HM Revenue & Customs

Research report

Personal Tax Account research

To explore customer attitudes and preferences towards digital services, specifically looking at the Personal Tax Account (PTA), to improve understanding of what customers want, how to maximise take-up, and to inform development of services and functions within the PTA.

February 2017

Behavioural & Customer Insight Team

Personal Tax Account research

This report was one of a number of research papers commissioned by HMRC in 2016-17 to support the development of its Personal Tax Account. HMRC reprioritised its portfolio of transformation projects in 2018 to ensure that it delivers key government priorities. However Personal Tax Account work is still continuing, focussing on driving digital take-up and iterative improvements to the existing offer. Additional services will only be added where they reduce phone and post contact and improve customer experience. This research continues to be used to inform that work.

Contents

About HMRC Process and Transformation

The government is committed to reducing burdens for taxpayers and building a transparent and accessible tax system fit for the digital age.

HMRC Process Transformation has been set up to play a leading role in driving radical transformation across HMRC. This work includes radically re-designing HMRC's processes to become more customer-focussed, intelligence led and digitally enabled.

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Research requirement (background to the project)

The Personal Tax Account (PTA), developed by HM Revenue and Customs and launched in December 2015, has been a key development in government's vision to transform the tax system to be 'digital by default'. This research was commissioned to assist HMRC in the development of the PTA and inform HMRC's migration, design and communication strategy in particular.

The PTA is an online tax account for individuals, which is designed to provide customers with the facility to manage their HMRC affairs securely and in one place, as well as allowing HMRC to make better use of the information it holds about customers to support an improved customer experience. The aim of the PTA is to make access to its digital services (such as viewing, checking and updating personal and tax details and making claims or applications) for individual customers as simple and intuitive as possible. As well as providing an improved customer experience, the Personal Tax Account will increase the likelihood that customers will get their tax and benefits and credits right, and decrease the need for contact via other channels (such as telephone or post).

Customers can sign up and log in to view the details that HMRC holds on them, make changes and interact with HMRC. HMRC continues to develop and refine the system, adding more functionality, features and services.

The mixed methods PTA research presented in this report was commissioned to get an understanding of customers' current digital behaviours and attitudes, their reactions to and likely uptake of the PTA, and gain insight into how HMRC could maximise uptake through their design, communications and migration strategies.

Specifically, the Personal Tax Account research sought to address the following business objectives:

- To improve understanding of what customers want from the Personal Tax Account; including what they want to see in the account and how and when they want to use it.
- To understand how HMRC can maximise take-up of this service and retain customers in the digital channel.
- To feed into the development of services and functions within the PTA.

When the research took place

The research took place between January and November 2016. Qualitative fieldwork was conducted between 14th March and 15th April 2016. Quantitative fieldwork was conducted from 10th June to 27th June 2016.
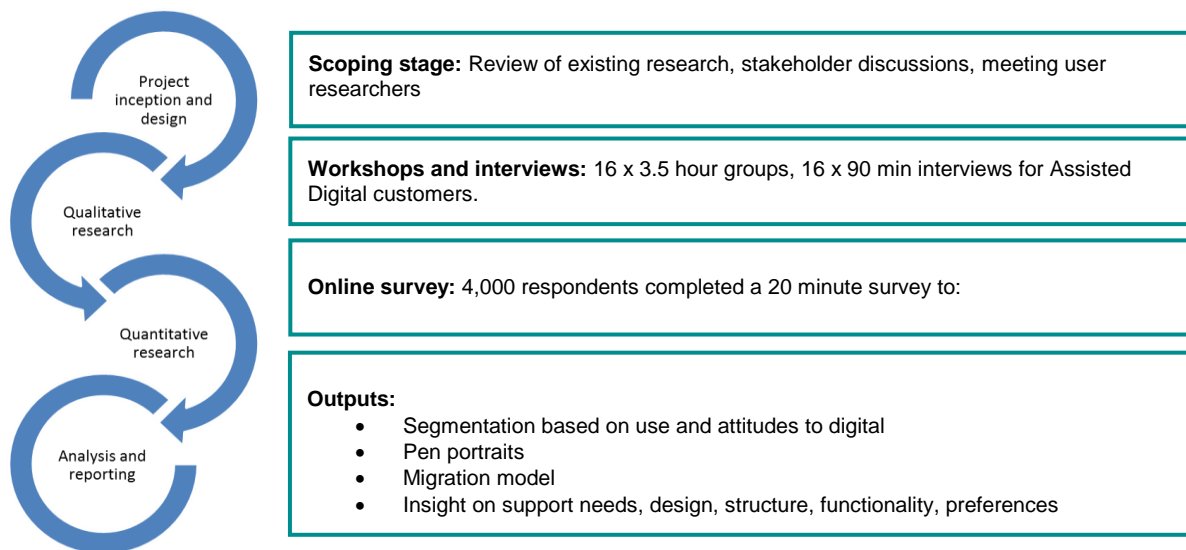
Who did the work (research agency)

The research was carried out by Kantar Public (formerly known as TNS BMRB). The core research team was made up of Benjamin Collins, Orla Mackle, Carryn Smit and Emily Edwards-Hughes.

Method, Data and Tools used, Sample

The Personal Tax Account research ran alongside the Digital Contact Channel (DCC) and digital segmentation research. The research involved a mixed method approach, combining primary qualitative and quantitative research, to gain a comprehensive understanding of customers (see figure 1 below for a summary of the approach).

Figure 1: Methodological approach

Project inception and design

Qualitative research

Quantitative research

Analysis and reporting

Scoping stage: Review of existing research, stakeholder discussions, meeting user researchers

Workshops and interviews: 16 x 3.5 hour groups, 16 x 90 min interviews for Assisted Digital customers.

Online survey: 4,000 respondents completed a 20 minute survey to:

Outputs:
- Segmentation based on use and attitudes to digital
- Pen portraits
- Migration model
- Insight on support needs, design, structure, functionality, preferences

Primary qualitative research

The qualitative stage consisted of 16 x 3.5 hour focus groups across the whole of the UK, alongside 16 x 90 minute depth interviews with Assisted Digital customers. Discussions explored customers' experiences of digital services both with HMRC and other industries, as well as their expectations and perceptions of what a "good" digital service should look like. The qualitative strand then introduced the concept of the PTA, explored initial responses and focused on how the account could meet customers' needs. Discussion also explored how HMRC could communicate the PTA, digital contact channels and HMRC digital services to different customer audiences to ensure maximum take-up of the service.

Primary quantitative research

The primary quantitative research was carried out using the Lightspeed Research online access panel between 10th and 27th June 2016. The sample definition was HMRC customers who use the internet to some extent. Loose quota controls[1] were applied, and 4059 completed interviews were achieved. The data was weighted to reflect HMRC's customer base that use the internet, based on data drawn from the Understanding Society survey[2]. The data was also weighted by age, gender and region. Important to note is that customers who are digitally excluded – i.e. those not online – were not included within the scope of this research and therefore where results refer to "customers" they are specifically referring to those who use the internet. Around 10-15% of the overall HMRC customer population is digitally excluded[3].

The questionnaire was around 20 minutes long, and covered the following areas:

- **Internet use:** where, when and why customers access the internet, and how confident do they feel about using it?
- **Attitudes to online**: what experiences have customers had of government services online?
- **Recent interactions with HMRC**: what HMRC services have customers used in the past, and how have they had contact with HMRC?
- **Use of PTA**: what previous experience, if any, have customers had with the PTA?
- **Feature preference**: which features are the most important and why?

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[1] Loose quotas set on gender, age, social class, region
[2] https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/innovation-panel/dataset-documentation/wave/5
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/457800/Digital_Exclusion_and_Assisted_Digital_research_publication_report.pdf

- **Service preference**: which services would be the most and least useful? A MaxDiff[4] approach was used where respondents were asked to select the most and least useful service from subgroups. A score was derived from these choices.
- **Scenario testing**: what would customers do initially in simple and complex scenarios when dealing with HMRC?

Main Findings

HMRC online customer profiles

Three quarters (74%) of customers[5] reported accessing the internet at home several times a day and 80% of customers reported that the internet was their first port of call when looking for information generally. Eight in ten (80%) customers indicated that they had interacted online with a government service in the last year and the vast majority (87%) said they are likely to do so in the future.

The majority of HMRC customers claimed that they were confident doing things online themselves and reported accessing the internet using an average of 2.5 devices – most commonly laptops (72%) and smartphones (65%). Although there was high use of internet using smartphones overall, this was skewed towards younger customers with over 80% of those between the ages of 16 and 34 years old usually accessing the internet via mobile phone (see figure 2).

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[4] In order to establish service preferences within the PTA, a questioning technique called the MaxDiff approach was used, rather than asking for direct choices. In the MaxDiff exercise respondents were shown 12 subgroups of 4 services (each subgroup on a new screen) with each service shown more than once. They were asked to select the ones they considered most and least useful (the maximum difference in their preference) every round. A preference score was then derived from these choices for each respondent for each service

[5] Note on methodology: please note that customers who are digitally excluded – i.e. those not online – were not included within the scope of this research and therefore where results refer to "customers" they are specifically referring to those who use the internet.

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Figure 2: Access of internet by mobile across age groups
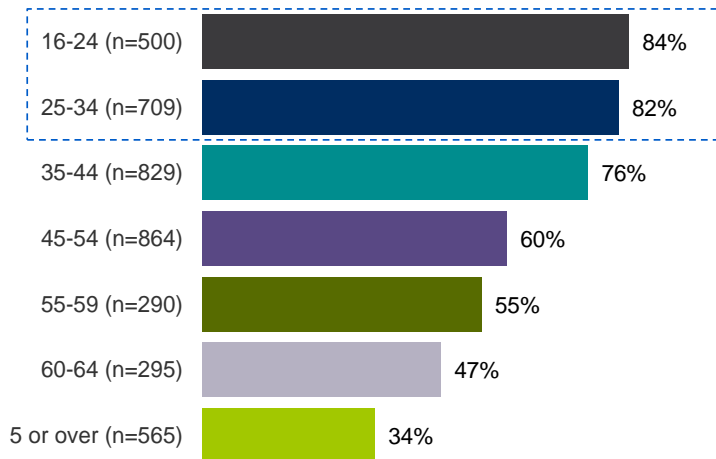
N=4052 (weighted) / 4059 (unweighted)
Source: "Which device or devices do you usually use to access the internet for personal use? Please select all that apply"

Despite this overall digital familiarity, HMRC customers vary in digital capability and their need for support depending on the specific tasks and circumstances they face. To better understand the specific needs of customers the survey asked about the extent to which they would or would not need help doing the following tasks online: (1) providing basic information, (2) making a payment or purchase and (3) providing detailed information to a government department.
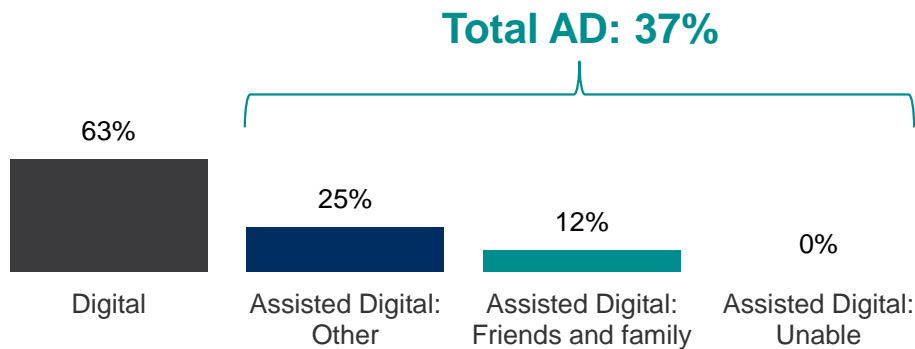
Although this particular online sample was relatively digitally capable, there were still a proportion of respondents who were less confident performing certain government related tasks online. More than a third (37%) of HMRC customers who already used the internet to some extent needed some kind of digital assistance and were less confident performing certain government related tasks online. These customers are considered Assisted Digital and are more likely to require particular forms of support, advice and reassurance[6]. Figure 3 shows three different types of Assisted Digital customers.

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[6] Originally used in the Government Digital Services (GDS) research conducted by Kantar Public (formally TNS BMRB)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/457800/Digital_Exclusion_and_Assisted_Digital_research_publication_report.pdf)

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Figure 3: Assisted Digital population

Total AD: 37%

63%   25%   12%   0%

Digital   Assisted Digital: Assisted Digital: Assisted Digital:
                    Other   Friends and family   Unable

N=4052 (weighted) / 4059 (unweighted)
Source: "Below we have listed three scenarios involving government services and the internet. For each of
these, please select the option that best reflects the extent to which you would be able to do this without
any help, with some help, or would not able to do this at all."

### *Current communication with HMRC*

Six in ten customers (60%) reported having contact with HMRC at least once in the past
year. Of those who did, the most used channels of communication were online (45%) and
telephone (39%), demonstrated in figure 4.

The proportion of customers who called HMRC within the different age groups was
relatively evenly spread, but a slightly higher proportion of younger respondents indicated
that they had called HMRC in the past year compared with older respondents (32% of
respondents aged 16-24 compared with 17% of those 60 years or older). Additionally a
higher proportion of customers classified as low need[7] called HMRC in the last year
compared with those classified as high need (39% of all low need versus 16% of all high
need) – contrary to what one might expect.

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[7] This is a derived index based on the complexity of customers' tax/credit & benefit affairs and their past
interaction patterns.

Personal Tax Account research

Figure 4: HMRC contact channels used for those who had contact with HMRC in the past 12 months
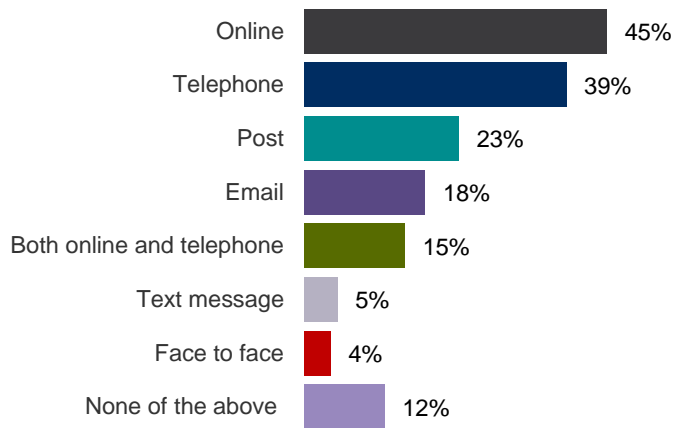
n= 2612 (weighted) / 2609 (unweighted)
Source: "Which of the following ways have you used to contact HMRC in the last 12 months?"

Of those who had called HMRC in the past year more than half (55%) did not have any digital contact (online or email contact) with HMRC. These customers will potentially be more challenging to migrate to the PTA since they are unfamiliar with interacting with HMRC online. Across the age groups, 16 to 24 year olds were the most likely to have called HMRC and to have had offline contact only (22%). While across the HMRC customer types a particularly high proportion of tax credit customers (22%) called HMRC and only contacted HMRC offline in the past year.

Assisted Digital customers were the most likely to have had offline contact[8] only with HMRC in the past year. Almost three in ten (28%) Assisted Digital customers had offline contact only, compared with 19% of Digital customers.

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[8] Offline contact includes telephone, post, text message and face-to-face

Perceptions of the Personal Tax Account

The qualitative findings revealed that the PTA was seen as a 'logical next step' for HMRC, while the quantitative findings suggested a good appetite for the PTA generally.

From the qualitative data, it was clear that customers' initial reaction to the Personal Tax Account was predominantly positive across all groups. Customers largely held the view – primarily from their experiences of using other digital comparators – that moving tax to a digital sphere would make their tax affairs simpler and more efficient.

Customer responses to the idea of a Personal Tax Account largely hinged on the current complexity of their customer journey with HMRC. The following general perceptions of the PTA were moderated by that complexity:

- **A hub for all interaction with HMRC**: Bringing together all their information in one accessible place.
- **Continuing the government agenda on digital services**: Many were engaging with other departments digitally and viewed this as an extension of that.
- **More control for individuals**: Linked more to individual personality than demographic or other measurable characteristics, some customers believed this could lead to better ownership and control of their tax affairs.
- **Making tax simpler and more efficient**: Viewed as having the ability to fill in gaps of knowledge in tax and provide clear, simple, jargon-free guidance.
- **Moving tax from the black box to equal relationship**: The potential to reconstruct their relationship with HMRC to be a more open, two-way conversation with increased transparency.
- **Record of past transactions/contact**: Respondents viewed this as particularly important for providing reassurance regarding transaction progression. It was also considered important for other commercial service providers in the digital space.
- **A summary of tax situation**: Respondents believed that by providing a summary of current, past and future tax affairs, the PTA could help with future planning and provide a hub for information on all tax affairs including their contributions.

Many self-assessment customers commented in the qualitative research that the account may make them more likely to complete their tax return across a financial year instead of "leaving it all to the last minute" in January. Others liked the idea that they could log expenses across the year and use that information to make forecasts for the next year. Other customers with more limited interactional history with HMRC, while enthusiastic about the overall concept, expressed lower levels of interest in logging into their account, outside of potentially encountering a problem, for example checking their tax code or investigating an underpayment. While they would consider signing up to the account, they

expected that they would not log in frequently. This group might need additional reasons/needs to encourage them to access their account on a more regular basis. Fundamentally, personality rather than customer type was found to be key from the qualitative research in understanding drivers to interact with HMRC. For example, there will always be customers who like to have more control regardless of how complex their affairs are and conversely customers who have low interest in engaging with tax despite potentially having frequent interactions with HMRC.

The quantitative findings indicated that the majority (75%) of HMRC customers felt they were likely to use the PTA – and customers were generally positive and receptive to the concept. This is despite the fact that the majority (69%) of customers had not yet heard of the PTA before being introduced to it in the survey.

One in seven (69%) of those who had heard of it had also accessed the PTA previously. Of those who had previously accessed it, the highest proportion (40%) had done so to file their self-assessment tax return while the second highest proportion (35%) checked their tax code. A third (33%) also just looked around. Of those who had used the PTA previously, 80% rated it positively (see figure 5).

Figure 5: PTA ratings from previous users
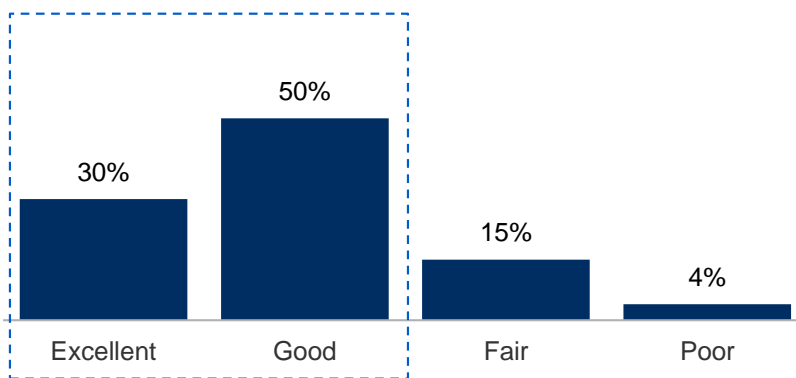

N=750 (weighted) / 719 (unweighted)
Source: "Overall how would you rate your experience with your Personal Tax Account?"

Those most likely to use the PTA are customers with a clear need – for example self-assessment (78%) or tax credit (84%) customers (see figure 6). These customers are most likely to want the PTA to facilitate an active relationship and more complex forms of interaction.

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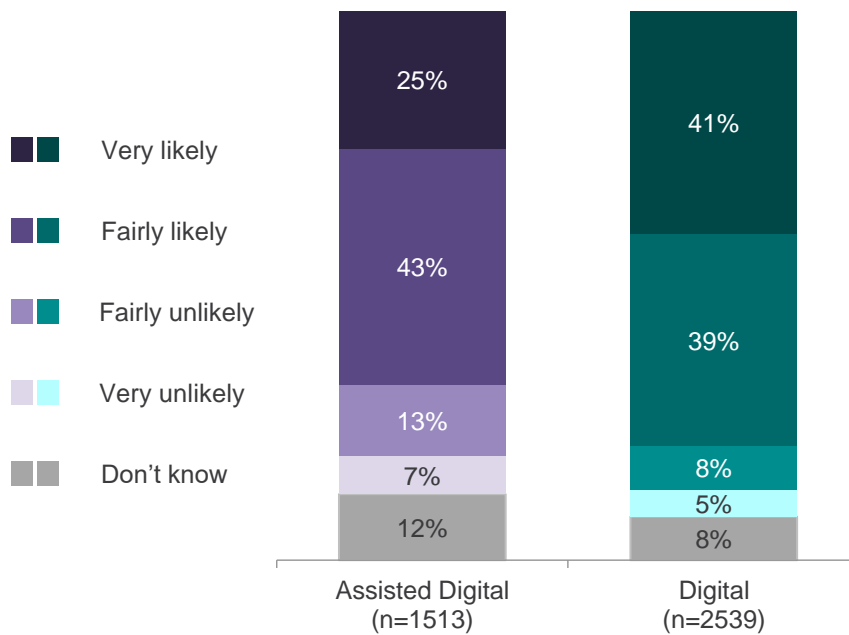**Figure 6: Stated likelihood to use PTA across customer types**
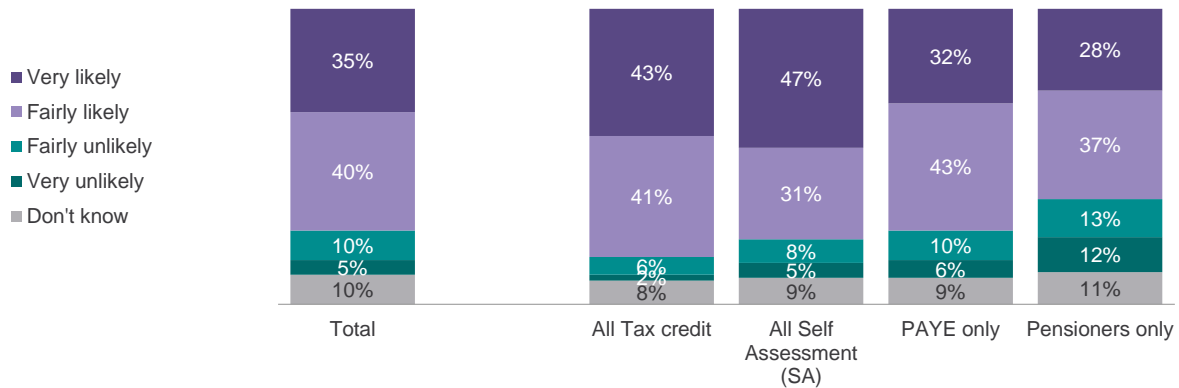
Source: "Having thought about the Personal Tax Account, how likely, if at all, would you be to use it [again]?" (n=4052)

The majority (73%) of customers could not think of any concerns that they might have with the PTA. Where concerns did exist they were mostly related to security and confidentiality (9%). Across customer types, self-assessment customers (23%) and those who were pensioners without other income sources (23%) were more likely to have concerns with the PTA compared with PAYE only customers (16%) and all tax credit (14%) customers.

The qualitative findings revealed that Assisted Digital customers were generally positive, but had lower confidence and higher anxiety around using the PTA. This tended to come from two aspects in combination – perceived high burden and a lack of knowledge as they are less likely to be interacting with HMRC or other organisations online. Typically, Assisted Digital customers worried about safety of personal details, feeling like they might lose the ability to talk to someone, get things wrong, and not understanding things. This leads to a greater need for support. AD customers would need support with tasks like completing forms, logging on and explaining tax circumstances**.** The quantitative findings suggested that Assisted Digital customers were less likely than Digital customers to use the PTA in the future (68% compared to 80%), demonstrated in figure 7.

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Figure 7: Stated likelihood to use PTA, Assisted Digital and Digital customers

Source: "Having thought about the Personal Tax Account, how likely, if at all, would you be to use it [again]?"

The qualitative findings demonstrated that the PTA presents an opportunity to transform the relationship between HMRC and its customers. Findings suggested that there is the potential for it to change the way HMRC is perceived; from a less distant and bureaucratic organisation to a more friendly accessible government service. Key aspects of this potential shift from the current to future relationship include:

- **Greater ownership and control:** The PTA was perceived as offering customers the ability to "manage" their tax affairs better, prepare for tax bills and update HMRC more regularly.

- **Better knowledge of tax**: Customers hoped that the PTA might "decode" tax codes, make jargon seem less intimidating, and explain how tax operates by stripping out complicated language and using simple straightforward advice and guidance.

- **Increased transparency**: Participants hoped that the PTA could help them better understand how tax is estimated, which could provide legitimacy on tax and shake off stereotypes around public spending.

- **Open, smarter communications**: Being able to communicate a change of circumstances in a two-way conversation with HMRC was seen as a way to reduce errors and thus phone calls.

What customers want in the Personal Tax Account

Qualitative findings

In the qualitative research participants tended to select services that they wanted to be included in the PTA in three ways: if they were **familiar** (i.e. HMRC services that they had already used or heard about)**, essential** (i.e. that they saw an immediate need for) or **relevant** (i.e. to their personal circumstances) or a mixture of these concepts.

They tended not to be interested in services outside of these factors or in the additional possibilities of how the PTA could work or what it could do. **Personal circumstances, rather than customer type, was the main driver for service preference**.

A number of participants relayed that certain services would appeal to certain people and it was therefore difficult to provide an overall consensus, even within customer types. The key finding from this exercise was that the account must reflect a degree of **personalisation** and **individuality** to the customer for the concept to be appealing.

Participants also tended to prioritise services which gave them information that they could use with other government departments/other services or enabled them to complete transactions in a simpler way. These included:

- **Tracking correspondence**: Feeling reassured that a transaction was "in hand" was important.

- **Auto-filling**: For those who were filling out information on a frequent basis, auto-filling was hoped to make a process easier and quicker.

- **Checking tax codes**: For those who wished to ease in to their relationship with HMRC and take the first step towards an open relationship, this was flagged as a good starting point for engagement which was a key stress point for many customers.

- **Annual Tax Summary**: The tax summary was viewed as a great way of opening the "black box" of tax, providing education and therefore empowering customers.

However, there were also a number of areas which were flagged as potentially causing anxiety or worry:

- **Auto-filling**: While being viewed as a great way to save time, there were also concerns about the use of third party information in the account. Specifically what kind of information HMRC would be privy to and whether they would ask permission before accessing this, especially banking and financial information. There were conversations here around the joining up of government services to close loopholes in the system and some strong debates about who would be most impacted by this.

- **Security of data**: While some viewed the idea of having all their tax in one place as convenient, upon further reflection some questioned the security of having personal data all in one place, the potential for hacking and the implications of this.

- **Potential for increased responsibility**: Some participants were concerned that the PTA may generate added responsibility for maintaining details or making sure things are done correctly. For those with low tax knowledge and low HMRC interaction this was particularly worrying.

Tailoring and personalisation were seen as key to making sure the PTA is relevant to customers and offers greater ease and speed. Participants suggested that this could be achieved by the following features:

- **A pre-selection process**: A number of customers spontaneously suggested the idea of a pre-selection process (i.e. filling out a form that would mean the account and layout would be tailored to them).

- **A guiding hand**: Towards potential entitlements which they may not have previously been aware of, but were eligible for. This kind of nudging incentive was seen as a key way to encourage people to migrate to the account.

Important to note is the influence of experience with commercial comparators on expectations of how their account should function. Some customers had engaged with similar services in the digital space (e.g. with their bank) and consequently believed that HMRC should offer a similar experience.

Quantitative findings

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what customers want from their PTA, the quantitative survey focused separately on features and services. Respondents were presented with two hypothetical scenarios (simple and complex) tailored to customer type to gauge what action the respondent would likely take in these scenarios.

Features

After a description of the Personal Tax Account, respondents were presented with 14 features and asked to select the five that they considered the most important to be included in the PTA, followed by which single one of those they considered most important. They were then asked why they had made these choices.

The top three features that customers considered important in the PTA were:
1. Tax, pension and tax credits calculators (41%)
2. Online support through Webchat (38%)
3. Ability to track your progress online and summary of recent contact (35%)

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Across the HMRC customer types these three features were almost consistently rated the most important. The only exception to this was pensioners, for whom the function to 'auto-fill forms and applications' was ranked the most important, followed by tax calculators and Webchat (see table 1 for details).

Table 1: Feature preference across customer groups

	Total	PAYE only	Pensioners only	All Tax credit	All Self-assessment
	n=4052	*n=1671*	*n=437*	*n=809*	*n=647*
Tax, pension and tax credits calculators	**41%**	**44%**	**41%**	**41%**	**36%**
Online support through Webchat	**38%**	**38%**	**37%**	**36%**	**42%**
Track your progress online and summary of recent contact	**35%**	**34%**	31%	**38%**	38%
Auto-fill forms and applications	33%	32%	**43%**	28%	36%
Advice and guidance for dealings with other government departments	28%	29%	30%	29%	25%
Personalise services available to fit needs	26%	25%	27%	29%	28%
Able to select services available to fit needs	25%	26%	31%	22%	27%
Opting to go paperless	23%	25%	22%	22%	25%
An account landing page	20%	21%	21%	18%	23%
SMS message or email reminders	18%	15%	11%	24%	23%
Self-assessment payment scheduler	14%	13%	3%	16%	26%
Ability to allow somebody else to act on your behalf	12%	10%	12%	13%	18%
Personal and Business tax affairs kept separate	9%	9%	2%	12%	13%
Able to move between Personal and Business accounts	8%	7%	2%	11%	13%
Don't know	15%	16%	19%	11%	6%

Top 3 ranking for % people considering it important

Stands out as higher than among other groups

N=4052 (weighted) / 4059 (unweighted)
Source: 'What features would be important to have as part of your Personal Tax Account? Please select up to 5 features that you feel would be important to have in your Personal Tax Account.'
Ranked on Total

Features considered most important were also largely consistent across Assisted Digital and Digital customers. The ability to allow somebody else to act on their behalf was considered twice as important by Assisted Digital customers, however (18% compared with 9% of Digital customers). Assisted Digital customers were also more likely to answer 'Don't know' to this question (19% compared with 12% of Digital customers): an indication

that they perhaps found it more challenging to conceptualise the PTA and how they might use it.

Overall, convenience, speed, ease and efficiency were the most common motivations for choice of feature:

1. It will make things more convenient (45%)
2. It would make dealing with HMRC easier (44%)
3. It will make things faster and more efficient (41%)

Across the HMRC customer types, more tax credit customers wanted to be informed and up to date (42% compared to 39% overall) than other customer types, while more pensioners were attracted by the idea of not having to call HMRC (42% compared to 35% overall). Although Assisted Digital customers had similar preferences for features within the PTA, they were more likely to be looking for reassurance (40% compared to 32% for Digital customers) rather than convenience (36% compared to 50% of Digital customers).

Services

In order to establish service preferences within the PTA, respondents were asked to select the services they considered most and least useful.

The top three services that HMRC customers would find most useful were:

1. Notification of underpaid/overpaid tax and how amount is calculated (48%)
2. Ability to check income tax details (33%)
3. Ability to view NI contributions and state pension forecast (32%)

Service preference was comparable for these top three services across Assisted Digital and Digital customers. Overall though, Digital customers had a greater preference for more active services such as the ability to make claims or applications (30% compared to 25% of Digital customers). Assisted Digital customers, on the other hand, had a higher preference for more passive actions, such as viewing an annual summary of how the government spent tax (13% of Assisted Digital customers compared with 6% of Digital).

There was greater difference in the top ranked services by customer type (see table 2). This appears to be based on specific interaction needs – e.g. for tax credit customers renewing tax credits online would be most useful, while for self-assessment customers paying any tax owed or arranging for a tax repayment online would be more useful. This suggests that overall there are similar 'hygiene factors' (basic expectations) across all segments but some customisation across HMRC customer types is expected.

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Table 2: Service preference across customer groups

	Total	PAYE only	Pensioners only	All Tax credit	All Self-assessment
	n=4052	*n=1671*	*n=437*	*n=809*	*n=647*
Notification of underpaid / overpaid tax & how amount is calculated	**48%**	**51%**	**57%**	31%	**56%**
Check your income tax details	**33%**	**35%**	**55%**	17%	**34%**
View your NI contributions and state pension forecast	**32%**	**42%**	17%	25%	27%
Pay any tax you owe or arrange for a tax repayment online	29%	28%	27%	20%	**47%**
Make claims or applications	28%	27%	18%	**35%**	25%
View and update the personal details HMRC holds	26%	28%	**43%**	14%	20%
Update with personal info on life events	23%	22%	19%	24%	22%
Check the information HMRC holds	18%	19%	36%	11%	14%
Renew your tax credits online	18%	11%	3%	**50%**	15%
Tell HMRC about changes relating to tax/credits & benefits	15%	9%	4%	**36%**	11%
View an annual summary of how the govt. spent your tax	9%	10%	4%	10%	7%
Report non-employment income received	6%	5%	2%	7%	10%
Paperless tax code notification	6%	6%	8%	7%	5%
Print confirmation of your National Insurance number and income	5%	6%	4%	6%	3%
Charitable donations (i.e. Gift Aid)	5%	4%	4%	7%	6%

Top 3 ranking for % people considering it useful

Stands out as higher than among other groups

Top 3 and stands out as higher than among other groups

N=4052 (weighted) / 4059 (unweighted)
Based on MaxDiff question to select most and least useful services. % rating in top 3 most useful presented
Ranked on Total

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Scenario testing

Respondents were presented with two tax/credits and benefits related tasks – one simple and one complex – to understand what action they would take in these scenarios. These were customised to HMRC customer type to reflect their different needs (see table 3).

Table 3: The simple and complex scenarios presented to the different HMRC customer types in the questionnaire

Customer Type	Simple scenario	Complex scenario
Employed (PAYE) + all other (n=1671)	Check your tax code	Reclaim an overpayment of tax
Pensioners (n=597)	Check the details HMRC have for you are correct, such as address or telephone number	Reclaim an overpayment of tax
Tax credit (n=664)	Check the details HMRC have for you are correct, such as address or telephone number	Resolve an underpayment of tax credits
Self-assessment (SA) (n=647)	Check how much tax you are likely to pay (i.e. via a tax calculator)	Complete your self-assessment tax return

Initial actions: The research showed that the largest proportion of customers would first go online when confronted with a simple task relating to their tax/credit and benefit affairs. Across the simple scenarios, searching the GOV.UK or the HMRC website (27%) was the most popular initial action across all groups. Differences across the customer groups suggested that PAYE customers were more likely to simply check previous correspondences (21%) while pensioners (21%) and self-assessment (23%) customers would be the most likely to turn to their PTA.

Using the PTA increased in popularity across the complex scenarios – 28% said they would go to their PTA first when presented with the complex scenario compared with only 16% in the simple scenario. This suggests that the PTA may be seen as most useful for tasks that are less straightforward or more active. Calling HMRC also gained popularity as a response to the more complex scenario.

Why they chose to do that first: The motivations behind these initial actions were fairly consistent across scenarios and customer types. The top ranked motivations were convenience (simple scenario: 40%; complex scenario: 34%), speed (simple scenario: 37%; complex scenario: 33%), and wanting to get information first (simple scenario: 20%; complex scenario: 21%).

Motivations did not change substantially across scenarios or customer types, reiterating the importance of speed, convenience and information as key practical factors motivating customers' choice of contact channel. A high proportion (42%) of self-assessment customers mentioned familiarity as a key motivation for their choice in the complex

scenario (completing their self-assessment tax return) making it the top ranked factor for that scenario.

What would encourage them to use the PTA: Across the board customers were much more likely to use their PTA if they knew more about it (simple scenario: 31%; complex scenario: 30), if it was simpler or easier than what they usually did (simple scenario: 26%; complex scenario: 23%) or if it guaranteed a faster query resolution (simple scenario: 24%; complex scenario: 24%). For both the simple and complex scenarios, a higher proportion of Assisted Digital customers said they would call HMRC as their first action, however their main motivation behind this initial action remained speed and convenience.

Support preference when using the PTA: Across both the simple and complex scenarios, the use of Webchat and looking for information online were consistently the most preferred support options for the hypothetical tasks, as demonstrated in table 4.

Table 4: Support preferences in simple and complex scenarios

	Simple	Complex
Look for information on the HMRC / GOV.UK website(s)	26%	23%
Webchat	22%	23%
Call HMRC	15%	19%
Email HMRC	9%	8%
Virtual Assistant	6%	7%
Ask for help from a friend or relative	4%	3%
Watch an online help video	4%	4%
Write to HMRC	3%	3%
Stop trying to do it	2%	2%
Co-browsing	1%	1%
Something else	1%	1%
Don't know	7%	7%

◼ Top 3 selection ranking

N=4052 (weighted) / 4059(unweighted)
Source: As you are using your Personal Tax Account to [insert scenario] you experience an issue where you don't know what to do next. What would you do first?

Across the HMRC customer types, when presented with a simple scenario, tax credit customers (19%) were the most likely to say that they would call HMRC while pensioners were the least likely (12%). In the complex scenario tax credit customers (26%) were still the most likely to call while self-assessment (13%) customers were the least likely. A higher proportion of younger customers were most likely to call in both scenarios.

Communications

Respondents suggested that HMRC emphasise the following in its communications on the PTA:

- **A one stop shop**: Somewhere you can access all your tax information and deal with **multiple matters in one, easy, accessible platform.**

- **Gives you more control of your affairs**: Message should focus on greater transparency, being able to communicate with HMRC when it suits you, and allowing customers to update and "keep on top" of tax affairs throughout the year. Self-employed respondents felt that empowering customers to take control of their affairs was an important message to convey.

- **Simple language**: Language which is clear, succinct and avoids technical jargon but also provides guidance without patronising or confusing customers.

- **Easy to register and high security**: To address concerns around security, messages should also focus on security of personal information and for many of those who were not used to engaging with government online, focus should also be placed on the ease of registering and setting up the account to encourage making the first leap.

Respondents also suggested that it would be helpful for HMRC to address the following concerns:

- **Needing to log on regularly**: Respondents viewed the potential for added burden as the least appealing aspect. They suggested that specifying how often they would need to log in in a mandatory sense was important.

- **More responsibility for your tax affairs**: Respondents concerns about added responsibility suggests messages should avoid focusing on the potential added responsibility for customers.

- **Everything is now digital**: Many customers feared that this would mean the end of HMRC's phone line. They would benefit from an assurance that this is not the case but that the PTA exists to allow people to address queries with HMRC faster and with more clarity (flagging that speed is key).

- **Complex Jargon**: Removing any complex jargon from advertising was recommended by respondents.

In the qualitative interviews respondents indicated issues that would resonate with them in communications. These suggestions tended to differ by customer grouping but were also influenced by personality type:

For PAYE: Fostering a better understanding of tax and offering transparency in relation to how tax is calculated and how this is apportioned.

For SA: The connection to the Business Tax Account, simplicity of transactions and allowing for more control of affairs instead of the often "last minute rush" in January.

For benefits: Ease of communicating information to HMRC and in providing information on potential benefits entitlements.

For retired customers: Ability to manage (sometimes complex) tax affairs in one place.

Job change/new to work: Establishing an early and better understanding of options in tax and benefit and credits.

Multiple jobs: Ease of keeping track of tax codes and simplicity of letting HMRC know when contracts change.

Assisted Digital customers: Ease of functionality, and availability of support and help within their PTA.