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## HMRC Children's Centres Survey 2009

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A research report for:



**HM Revenue  
& Customs**

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## Disclaimer

The views in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of HM Revenue & Customs.

Where no significant demographic differences are mentioned, this is because none were shown in the data.

Overall this report reflects the joint findings for both initiative and control centres. Where significant differences exist between initiative and control sites these have been highlighted and discussed.

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# 1 Executive Summary

This report is of the findings from the HMRC baseline survey of Children's Centres visitors to support the evaluation of an initiative to deliver information and advice about tax credits through Children's Centres. Interviews were conducted in Children's Centres where such a service was to be provided (initiative sites) and in the same number of Children's Centres, which have similar characteristics, where advice was not to be provided (control sites). This baseline research was carried out prior to the introduction of any initiative activity. Therefore the findings cover people's use of Children's Centres and understanding of the tax credits system prior to the initiative and do not reflect any measure of the impact of the initiative.

The key findings from the baseline survey were:

- Seventy seven per cent of children's centre visitors are already receiving tax credits from HMRC.
- Eighty four per cent of those receiving tax credits "depend on the money [they] get from tax credits".
- Nearly 80 per cent gave a reason for why they may have to update the tax credit system annually.
- Over 90 per cent of respondents who had changes in circumstances claim to have reported them, mainly via the helpline and within a month of the change occurring.
- Where not reported within a month, the most common reasons given were that they were too busy/stressed.
- More agreed than disagreed that calling the helpline is expensive and time consuming.
- Forty five per cent did not know how the tax credits system works.
- Sixty five per cent said they know who can give them proper advice about tax credits.
- Children's Centre/Staff came second after the helpline for the most preferred source of information about tax credits.
- Fifty seven per cent would definitely like to get advice and support about tax credits from Children's Centres and an additional 22 per cent would probably like to.

- The visitors who were most positive about the idea of receiving information via the Children's Centres were those not working, on low incomes and from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups.
- Those who said they would like to get advice or support about tax credits from Children's Centres wanted to do so mainly because it was seen to be quicker, easier and more convenient. Those who would not simply prefer other methods.
- The profile of users in the initiative sites and control sites was very similar although the control sites had a lower volume of users. There were no differences in terms of knowledge and attitudes other than awareness of benefits and tax credits was slightly higher in the initiative sites.

## 2 Background and Objectives

In line with the government's long-term commitment to reducing child poverty, a cross-government Child Poverty Unit (CPU) has been established to oversee a number of initiatives to be introduced through different systems across the country, including through Children's Centres. There are currently 2,500 Children's Centres, delivering a wide range of services and support for families with children under five. The new initiatives will run alongside family, health, employment and education services already operating within these Centres, which primarily provide services within the most disadvantaged areas in England.

Figures indicate that the risk of child poverty falls from 58 per cent to 14 per cent when parents are employed. These figures highlight the importance of supporting working parents and reducing barriers, such as childcare, through systems such as tax credits. There are currently two forms of tax credits available.

- Child Tax Credit – financial support provided to families and children.
- Working Tax Credit – financial support to help working people on low incomes, whether they have children or not.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the department responsible for administering tax credits, is responsible for one of the initiatives, which will involve HMRC staff delivering advice and support to parents about claiming tax credits, through Children's Centres. A 12-month initiative to be run in 100 Children's Centres across London, Birmingham, Lancashire and Wolverhampton, will see HMRC Claimant Compliance Officers (CCOs) visiting Children's Centres on a regular basis to offer advice and support on tax credits to customers attending the Centres.

HMRC currently operates a tax credits helpline and provides information and advice on tax credits through various sources, but does not currently tend to provide information through other organisations. Many Children's Centre users claim, or could potentially claim, tax credits and may be likely to need help with their claims. Therefore, by giving advice through Children's Centres HMRC will be targeting a group of customers who are likely to need help and support more than others.



GfK NOP Social Research was commissioned to carry out a baseline of quantitative research.

This baseline survey was carried out prior to the introduction of any initiative activity within Children's Centres. Therefore the findings cover people's use of Children's Centres and understanding of the tax credits system and do not reflect any measure of the impact of the initiative. This could provide a point of comparison for any post-intervention survey stages which would then allow analysis of the impact of the initiative. A follow-up survey was not conducted due to a change of Government priorities in May 2010.

Additional objectives of the quantitative research included:-

- Identifying customers' desire to use Children's Centres as a source of advice and support about tax credits.
- Comparing customers' feelings towards accessing support and advice via Children's Centres with other routes such as helplines..
- Provide a sample to allow for the possibility of administrative data analysis of the tax credits claims of those interviewed.

The survey used a test/control design to allow the identification of the impact of the initiative if post-intervention surveys were conducted. A random sample of 43 of the initiative sites was selected by HMRC along with an equal number of nearby 'control' locations (i.e. where no intervention was planned), giving a total sample of 86 Children's Centres across London, Birmingham, Lancashire and Wolverhampton. Initiative and Control centres were matched by specific demographics to make sure they were as similar in make-up as possible.

Advance information about estimated flows was obtained from most sites to enable calculations to be made for sampling intervals for each hour (e.g. to interview every person or one person in three, etc). Fieldwork shifts were spread evenly by day of the week to ensure that we included the views of people who went into Centres in quiet periods. Interviewers worked in pairs, with one maintaining constant counts of 'users' and the other carrying out interviews with every  $N$ th person who walked past. This

enabled the collection of views and experiences from a random probability sample of Children's Centres customers.

The final questionnaire averaged around 15 minutes and was acceptable to most respondents – very few people opted out once the interview had begun. In total, 1849 separate people were successfully interviewed at the 86 sites and 1786 full interviews were completed (after screening out non-users of Centre services).

After removing non-eligible people and those who had already been approached to take part in the survey on a previous day, the adjusted response rate was 50 per cent. The main reasons for refusal to take part were being too busy, the length of the interview, the mention of HMRC in the introduction to the survey, language issues and not being interested in the subject.

Two-thirds of the sample agreed that HMRC could have their name, address and date of birth to allow for the possibility of data linkage in order to monitor any differences between how customers dealt with their tax credit claims (e.g. in numbers of changes of circumstances reported; date by which they renewed their claim, etc.) at initiative and control locations over the evaluation period.

An in-depth discussion of the sampling approach is contained in the appendices.

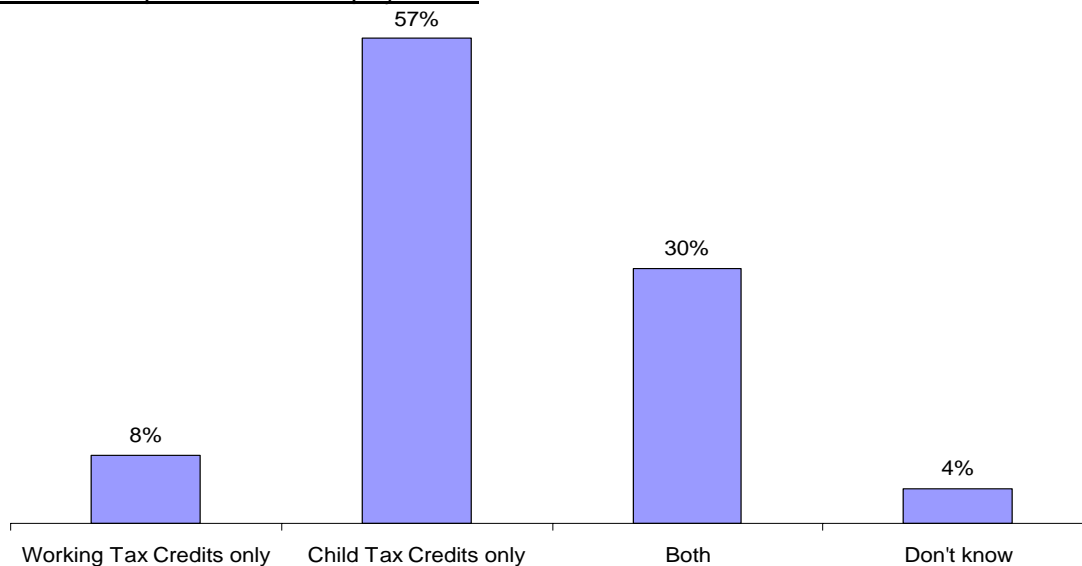
### 3 Sample Profile

The sample was made up of a high proportion of female respondents (85 per cent). About half of the sample (44 per cent) were from BAME groups, and half were aged between 25 and 34 years of age. Almost a third (30 per cent) did not live with a spouse or partner. The aim of achieving an equal split between initiative and control sites was met, with a sample made up by 49 per cent of initiative centres and 51 per cent of control centres

With regard to working status, 40 per cent of respondents were in paid work and an equal proportion were not working and not looking for work. A further 9 per cent were looking for work. Forty four per cent of those who gave an income stated it was under £11,000 per annum. Only 11 per cent of respondents had just a landline telephone, 25 per cent had just a mobile telephone and 62 per cent have both. There were no significant differences in the demographic profiles of users at the initiative and control centres.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their tax credit status. The majority (77 per cent) of respondents were currently claiming tax credits. Of those that were, more than half reported to receive Child Tax Credits (CTC) only, followed by about a third who reported to be receiving both CTC and Working Tax Credits (WTC). A minority reported receiving WTC only. Of these, only one respondent reported to have no children, prompting the assumption that the majority may have been confused about the details of their tax credits claim and may also have been in receipt of CTC. A smaller proportion still reported they were unclear about the type of tax credits they claimed.

Chart 1: Receipt of tax credits payments



Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

Respondents were read two pairs of statements about their dependence on tax credits and asked to select from each pair the one which best described their circumstances. It was apparent that, in the majority of cases, those who do receive tax credits are highly dependent upon them. A total of 84 per cent depend on the money they get from tax credits “to get by”, whilst 15 per cent “could manage without” if they needed to. Furthermore, 78 per cent need them to “pay for essentials like food, rent or heating bills” compared with 20 per cent who use them to help pay for the “little extras”. This result will be drawn upon at relevant points throughout this report.

## 4 Key Findings

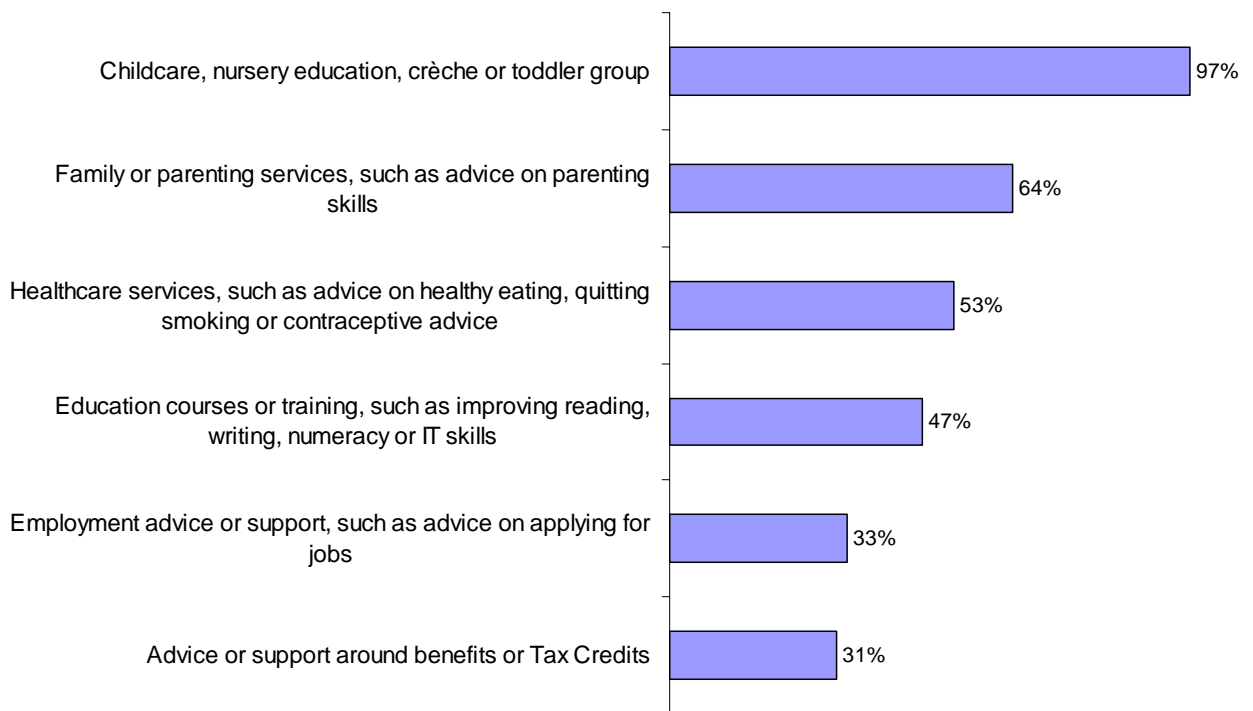
### 4.1 Use of Children’s Centres

**Summary of findings:**

- Slightly higher awareness of advice around benefits or tax credits in initiative centres (34 per cent) than in control centres (27 per cent).
- More than half (57 per cent) of Children’s Centre users ONLY use childcare, nursery education, crèche or toddler groups.
- Eighty eight per cent of those who use more than one Children’s Centre service MAINLY use childcare, nursery education, crèche or toddler groups.
- Over a third (36 per cent) have been visiting their Children’s Centre for more than a year.

After some initial screening questions respondents were asked to identify, from a prompted list, which services they were aware of at the Children’s Centre they were visiting. Almost all respondents were aware of childcare services, which include nursery education, crèche and toddler groups. High proportions were also aware that family and parenting services, healthcare services and education courses or training were available at their Children’s Centre. There was also awareness amongst a third of respondents about advice and support on employment, benefits or tax credits.

Chart 2: Services respondents were already aware of at their Children's Centre

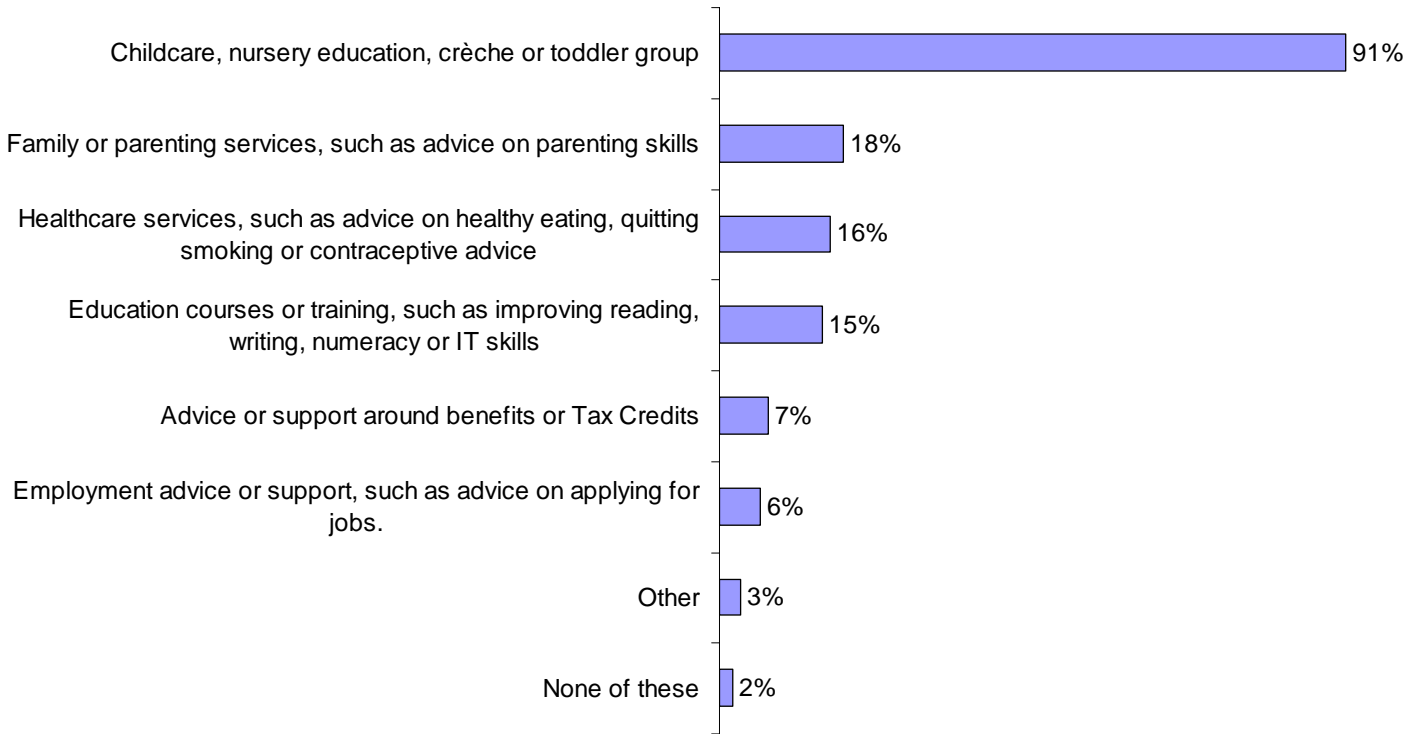


NB: Mentions under 5% are not shown  
Base: All = 1849

Awareness of the services available at Children's Centres was greater amongst those who visit more regularly and those that have been using their Centre for a longer period of time.

Respondents were asked which services they had ever made use of at their Children’s Centre. Almost all reported using childcare services. Other services are used, but by less than 20 per cent of users.

Chart 3: Services respondents use at their Children’s Centre



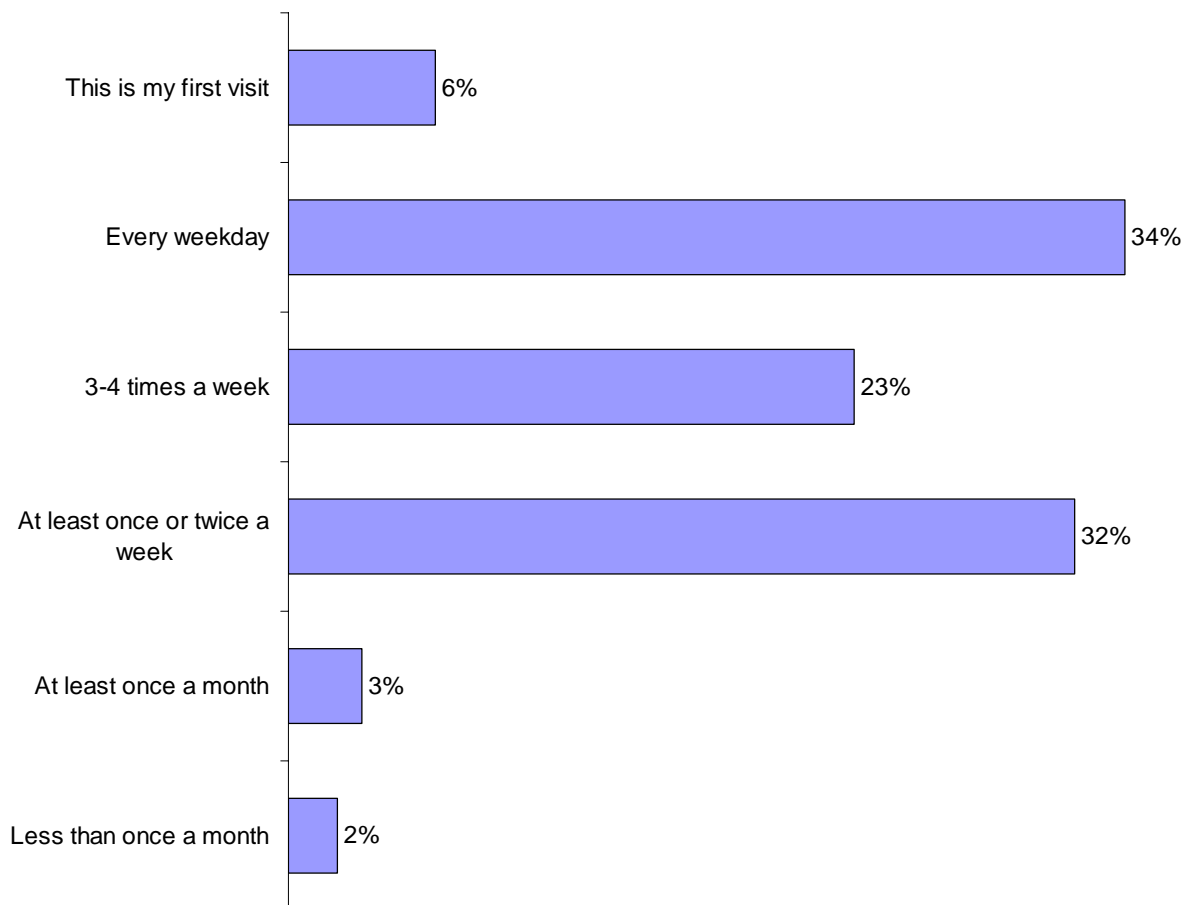
Base: All who are aware of Children’s Centre services = 1831

More than one answer could be given so answers do not sum to 100%

Eighty eight per cent of respondents who reported making use of more than one Children’s Centre service gave childcare as their main reason for visiting.

About a third (34 per cent) of users visit their Children's Centre every weekday. Almost half (55 per cent) visit between one and three times a week and five per cent visit less often. A further six per cent were on their first visit at the time of being interviewed. Higher household income users tend to go only once or twice a week.

Chart 4: Frequency of visits



Base: All who are aware of and use Children's Centres = 1786

Of those not on their first visit, 36 per cent have been visiting their Children's Centre for more than a year, 11 per cent for about a year and 25 per cent since last summer (2008). At the time of interview only 28 per cent of users had been visiting their Children's Centre for only a few months.



## 4.2 Preference to receive tax credits advice and support at Children’s Centres

### Summary of findings:

- Overall 78 per cent of users said they would like to get advice and support about tax credits from a Children’s Centre, with 57 per cent saying they definitely would.
- Main positive reasons included convenience, ease and speed.
- Main negative reason was preference for other methods.

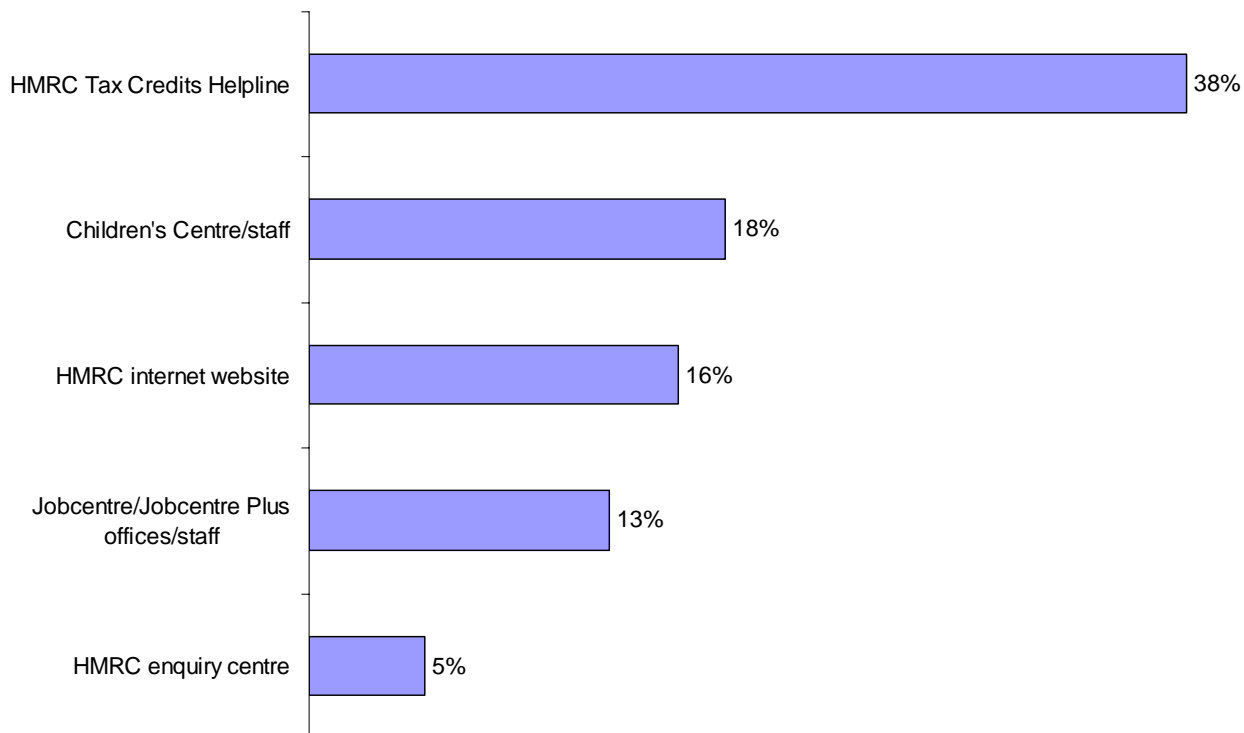
In order to determine the preference of centre users to receive advice and support about tax credits in their Children’s centre, a number of questions were asked. Users were asked where they had gone in the past when they had wanted information, advice and support about tax credits. This was an unprompted question, with responses multi-coded to a pre-selected list. The majority (58 per cent) of users said that they had called the HMRC helpline. Other responses included Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus (17 per cent), the HMRC internet website (15 per cent) and a range of other responses all given by fewer than 10 per cent of users. At this stage five per cent of respondents said they had gone to a Children’s Centre when they wanted information, advice and support about tax credits in the past.

Users were shown a pre-coded list and asked where they would go, given the choice. Again, the HMRC helpline was the most popular option (56 per cent). With this prompting other options, such as the HMRC internet website and Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus, received a higher proportion of responses (36 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). A further 34 per cent also said they would choose to get information, support and advice about tax credits from Children’s Centres. Those choosing more than one option were then asked which one they would prefer so that a primary choice was achieved from all users.

Almost a fifth of users said Children’s Centres would be their preferred source of information, support and advice about tax credits. This was topped only by the HMRC helpline, which a large proportion of users are already aware of and making

use of. It is encouraging to see that such a large minority of users are most likely to turn to Children's Centres for such advice given the range of other sources that had been suggested to them before this point.

Chart 5: Preferred source of information, advice and support about tax credits

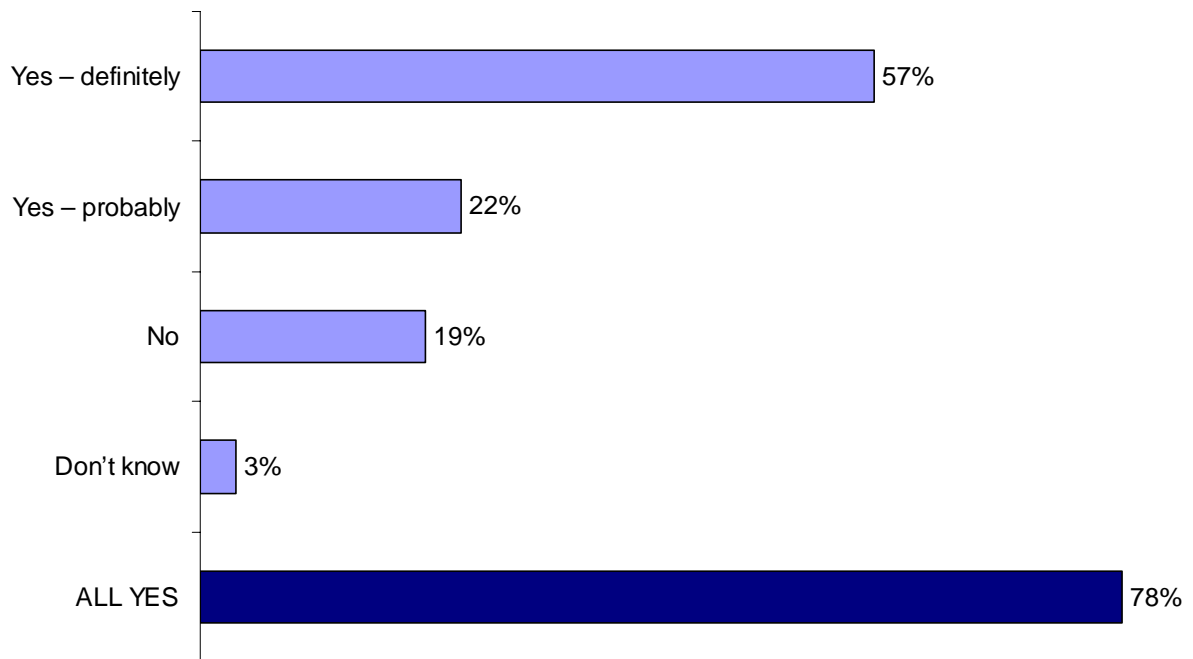


Base: All who are aware of and use Children's Centre services excluding those who don't know or gave no answer = 1754. NB: mentions under 5% not shown

The HMRC internet website was most popular among those who were not currently claiming tax credits; the Jobcentre scored highest among those on lower household incomes and who only had mobile phones while the highest score for Children's Centres was among users who found the helpline expensive and were not working. Those who have greater dependence on their tax credits are more likely than others to select Children's Centres as their preferred choice of where to get information, advice or support from.

Users were asked specifically whether they would like to get advice and support about tax credits from their (or any other) Children’s Centre. The majority responded positively to this, with more than half (57 per cent) saying they “definitely” would and a further 22 per cent saying they “probably” would.

Chart 6: Desire to get advice and support about tax credits from a Children’s Centre

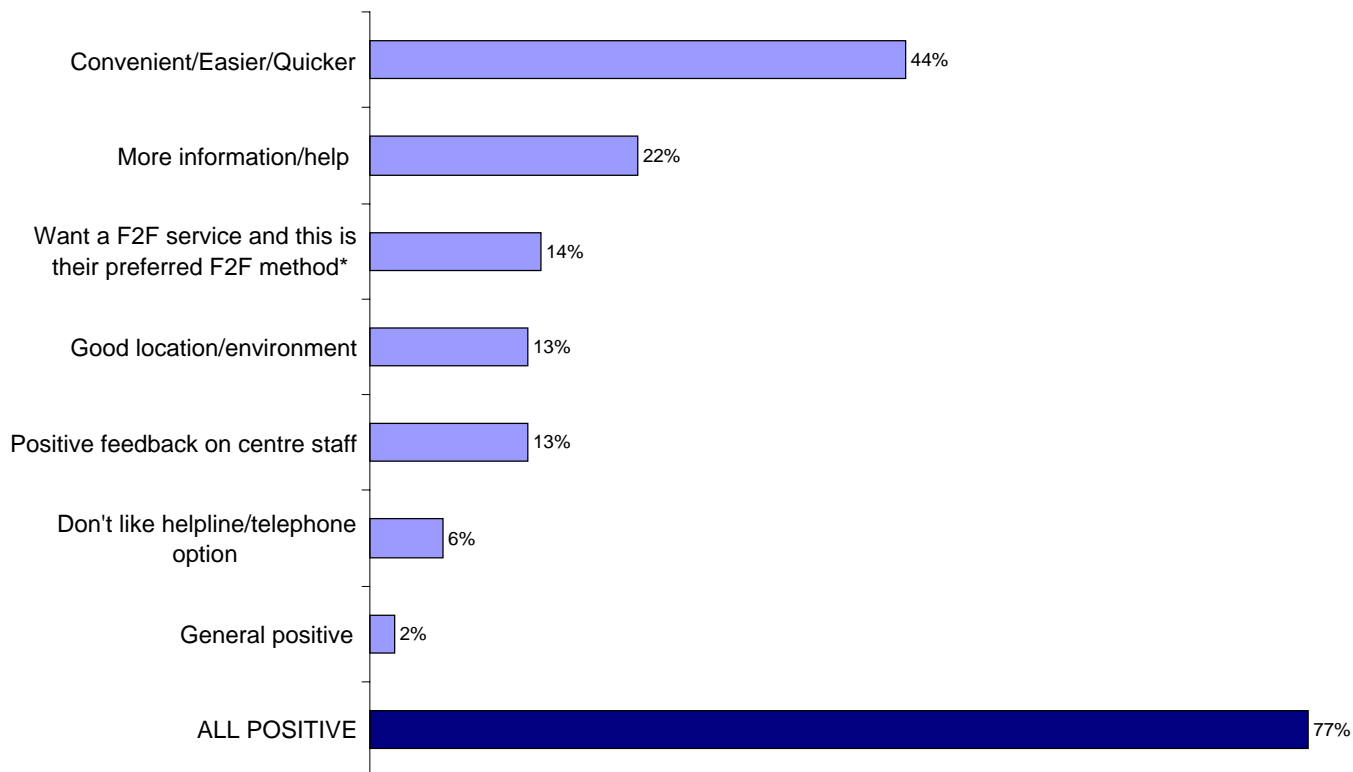


Base: All who are aware of and use Children’s Centre services = 1786

Interest was lower among those from higher income households (71 per cent for those on £30,000+) but higher for BAME groups (84 per cent) and for those who agreed that they have problems with official forms (86 per cent). Those who depend more upon their tax credits are also more likely to show interest in receiving advice and support via Children’s Centres.

When asked to explain why they would or would not like to get advice and support about tax credits from their, or any other, Children's Centre the main reasons for wanting this advice related to convenience, ease and speed. The most common reason for not wanting advice from Children's Centres was that users simply preferred other methods.

Chart 7: Positive reasons for wanting to get advice and support about tax credits from a Children's Centre

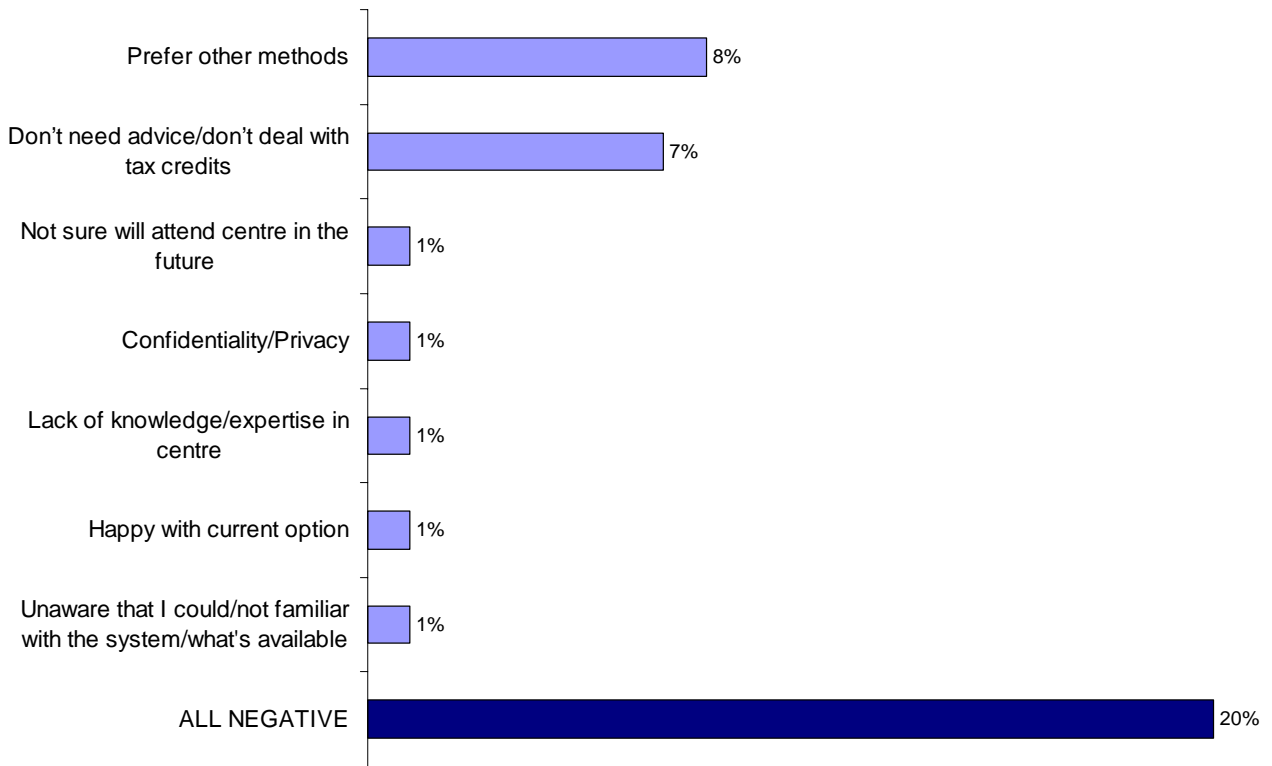


Base: All who would definitely or probably like to get advice or support about tax credits from any Children's Centre

For 'All Positive' based on question asked of 1728 respondents.

\* F2F means face-to-face

Chart 8: Negative reasons for not wanting to get advice and support about tax credits from a Children’s Centre



Base: All who would not like to get advice or support about tax credits from any Children’s Centre  
For ‘All Negative’ based on question asked of 1728 respondents

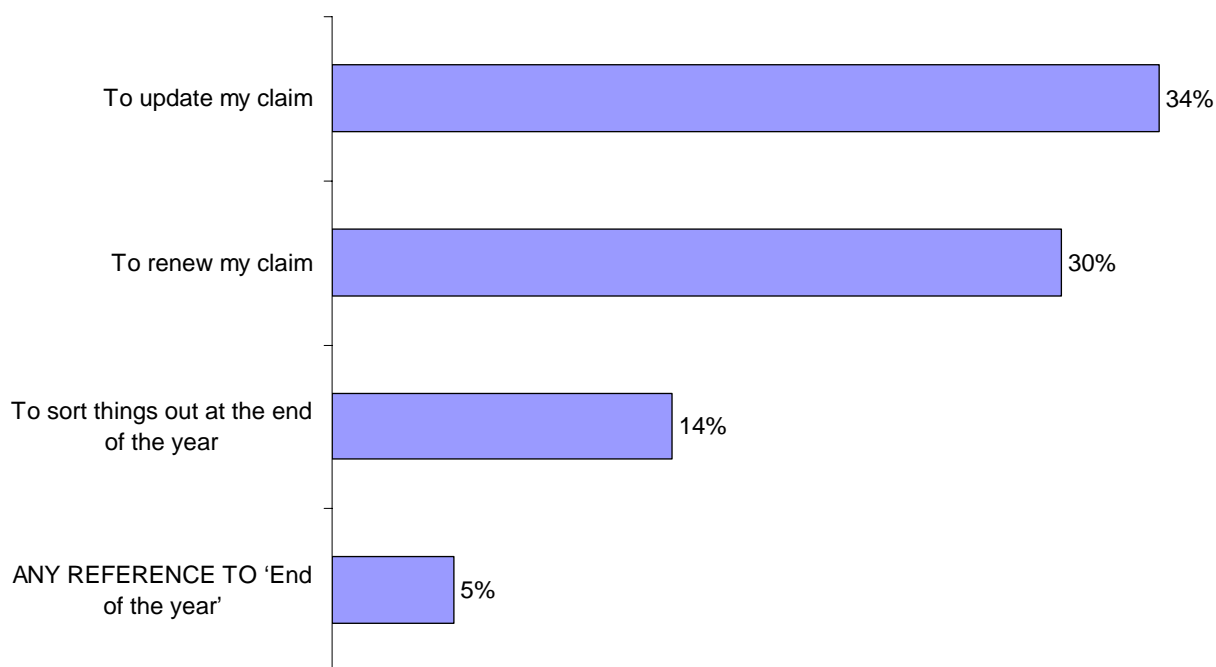
### 4.3 Current tax credits knowledge and experience

**Summary of findings:**

- Nearly 80 per cent knew why people who claim tax credits are asked to contact the tax credits system between April and July each year.
- More than 90 per cent reported recent change(s) of circumstance to HMRC.
- Main method for reporting was the HMRC helpline.

A series of questions were designed to measure knowledge and experience of tax credits and the tax credits system amongst those who claim tax credits in some form. Nearly 80 per cent of claimants knew, without prompting, why people who claim tax credits are asked to contact the tax credits system between April and July each year. The main reasons identified were to update or renew a claim and to sort things out at the end of the year. Other reasons were given, each by less than five per cent of claimants. A fifth (21 per cent) did not know.

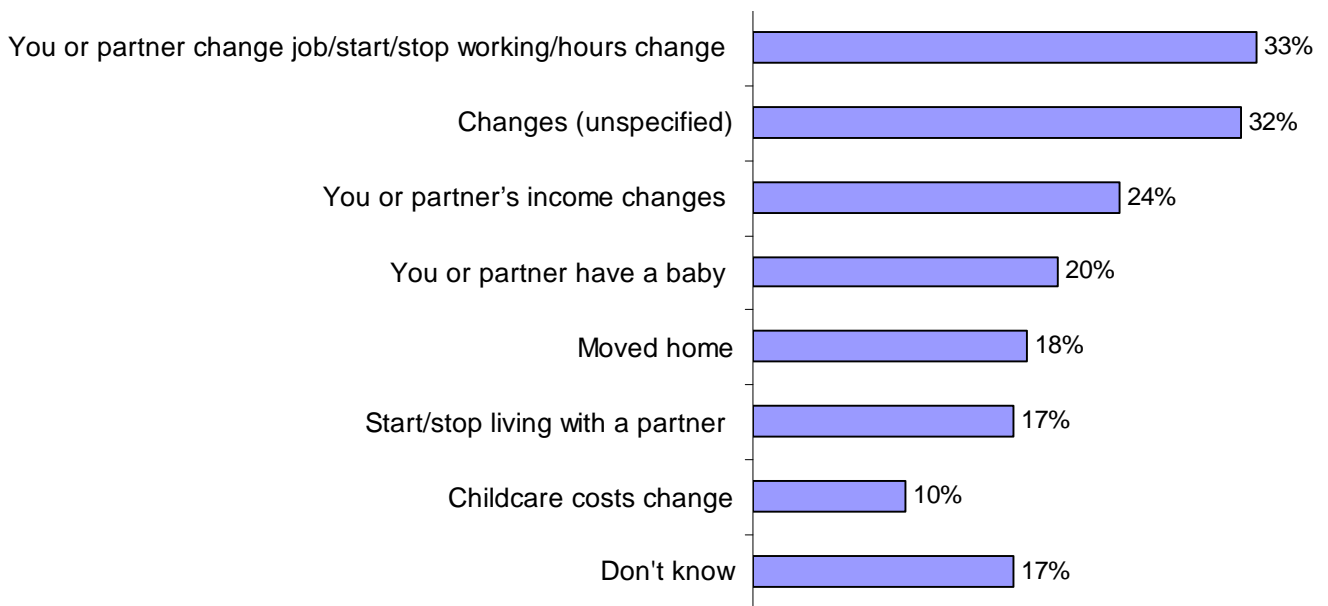
Chart 9: People who claim tax credits are asked to contact the tax credits system between April and July each year. Do you know why this is?



NB: Findings under 5% and 'don't know' not shown  
 Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

Still without prompting, almost all claimants (83 per cent) were able to offer at least one reason for why they may have to contact the tax credits system at any other time during the year. The reasons identified by most related to changes in their (or their partner's) working circumstances or other unspecified changes. More than a fifth were aware that they had to contact the tax credits system about income changes and a further fifth also identified the need to contact the system if they or their partner had a baby. Only one sixth were unable to identify any reason to contact the tax credits system at any other time during the year outside the renewal period.

Chart 10: Other reasons to contact the tax credits system at any other time during the year (unprompted)



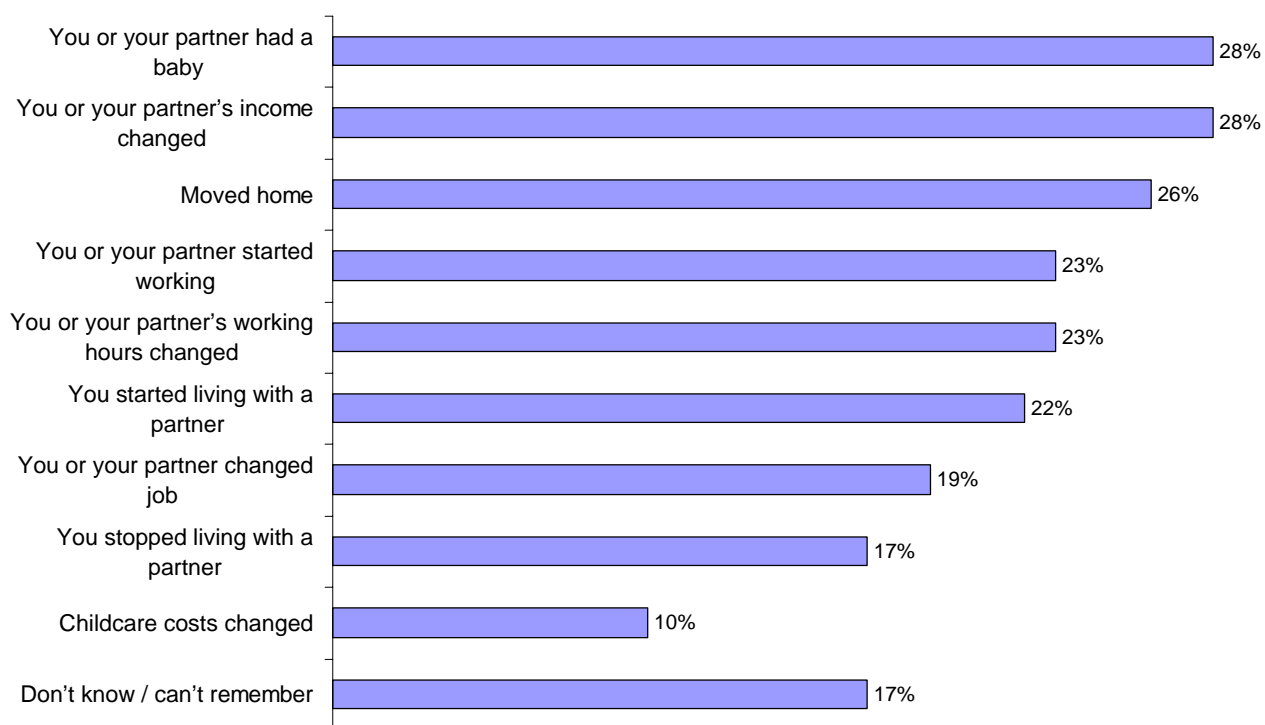
NB: Mentions under 5% not shown

Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

More than one answer could be given so answers do not sum to 100%

With specific reference to reporting changes in circumstances, but still unprompted, 83 per cent of tax credits claimants were aware of at least one change in circumstance that needs to be reported to the tax credits system. A greater range of reasons were identified at this question. The largest proportion (28 per cent) were aware that they had to inform the tax credits system if they or their partner had a baby. Perhaps this could be attributed to the likelihood that many of them will have recently experienced this change in their own circumstances, and therefore may have had increased awareness. The same proportion again was also aware that they had to report changes in income. Fairly high proportions were also aware of the need to report moving house, starting work, changes in working hours and starting to live with a partner (over a fifth in each case). A range of other reasons were also mentioned; however 17 per cent of claimants did not know or could not remember which changes need to be reported to the tax credits System.

**Chart 11: Which changes in circumstances need to be reported to the tax credits system (unprompted)**



NB: Mentions under 10% not shown

Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

More than one answer could be given so answers do not sum to 100%



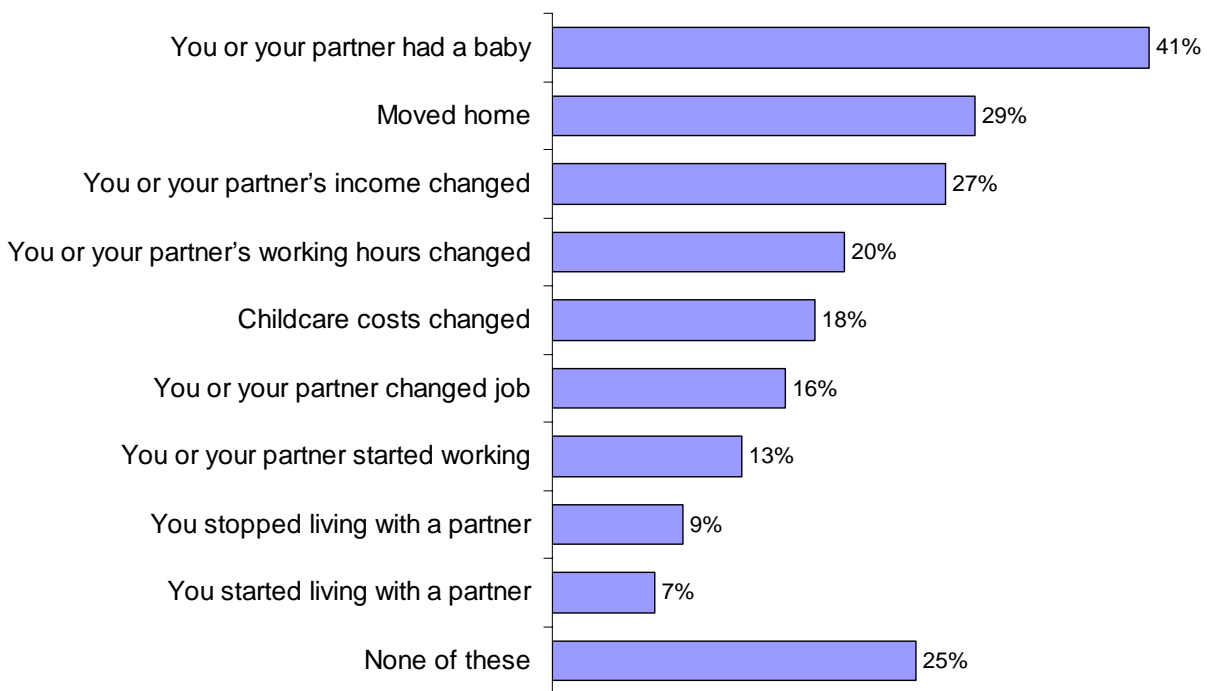
#### 4 Key Findings – 4.3 Current tax credits knowledge and experience

Awareness was relatively low among those who agreed that they often need help understanding official forms, with 22 per cent of this sub-group saying they did not know or could not remember which changes in circumstances need to be reported to the tax credits system.

After demonstrating their awareness of the procedures for contacting and reporting changes to the tax credits system, claimants were asked about any changes to their own circumstances they had experienced since they first applied for tax credits. Of all those who claim tax credits, a majority (71 per cent) first applied for them before January 2008.

Three quarters (75 per cent) had experienced at least one change in their circumstances since first applying for tax credits. The most common change was the birth of a baby followed by moving home, change in income and change in working hours. Claimants from lower income households were less likely to have experienced changes (27 per cent of those below £11,000 pa experienced no change compared to 19 per cent of those with an annual income above this figure).

**Chart 12: Changes in circumstances since first applying for tax credits**



NB: Mentions under 5% not shown

Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

Of those who experienced a changed more than 90 per cent of claimants claimed to have told the HMRC about their change(s) of circumstance. The majority (84 per cent) of these changes were reported via the HMRC helpline. Other methods were also used, but each by less than five per cent of claimants.

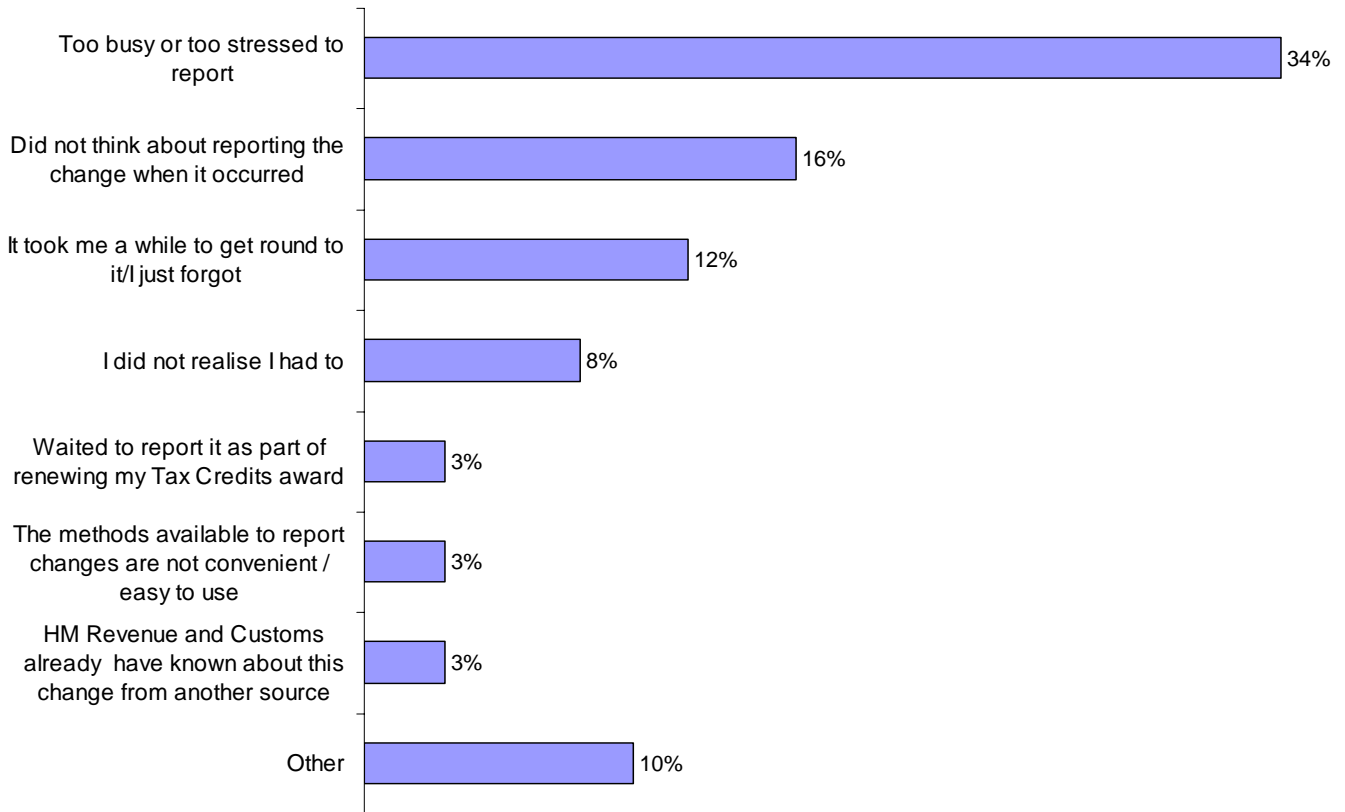
Where changes were reported to HMRC, 89 per cent of claimants did so within a month of the change taking place. Only four per cent took between one month and three months and a further two per cent took more than three months to report changes of circumstances to HMRC. Those with household incomes greater than £30,000pa were much more likely to take over a month to report changes (19 per cent compared with six per cent for lower income groups). Those who express greater dependence upon the money they receive from tax credits are more likely to report changes in less than a day or within one week than those who have less dependence.

Table 1: Speed at which changes are reported by dependence on tax credits

	<b>Depend on tax credits/need it for essential items</b>	<b>Could manage without/pays for little extras</b>	<b>Other</b>
	(759)	(109)	(145)
Within 1 day	20%	8%	16%
Within 1 week	47%	36%	40%

Those claimants who said they had taken longer than one month to tell HMRC about changes in their circumstances were asked to give the reasons for this. The main reason, reported by more than a third of claimants was that they were too busy or too stressed to report the change within a month of the changes occurring.

**Chart 13: Reason for not telling HMRC within one month of changes happening**



NB: Mentions under 3% not shown

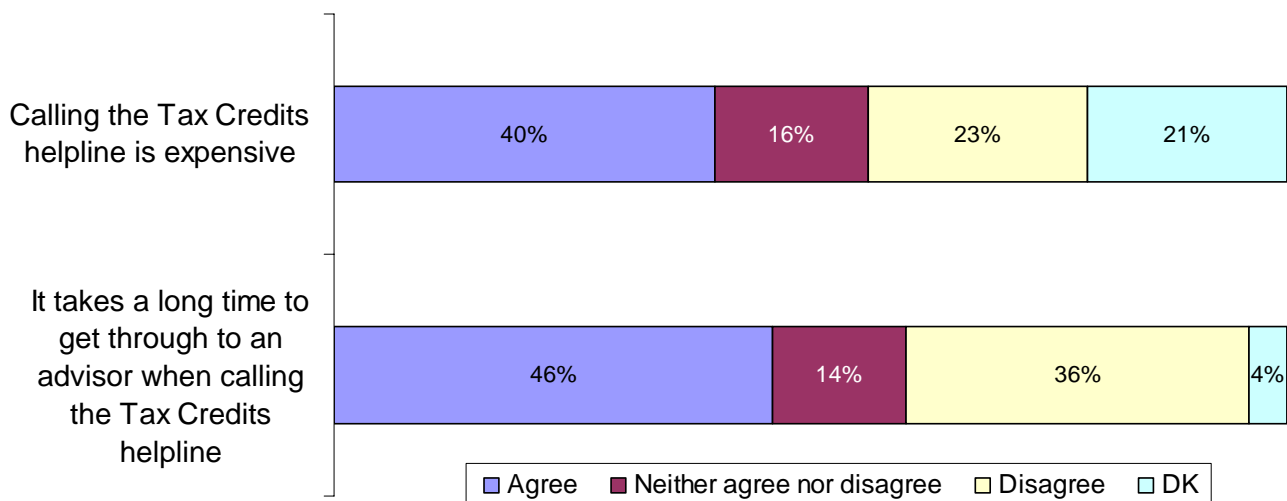
Base: All who took more than one month to tell HMRC about change(s) of circumstance = 63

All those claimants who did not tell HMRC about their most recent change(s) of circumstances by calling the tax credits helpline were asked if they had ever tried to report changes via the helpline. More than half of these claimants (55 per cent) reported using the helpline in the past to get information on tax credits. In addition to those who used the HMRC helpline to report their most recent change(s) (as mentioned after Chart 12 on page 22), this would suggest that only seven per cent of tax credits claimants who have experienced a change in their circumstance have never used or do not remember using the helpline to report this.

Those claimants who had used the tax credits helpline at some point to tell the HMRC about their change(s) in circumstances were asked to rate their level of agreement (against a five-point scale) with two statements about the helpline. Two fifths agree that calling the tax credits helpline is expensive, and slightly more agree that it takes a long time to get through to an advisor when calling.

In addition, a fifth of claimants did not know whether the helpline was expensive. The only significant difference about these claimants is that they are more likely to have a household income of over £15,000 a year, perhaps suggesting that the cost of the helpline is not as important an issue to them as it may be to others.

Chart 14: Agreement with statements about the tax credits helpline



Base: All who told HMRC about change(s) of circumstance by the tax credits helpline = 867

In both cases, levels of agreement are much higher (20 per cent) amongst those who only have a mobile phone compared with those who have use of a landline.

## 4.4 Attitudes towards tax credits and the tax credits system

### Summary of findings:

- Overall, attitudes towards tax credits and the tax credits system are quite positive.
- Nearly half do not understand how the system works.
- Four in ten often need help understanding official forms.

Claimants were asked a series of questions to help assess attitudes towards tax credits and the tax credits system.

Chart 14: Agreement with statements about the tax credits helpline - claimants

### POSITIVE STATEMENTS

**I'm happy with the current ways of getting information about Tax Credits**



**I know who can give me proper advice on Tax Credits**



**I trust the Tax Credits system to get things right**



### NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

**I do not understand how the Tax Credits system works**



**I often need help understanding official forms**



■ Agree ■ Disagree

Base: All who receive tax credits = 1349

The majority of claimants agree that they are happy with the current ways of getting information about tax credits. There is higher disagreement (16 per cent) among those who were keenest on using Children's Centres for advice on tax credits.

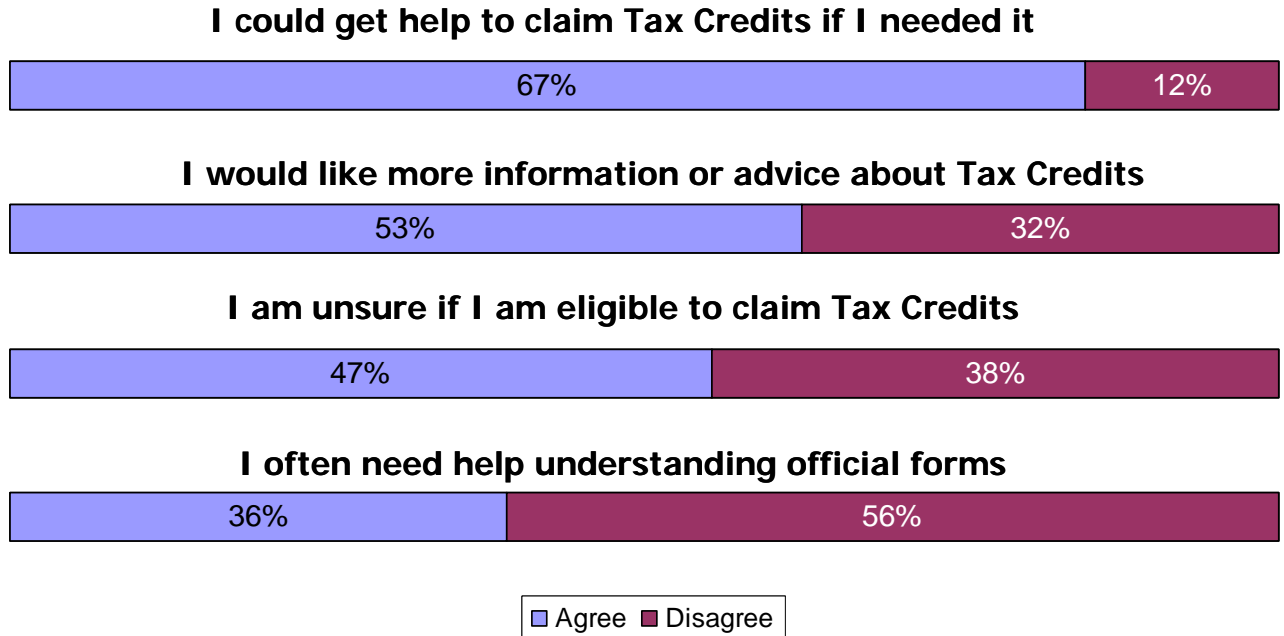
Again, the majority of claimants agree that they know who can give them proper advice on tax credits. Those aged 18-24 were more likely to disagree than other age groups – 31 per cent compared with 20 per cent. More than half agree that they trust the tax credits system to get things right. Claimants who had reported a change were more likely to disagree (30 per cent) than those who had not reported a change (15 per cent). There was also high disagreement among those who felt that calls to the helpline were expensive (37 per cent).

Responses are fairly evenly split between agreement and disagreement towards the statement "I do not understand how the tax credits system works", suggesting that just under half do not understand. Agreement was higher among those who are interested in using Children's Centres for advice on tax credits.

A slightly smaller proportion of claimants agree that they "often need help understanding official forms" than disagree. Desire for tax credits advice in Children's Centres has an impact here, with 47 per cent of those who would definitely want tax credit advice at Children's Centres, compared with 26 per cent among those not interested in this option, agreeing with this statement.

A set of statements about tax credits was read to all those who do not claim tax credits.

Chart 15: Agreement with statements about the tax credits helpline – non claimants



Base: All who do not receive tax credits = 395

The majority agree that they could get help to claim tax credits if they needed it. More than half agree that they would like more information or advice about tax credits. Agreement with this statement was highest (at 64 per cent) amongst those who would definitely like to receive advice about tax credits from Children’s Centres.

Just under half agree that they are unsure whether they are eligible to claim tax credits. Agreement with this statement was relatively high (56 per cent) amongst those with household incomes of under £5,000 a year. More than half disagree that they often need help understanding official forms, suggesting that for some there are other barriers to them not claiming tax credits.

## 5 Summary of findings

Over a third (36 per cent) have been visiting their Children's Centre for more than a year. The main reason for visiting is to make use of the Childcare, nursery education; crèche or toddler groups (88 per cent).

More than three quarters (77 per cent) of Children's Centre users currently claim tax credits. Around eight in ten of these claimants report to receive Child Tax Credits, either on its own (57 per cent) or in combination with Working Tax Credits (30 per cent). A minority (eight per cent) report to claim Working tax credits only, although the data shows that the majority of these have children, suggesting that perhaps there is some confusion amongst these respondents about the details of the tax credits they receive. It is apparent that, in the majority of cases, those who do receive tax credits report being highly dependent upon them.

Although almost half do not understand how the tax credits system works, overall attitudes towards tax credits are quite positive. Nearly 80 per cent knew why people who claim tax credits are asked to contact the tax credits system between April and July each year; and nearly 90 per cent who had experienced change(s) of circumstance reported this to HMRC – mainly via the helpline.

The majority (78 per cent) of users would like to get advice and support about tax credits from a Children's Centre. This is seen as a more convenient, easier and quicker method. Where users are not interested in receiving this information through Children's Centres it is mainly because they simply prefer other methods. Those who expressed higher dependence upon the money they receive from tax credits were more likely than others to select Children's Centres as their preferred source for information, advice and support about tax credits.



## 6 Appendices

### 6.1 Sampling

The sampling strategy was designed with several aims in mind:

- (1) To ensure there was as much matching as possible between the initiative and control centres.
- (2) To maximise the final sample size in order to gain robust survey estimates.
- (3) To obtain as representative as possible a sample of the users of the selected Children's Centres, based on the time of day.
- (4) To minimise interviewer subjectivity in the selection of respondents.

The centres were selected by HMRC with criteria (1) in mind. A difficult part of the design was combining the requirements of (2), (3) and (4). In order to maximise the final sample size the temptation is to interview as many respondents as possible given the constraints on time and on the number of interviews. However, it was felt that such an approach could lead to a sample which was skewed towards users of the centres at quieter times, as respondents who passed through the centres at busier times would be less likely to be stopped whilst those attending at quieter times would almost certainly be approached. An approach where selection was so allied to availability of the visitors could also fall foul of scrutiny in respect of being a truly random process. For instance, during a busy period, there would be more scope for an interviewer to hand pick visitors to select for interview.

This problem was overcome by the supply of flow count estimates from the centres obtained via the HMRC. Although numbers registered at some centres were available, it was concluded that these numbers were unlikely to be representative of the actual flows as they also included lapsed users. The numbers used were estimates by centre managers of the number of visitors for every hour for every day of a typical week.

It was also decided that an additional interviewer would accompany the main interviewer for the purposes of counting the actual flows in each hour of each shift. The principle aim of this was to enable the construction of a more robust weighting scheme which took into account probability of selection. It would also act as a comparison to the estimated flows in case any of the sampling intervals needed to be changed during the course of fieldwork.

An example of the numbers we received from each centre is given below:

Time of day	Day of the Week				
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9 - 10am	27	31	26	26	25
10 - 11am	2	6	5	6	6
11am - 12pm	2	6	5	4	2
12 - 1 pm	2	1	1	1	0
1 - 2 pm	2	7	4	6	2
2 - 3 pm	0	5	4	11	2
3 - 4 pm	16	17	20	19	16
4 - 5 pm	9	10	10	14	9
5 - 6 pm	0	0	0	4	0

This information allowed us to estimate the total number of interviews that could be expected in any given six-hour shift in any given day. It also allowed us to calculate a sampling interval for the interviewers to adhere to.

This was calculated as follows:

- (1) The total expected flow for a given six hour shift is calculated. So, in the example above, the 9am – 3pm shift on a Monday would yield 38 visitors (Some centres also indicated 'additional' visitors in unspecified time slots. These were included in the calculation and assumed to be evenly distributed throughout the day.

- (2) We made the assumption that around half of those contacted would be willing to be interviewed, so divided this number by two so that an estimate for the number of completed interviews may be obtained. In this example we would therefore aim for 19 completed interviews in the six hour shift.
- (3) Where centres were expected to be very busy or quiet, the expected numbers of interviews were capped, so that a minimum of 10 completed interviews would be aimed for, and a maximum of 25.
- (4) Using the proportion of flows within each hour and the total counts, the proportion of respondents who would need to be interviewed in each hour in order to achieve the total *contacts* (not completed interviews), was then calculated. This also takes into account the relative flows in each hour but aims to keep the sampling fraction as uniform as possible, in principle. It also made the assumption that it would not be feasible to conduct more than six completed interviews in an hour. In this example, around one half of the 27 visitors who are estimated to visit between 9am – 10am on the Monday would need to be contacted. However, given we are placing a limit of six in an hour, this sampling interval is reduced to 1 in 4 (which would lead to around 7 contacts, implying 3 or 4 completed interviews).
- (5) This process is repeated for each hour of each day in order to achieve a sampling interval for every 'cell'.

In practice, there are a number of other considerations we needed to bear in mind, not least the fact that a number of the visitors who are counted here are in fact counted twice as they may visit a centre more than once a week and even more than once a day. Thus, the sampling intervals were frequently revised in order to achieve a greater number of interviews. This was always done incrementally in terms of the fraction, so, for instance, a 1 in 4 would become a 1 in 3 and so on.

In case an interview was already being conducted when the next visitor to be sampled arrived, that visitor was requested to wait until the end of the ongoing interview or, if they were due to stay in the Centre for a period of time, were asked to undertake the interview when the interviewer was available. Although a degree of pragmatism was applied by the interviewers, this approach was adhered to as much as possible in order to maintain the integrity of the sample design.

## 6.2 Weighting

As we have no demographic information relating to the users of these Children's Centres, the weighting scheme purely takes into account the probability of selection of each respondent. This would then mitigate for any differences in visitor which occurred by time of day and, in particular, ensure that if there were any difference in profile of visitors at busy times, mornings or afternoons, this would be adjusted for in the weights.

The principle of the calculation of the weights is fairly straightforward. For any given hour in any given shift in any given centre, we know the number of interviews that were conducted and we know the total number of visitors, using the actual flow information obtained by the second interviewers. Therefore, we could simply apply a weight for any given interview by calculating

$$\text{Weight} = \frac{\text{Total actual flow count in hour during which interview was conducted}}{\text{Total number of interviews conducted during that hour}}$$

However, there were a handful of cases where actual flow counts were unavailable. One option here would be to use the estimated flow counts. However, as there were instances when actual flow counts were at considerable variance with the estimated flow counts, we instead adopted an approach where the weight applied to a respondent who had been interviewed in shift for which no information was available would be equal to the mean weight for all interviews conducted in that centre for which flow information was available.

There were three centres for which no flow information was available; these were given a neutral weight, i.e. a weight equal to the weighted mean weight of all other (weighted) respondents.

By definition, a weight could not be below 1. We also took the decision to cap upper weights at 10, to reduce the influence of any outliers which happened to be given a large weight.

Finally, all weights were re-scaled so that their mean was 1 and their sum was the sum of the unweighted sample size, i.e. 1,849.