Service Standard live reassessment report

# Check Employment Status Tool for Tax Service

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|---|---|
| From: | HMRC Standards Assurance |
| Assessment date: | 6 March 2020 |
| Stage: | Live |
| Result: | Met |
| Service provider: | Customer Strategy and Tax Design group |
| Digital leader: | [redacted] |

## Team

[redacted] - Service Manager

[redacted] - Product Manager

[redacted] - User Researcher

## Panel

[redacted] - Lead

[redacted] - UR

## Observers

[redacted] - Standards Assurance

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### Result summary

A Live reassessment was undertaken for point two of the standards ‘Do ongoing research’, which originally received a ‘Not Met’ marking, specifically around access needs user research. It is now deemed the service has met the service standard

## 2. Do ongoing user research

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 2

### What the team has done well

- The service had a challenge of recruiting accessibility users from niche user groups. In order to find out about accessibility issues, the team worked with internal accessibility staff. By using tailored scenarios, the team successfully put users in a more realistic scene.
- Although there were no significant problems found in the journey, the team still kept thinking about the end-to-end user experience, including support for users. The team discovered the specific page that users tended to contact HMRC if they need help. A recommendation to keep the telephone number would be passed to the Live Service team and stakeholders for consideration.
- Since there would be no user researcher in the Live services to cover CEST, the team will work closely with the UX Designer and Content Designer in Live Services for handover discussions.
- The team also worked with the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG) to make content more understandable for different range of users.
- The team worked closely with Deskpro advisers and set up weekly calls to catch pain points. They also took suggestions into actions to improve the GOV.UK pages.

Service Standard live report

# Check Employment Status Tool for Tax Service

| | |
|---|---|
| From: | HMRC Standards Assurance |
| Assessment date: | 8 January 2019 |
| Stage: | Live |
| Result: | Not Met |
| Service provider: | Customer Strategy and Tax Design group |
| Digital leader: | [redacted] |

## Team

[redacted] - Service Manager
[redacted] - Product Manager
[redacted] - User Researcher
[redacted] - Interaction Designer
[redacted] - Content designer
[redacted] - Technology
[redacted] - Performance Analyst

## Panel

[redacted] - Lead
[redacted] - User research
[redacted] - Design and content
[redacted] - Technology
[redacted] - Analytics

## Observers

[redacted] - Live Services
[redacted] - Standards Assurance

*The Check Your Employment Status Tool for Tax service has been assessed against the government service standards. The service standards do not check the accuracy of the employment status outcome. The accuracy of the outcome has been checked by HMRC Policy teams.*

## Result summary

The team demonstrated excellent working practices, a strong understanding of user needs and have significantly iterated the service during public beta. The panel were satisfied that the recommendations from the Research, Accessibility and Design (RAD) review have been addressed, and the team demonstrated the service is technically sound.

Overall, the service is very close to meeting the Live assessment standard. It's important the team address the few remaining public beta recommendations before the planned handover to the HMRC Live Services Team.

To fully meet the live assessment standard, the team should:

Demonstrate further rounds of research with users that have access needs to fully understand the needs of this user group (2)

## Service description

In April 2020 the Intermediaries Tax Legislation (Off Payroll working rules) will be extended so that large and medium private sector employers become accountable for making off payroll working rules determinations.
The tool originally deployed to support off payroll working rules in April 2017 has been iterated against. During public beta there has further iterations based on analysis of the existing tool and user feedback.
It enables users (hiring organisations and workers) to determine a worker's employment status for tax by answering questions about the contractual arrangements and the working practices. This enables a worker's payment to be correctly paid for tax purposes.
The tool is effectively interactive guidance. It allows a user to answer a series of questions based on a contract and/or working arrangements for a piece of work. The answers are compared to a set of business rules. The outcome of the comparison is a decision on the employment status of the work i.e. employed or self-employed.
The service is stand alone, unauthenticated and does not store the result in a HMRC data store (beyond analytic data).

### Service users

Primary:

- Public sector employers

- Large and medium private sector employers
- Small employers
- Intermediaries and workers

Secondary:
- Recruitment agencies (fee payers) may use the tool to check a worker's status for tax but are not accountable for the decision

The service enables:
- Both public and private sector users to correctly administer the worker's payment for tax purposes
- Users to be able to answer questions that will give an accurate assessment of a worker's status
- Users to easily understand the purpose of the tool, and the next steps
- Users to submit feedback & get help using the tool

## 1. Understand users needs

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 1

### What the team has done well

- The user research completed for the service was impressive. There was a very good overall understanding of user needs and clear examples and evidence was shown of how this has and will continue to improve the service
- The team gave several examples of how they iterated the design of the service. These iterations were informed by regular user research using appropriate methods, and the research was based on what the team needed to learn.
- There were also examples of where policy and legislation had been challenged to make sure the service meets user needs.

## 2. Do ongoing user research

### Decision - The team **did not meet** standard 2

### What the team has done well

- The service team has responded very well to recommendations made at the previous RAD including setting up a survey to test the support model

## What the team needs to explore

- The team completed an accessibility audit which identified some areas of work for improving accessibility. The team have only involved a limited number of users with accessibility needs. Further rounds of research need to be conducted to fully understand the needs of this user group.
- Put a clear plan in place for research to be integrated into Live Services

# 3. Have a multidisciplinary team

## Decision - The team **did meet** standard 3

## What the team has done well

- The team is a mixture of permanent HMRC staff and contractors, and has been largely consistent since April 2019. They are a truly multidisciplinary team with all the necessary skills to research, design, deliver and iterate the service significantly during public beta.
- There are no notable gaps in the team which is co-located in Telford, and the service has had a dedicated user researcher throughout.
- When there have been changes in the team (such as Scrum Master and Content Designer), knowledge transfer has been smooth and the team's velocity has not been impacted.
- The team collaborate very well across all roles through pair programming, mobbing and continuous collaboration between research, design and development.
- The panel were impressed with the "engineer mindset" across development and testing, and the team are embedded and actively contributing to communities of practice outside the team.
- The team forged strong relationships with stakeholders inside and outside of HMRC through sprint ceremonies and regular catch-up with operational teams.
- The team have built up excellent trust with the likes of policy, which is evidenced by the empowerment they've had to rapidly iterate the service during pubic beta. Examples of this include policy stakeholders attending UR sessions, and policy proactively inviting the team to collaboratively problem solve.
- It was clear the team are high-performing with a good spirit - who care about and enjoy their work.

## What the team needs to explore

- The team would still like to make some minor improvements to the service, and it's important the team remain in place until the backlog is clear and any

remaining pubic beta recommendations (e.g. accessibility) are addressed before the planned handover to the HMRC Live Services team.
- It is important any transition to Live Services is a considered one, with appropriate knowledge exchange, pairing and documentation to ensure none of the care and attention that has gone into the service is lost.
- The Live Services team should ensure they have the skills in the team (User Research and Design) to further iterate the service and not just maintain it. There should also be a model in place to deal with more significant changes to the service, such as future changes in policy.

## 4. Use agile methods

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 4

### What the team has done well

- The team have adhered to agile best practices (Scrum and Kanban), working in two week sprints, delivering at pace and improving ways of working through regular retrospectives.
- This is backed up with the use of collaboration tools such as Jira, Confluence, Github and Slack for continuous collaboration.
- The transition and progression of work through the team (from user research to deployment) was very smooth, which has been achieved through continuous backlog refinement and collaboration to get a shared understanding of policy, user needs, design, analytics and technical implementation.
- Overall the panel were impressed with the team's way of working, which has been evidenced by how rapidly they've been able to iterate the service during public beta.

## 5. Iterate and improve frequently

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 5

### What the team has done well

- Team has done good work in improving the code base that they inherited. They have refactored and made the code much simpler and more maintainable
- Team have iterated frequently in response to user research feedback. This has clearly led to a much simpler journey for users.

- During development they carried out regular releases and made good use of feature toggles so that features could still be deployed to live but 'hidden' from users.
- Stories are in place for continued improvement of the service following the service being handed to the Live Service team.

### What the team needs to explore

- Ensure plans are in place for the Live Service team to continue rapid iteration of the service where necessary

## 6. Evaluate tools and systems

### Decision - The team **did meet** [standard 6]

### What the team has done well

- The team has followed MDTP principles and have a simple, well thought out architecture which they can clearly articulate and explain.
- The full suite of monitoring/alerting tools is being used including Kibana, Grafana and Splunk.
- Dashboards for the above and all in place and monitored accordingly.
- Pager Duty thresholds are set at appropriately low levels given that the lack of external (i.e. non-MDTP) dependencies mean that there should be very few errors.
- MIS information has correctly being migrated from a Mongo solution which involved periodic running of jobs to use Splunk
- A runbook is in place and is up to date.

## 7. Understand security and privacy issues

### Decision - The team **did meet** [standard 7]

### What the team has done well

- Although there is only minimal data storage in the service the team has still considered security aspects.
- All 'journey data' is stored only for the duration of the session.
- The only personal data entered is if the user chooses to personalise the PDF. In theory this should only be the users name but as it is a free text box and could therefore theoretically include identifiers the team have taken the steps of encrypting the data.
- The team have carried out the necessary penetration testing (both external and internal)

- When the team inherited the service the journey data was being stored using cookies. The team has refactored this so it is now correctly stored in Mongo. There are now no non-standard cookies within the service.

## 8. Make all new source code open

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 8

### What the team has done well

- The team has implemented an innovative way of handling coding in the open. This was necessitated by the fact that members of the delivery team had been identified from commits to the repository, and several individuals had received threats and abuse seemingly driven by dislike of the IR35 legislation, or from some public groups. The service now commits to a private Github repository, with a cleansed version of the code periodically published to a public repository with Github usernames redacted. As a result, the code is available but the identity of individual delivery team members is fully protected.
- HMRC owns all intellectual property rights.

### What the team needs to explore

- The steps to cleanse the private Github repository is automated, however, the final step to publish the redacted code to the public repository is manual. Before transitioning to the Live Services team consider making this process fully automated so the service does not sustain a manual overhead.
- The cleansing process has the potential for reuse opportunities. The team could consider whether this process can be industrialised and publicised for other teams to take advantage of.

## 9. Use open standards and common platforms

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 9

### What the team has done well

- The service has been built as a standard MDTP solution. All tooling and technologies used are standard on the platform.

## 10. Test the end-to-end service

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 10

### What the team has done well

- The team is following standard MDTP testing practices
- Test Driven Development (TDD) has been used to develop the service and the team has a full range of automated integration and acceptance tests
- The team regularly performs cross browser testing using both BrowserStack and physical devices.
- The staging environment was also used for 2 large scale testing events. The tax professionals used tax cases in the public domain, cases that have been settled and ongoing cases to ensure that the tool provided a result that HMRC would stand by. The Technical Policy team kept records of the results should they need to be published.

## 11. Make a plan for being offline

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 11

### What the team has done well

- Deployments require zero downtime.
- As the service is non-transactional, if there was any outage there is no real business impact and users would simply be informed to 'try again later'.
- As there are no external dependencies it is envisaged that downtime will be negligible and would only be in the event of a platform wide issue.
- Team has the ability to shutter the service in the unlikely event that there is any downtime.

## 12: Make sure users succeed first time

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 12

### What the team has done well

- The team has a thorough understanding of what their service does and how its users will find it and navigate through it
- The team is able to demonstrate a full end to end journey starting from various comms triggers, through relevant guidance and the service finally to appropriate next steps once the digital journey is complete

- The team was able to clearly explain how user research, usability testing and analytics have driven their content and design iterations. The team has tested the journey with a variety of user segments and continues to monitor analytics to better understand user behaviour and target specific pain and drop out points for additional improvement. They were able to provide clear examples of iterations and improvements throughout the service.
- The service uses consistent terminology and tone of voice throughout and has done an admiral job of simplifying complex concepts
- The team has integrated a support model that provides assisted digital users with the help they need to complete the service. Users have access to both DeskPro and telephone support, both of which have been provided with the materials necessary to guide the user through the service. The team receives regular feedback from the support teams to further improve the service.
- Access to support is also offered to users that achieve an indeterminate result.
- The team was able to demonstrate a number of examples where they started simple and only added complexity when user research indicated it was needed.
- The team has, where possible, simplified complex questions into simpler, multiple stage questions and believe there are additional questions where this can be done.
- Counterintuitively, the team understood that users were most reassured when they provided more information about their particular circumstances than necessary, even if a determination could be achieved more quickly with less input.
- The team has achieved WCAG 2.1 AA certification from DAC and the appropriate accessibility statement has been added to the service.
- The team has enhanced the accessibility and usability of the final determination by providing both an html and pdf versions to the user
- The team have considered Welsh language and the service is currently being translated by the Welsh language team

### What the team needs to explore

- The team must continue to monitor the support across all channels  iterating in response to both user feedback and performance measurement
- While the team has a technically accessibility service they should complete any necessary iterations before passing over to the Live Services team

## 13. Make the user experience consistent with GOV.UK

### Decision - The team **did meet** [standard 13]

### What the team has done well

- The designers and development team have worked closely together to create a service using standard GOV.UK patterns and components wherever possible
- The team has evidenced the need for an enhancement to an existing pattern and have ensured that it meets accessibility standards
- The team has consistently implemented a clear primary, secondary and tertiary information structure throughout the service. This structure was driven by user research and analytics.
- The team has considered a variety of use cases and the service responds well to different devices and screen sizes.

## 14. Encourage everyone to use the digital service

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 14

### What the team has done well

- The team have collaborated well with the customer service telephony team to understand pain points in the digital service journey and what issues drive users to the helpline
- Feedback from the telephony team is used to iterate on the service design, analytics back-up and support findings and drive actionable improvements
- The analytics driven design improvements keeps the user in the digital journey and reduces drop-outs and exit rates as demonstrated on specific dashboards. This has helped inform preferences of the user journey
- User volumes are tracked for each page of the journey with accompanying exit rates. This data is displayed and reported using Splunk dashboards available to the whole team.
- Usage volumes and trends are tracked for each channel

### What the team needs to explore

- The team will need to implement a clear plan, detailing how they can increase digital take-up and reduce volumes of users entering the non-digital channels. This is specifically important as of off-payrolling rules are being extended to the private sector.

## 15. Collect performance data

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 15

## What the team has done well

- The team collects and collates a wide variety of quantitative performance data from varying sources including Splunk and Google Analytics, this is supported by qualitative data from User Researchers, Brandwatch, Deskpro and CSAT.
- The ideal start page for analytics has been identified to measure accurate user journeys and corresponding goals.
- All separate user journeys are identified, tracked and measured to allow comparison against each other. These user journeys are displayed using various dashboards with thought given to contents and audience.
- Careful consideration has been given to Splunk dashboards in reference to personally identifiable information (PII) in line with the data guardians advice. This has been cleansed of any PII and is shared internally within the team, allowing complete transparency in the performance data.
- Google Analytics and Data Studio dashboards have been constructed, and thought has been given to the future challenges of cookie consent. Where necessary Splunk has been utilised to collate and display analytics in the event that Google Analytics data becomes unreliable.
- The Performance Analyst has ensured that all collected data is relevant and suitable for the service.

## What the team needs to explore

- Evaluate the ongoing changes with cookie consent and the reduction in data volumes on Google Analytics, including whether the data collected is relevant.

# 16. Identify performance indicators

## Decision - The team **did meet** [standard 16]

## What the team has done well

- Monthly reports on performance are provided to senior leaders and weekly reports to the project team to inform on the health of the service. These provide information on a wide array of KPI’s
- Benchmarking was completed on the previous service providing a starting point for analytics performance
- The split of outcome result is an important KPI for the team, ensuring the result is accurate is a key principle of the system. Results of the new tool are compared to the old service outcomes to monitor any degradation of the service and maintain health of the business tool. Currently, the total amounts of “unknown” results on the new tool are lower than the old service which is a key indicator that the service is performing well.

- The team has used Completion Rate and CSAT KPI’s, both have been set at 80% which is in line with other HMRC Digital services.
- Time on page and user volumes are measured and displayed on all performance dashboards.
- A Project Dashboard was constructed to inform Telephony teams of the health of the end to end service. Any anomalies in telephony can be reported back to the team to compare with analytics and identify pain points in the journey or user group. These telephony stats have been used to identify groups of users that could be experiencing an issue with the tool. These metrics are reported daily/weekly as appropriate.
- Senior leaders have used information/analytics provided by the team to report on the health of the service up to the chief executive - feedback from the chief executive has been excellent and has stated how easy it is to understand and digest.
- KPI’s have been iterated multiple times to ensure accuracy and relevance to performance reporting - clear examples of iterations have been given and documents back up the improvements in KPI reporting and performance.
- A KPI has been developed to display the results split from Hirer, Worker and Agency. The team expected parity between worker/hirer results and agency expected to be lower in comparison. Analytics backs up this expectation and shows clear improvement as iterations to the service have been implemented.
- High risk determinations are monitored and reported to senior leaders and this KPI is used to monitor the health and performance of the service.
- Unknown Decision KPI was considered however this was ultimately counter-intuitive to the health of the service and the team successfully pushed back that this wasn't suitable.
- Hirers with an unknown determination is broken down into whether the worker is known to them, to support deeper investigations into the analytics and to inform UR’s into areas for further research.
- All KPI dashboards are interactive for dates and filters
- The previous service had a completion rate of 79%, the goal of the team was to improve on this and Completion Rate performance currently sits at 89% an improvement of 10%.
- There was no CSAT on the previous tool so no comparisons can be made for performance.
- There is a clear desire to improve the user journey (CSAT) from the entire team and this is evidenced with the positive action taken on deskpro tickets.
- Each iteration of the service is focused on keeping users in the digital journey, this is supported by steady performance increases in analytics and the use of data to drive updates.
- Regular and appropriate discussions are had with SRO and Project teams and policy teams to understand “what good looks like”, the measures discussed have been iterated and continue to be developed as the service evolves.

## 17. Report performance data on the Performance Platform

### Decision - The team **did meet** standard 17

### What the team has done well

- Early conversations were had in relation to the performance platform and whether this is necessary for a non-transactional service.

### What the team needs to explore

- There are no immediate plans for the non-transactional service to report data on the performance platform. There needs to be a definitive answer on whether data needs to be reported on the performance platform or not.

## 18. Test with the minister

### Decision - The team did **meet** standard 18

### What the team has done well

- The service has been tested professionals in wealthy, mid size business, large business and Technical Policy, enabling them to test the full end to end journey.
- The service has been verified by a Challenge Panel made up of the senior leaders across compliance, ensuring that results were meeting HMRC's standards on employment status.
- The policy team have also demonstrated the service to the Financial Secretary (Jesse Norman), Senior Responsible Officer [redacted], Jim Harra (HMRC CEO) and Ruth Stanier (HMRC Director General for Customer Strategy and Tax Design).

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## Next Steps

**Recommended outcome:**

This service can continue into Live once the recommendations outlined in the 'Result Summary' section of this report are met.

A follow-up review will need to be booked with Standards and Assurance so these outstanding points can be assured.