pdf>

³ Consistently over time: https://whatdotheyknow.com/request/the_most_downloaded_pdfs_from_go

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-benefit-claim-form-ch2>

⁵ All usage figures are from GDS figures for gov.uk only – there may be other copies of forms available from others, or completed by accountants, etc.

⁶ Latest figures <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2019>

⁷ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cost_of_transactions_for_ch2_for

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-benefit-claim-form-ch2>

⁹ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/platform_etc_figures_from_google#incoming-1778698

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/smithsam/status/1373952229552615427>

The 2021 Spending Review – Access to Forms

As part of future work, GDS has been given a mandate¹¹ to improve forms for processes¹² that are paper only.¹³

To inform contingency planning before that work completes, GDS should design¹⁴ a service, including cost/benefit analysis of constituting a GDS-run service, building on GOV.UK Notify,¹⁵ through which users¹⁶ can request a print-out by post of any form hosted on GOV.UK that does not have a full digital service equivalent.¹⁷

That GDS service should be expected to publish statistics on every form that has been requested,¹⁸ thereby indicating some priority services for digital transformation to better serve the public.

In the absence of a central gov.uk service for any gov.uk hosted PDF, departments with a large reliance on paper processes – most notably MoJ and DWP – should task their digital teams with examining whether they should run one for their own remits.

¹¹ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2021/07/06/making-all-forms-on-gov-uk-accessible-easy-to-use-and-quick-to-process/>

¹² The issues we cover in this document about HMRC's CH2 form are repeated for another highly popular form in DLVA, the "V62 form", for which costs aren't measured <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/738958/>

¹³ even if they have to generate the PDF, print it, and mail it to the original department; with mandates that they can only do so if > X users, Y money or some such. Also they must not retain the data.

¹⁴ As a blog post, nothing more onerous

¹⁵ <https://www.notifications.service.gov.uk>

¹⁶ Possibly with a GOV.UK account?

¹⁷ We've done this before: <https://medconfidential.org/2018/children/>