



HM Revenue
& Customs

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Dear Ms Hawkins

Thank you for your letter of 28 April 2022 to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury about the Impact of HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) withdrawal of GOV.UK Verify on EU and other non-British citizens. This has been transferred to HMRC and I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Chief Executive. I am sorry for the delay in doing so.

HMRC and other government departments are high profile targets for cyber criminals because of their roles. Before sharing any personal data with a customer online we have a duty to establish their identity to an appropriate degree of confidence. There will always be a balance to strike between making this journey as straightforward as we can for customers but, at the same time, setting the bar high enough to deter fraudsters.

Planned developments

Most customers can use government services securely online, but we do recognise that not every customer currently can. We are constantly working on the Government Gateway service to help more people gain access while keeping customer information secure. In particular, I would like to highlight the following developments.

- We are currently in discussions with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and expect to be able to add UK driving licences as an additional evidence source, subject to getting the necessary data sharing agreements in place.
- Government Digital Service (GDS) is developing a new mobile app that will allow a customer to use the camera on their device to check their identity against a single evidence source. We will be adopting this in the summer, giving some of our customers an alternative way to prove their identity. We'll be working with GDS to make it available to more customers in phases.
- In the longer term, we intend to move services to One Login for Government, the new cross-government sign-on and identity verification system being developed by GDS, which the mobile app above is part of. We are working closely with GDS on the

design and development of the new service to ensure it best meets the needs of all our customers.

Answers to your questions are set out below.

Q1. Were any impact assessments carried out in relation to the 2019 replacement of the original Government Gateway with HMRC's new Government Gateway, which extended security? If so, could we receive a copy of it?

We replaced the Government Gateway - a cross-government authentication service that links a user to a username and password - in 2019 with a new, fit-for-purpose platform. We built the new platform on modern technology but did not make any changes affecting users beyond improved navigation. We tested the design of the new platform with users at every stage.

We did not make any changes to HMRC's Identity Verification service – the way the department establishes a customer's identity online – as part of replacing Government Gateway.

Q2. Was any consideration given to existing (pre-2019) users of Government Gateway who were not British and would therefore not have a UK issued identity document?

Please see the response above - we did not make any changes to HMRC's Identity Verification service as part of replacing Government Gateway.

Q3. Was any consideration given to liaising with the Home Office and exploring whether 'share codes' via 'View and Prove your Immigration Status' could be integrated into the new Government Gateway's security questions?

We are not aware of any discussions with the Home Office on that topic.

Q4. Were any impact assessments carried out for the withdrawal of GOV.UK Verify from the HMRC and DWP services? If so, could we receive a copy of it?

We held a range of data in relation to the level of uptake of GOV.UK Verify for its services. We were aware around 5% of our online customers used GOV.UK Verify and would need to migrate to Government Gateway. Some Verify customers will also have had Government Gateway accounts.

Decisions on when HMRC and DWP should stop using GOV.UK Verify were taken jointly with the Government Digital Service (GDS) as the service owner, in line with plans for the retirement of the GOV.UK Verify Service.

GDS agreed with departments that some government services would stop using Verify in spring 2022, as this was the most appropriate time for them to do so. These services have alternative systems for authentication and identity verification so the vast majority of users can continue to access them online, with offline channels also available as appropriate.

GDS published a summary of these changes to the platform on GOV.UK, including a list of services that could no longer be used with GOV.UK Verify.

Q5. Why was less than a month's written notice given to people that GOV.UK Verify would be withdrawn?

Decisions on when HMRC and DWP should stop using GOV.UK Verify were taken jointly with the Government Digital Service (GDS) as the service owner, in line with plans for the retirement of the GOV.UK Verify Service.

GDS agreed with departments that some government services would stop using GOV.UK Verify in spring 2022, as this was the most appropriate time for them to do so. These

services have alternative systems for authentication and identity verification so the vast majority of users can continue to access them online, with offline channels also available as appropriate.

Government departments worked together to draft the initial communications to users around the withdrawal from GOV.UK Verify. Government Digital Service (GDS) published a summary of the changes to the platform online at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/introducing-govuk-verify. This was to ensure that users were aware of the changes in advance.

Working closely with GDS, we carried out a range of communications activity following the initial announcement by GDS. This included:

- briefing key stakeholders, including MPs
- writing directly to around 200,000 customers, including users of the Trusted Helper service and those who had previously filed their Self Assessment return using GOV.UK Verify, to explain what was happening and what they needed to do
- alerting users of our Personal Tax Account when they logged in
- sharing messages with GOV.UK Verify identity providers - Post Office and Digidentity – to enable them so they could advise customers of the changes.

Q6. We have seen an example of such written notice from HMRC. Was such notice also given by DWP? Was this letter sent to all users of all services affected by the withdrawal of GOV.UK Verify?

Due to the alternative options in place and secured continuity of service, DWP did not issue bespoke written notice to our customers. New customers to these services will not have seen any changes to their journey and as these services did not have a sign in capability, existing customers were not impacted.

Q7. Why was less than a day's notice given on the GOV.UK Verify website that two DWP services would be withdrawn?

GDS updated the GOV.UK Verify hub page [<https://www.signin.service.gov.uk/verify-services>] to outline the withdrawal of two DWP services from GOV.UK Verify. The GOV.UK Verify hub page only displays services that have a live connection to GOV.UK Verify. It automatically updates once a service disconnects from GOV.UK Verify.

Q8. Why was no notice given on the GOV.UK Verify website that five HMRC websites would be withdrawn, and why was this information only placed there after contact from the Observer, and in any case after the service was already withdrawn?

GDS updated the GOV.UK Verify hub page [<https://www.signin.service.gov.uk/verify-services>] to outline the withdrawal of our services from GOV.UK Verify. The page in question shows which services are connected to GOV.UK Verify in real time. After access for customers through GOV.UK Verify was withdrawn, these services were still listed on the GDS Verify hub page for a short period of time until we took the technical steps to formally disconnect the services from GOV.UK Verify itself. The hub page then updated to reflect the changes (the formal disconnection of these HMRC services from GOV.UK Verify).

Q9. What mitigating measures have been put in place to help people affected by the inability to access online services from HMRC and DWP?

Anyone who is unable to prove their identity online can contact us by alternate channels such as phone or webchat and complete the activity they need to with us.

As stated above, for DWP an alternative identity verification journey is being offered and most customers will see no difference in their ability to access benefits and information they need.

Q10. Why are some people only offered a very small selection of items from which to choose two to verify their identity, such as “UK passport, Credit reference questions and Northern Ireland driving licence”? When will this be fixed to ensure that all people can choose from the full available list of items?

The evidence options offered to customers are based on the data held by HMRC and whether the customer holds a tax footprint for the specific tax regime. Notably customers are able to select two items from the following where they are available:

- tax credit claim details – dependent on the customer having a tax credit record with HMRC
- P60 or most recent payslips – dependent on the customer having a PAYE tax record with HMRC
- UK passport details – offered to all customers by default
- information held on your credit file (such as loans, credit cards or mortgages) – offered to all customer by default
- Your Self Assessment tax return (in the last 3 years) - dependent on the customer having a self-assessment tax record with HMRC
- Northern Ireland driving licence – offered to all customers by default.

Q11. When will the Government Gateway identity questions include the option to supply a non-British passport?

We are constantly working on our service and plan to increase the evidence options available to customers, helping more people to gain access whilst keeping our customer information secure. Where this involves data held by other parts of government, we need to explore the feasibility of gaining access to and sharing that data.

Please also see the information under the heading ‘Planned developments’ for identity options.

Q12. When will the Government Gateway identity questions include the option to supply a driving licence which is not from Northern Ireland?

As mentioned in the ‘Planned developments’, we are currently in discussions with the DVLA and expect to be able to add UK driving licences as an additional evidence source, subject to getting the necessary data sharing agreements in place.

Q13. When will the Government Gateway identity questions include the option to supply a Home Office ‘share code’ as proof of immigration status?

We are constantly working on our service and plan to increase the evidence options available to customers, helping more people to gain access whilst keeping our customer information secure.

We currently have no plans to introduce ‘share codes’ as an evidence source for Government Gateway. However, in longer term we intend to move services to One Login for Government, the new cross-government sign-on and identity verification system being developed by GDS. This may provide increased opportunities for EU and non-British citizens to prove their identity.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Yours sincerely

Kate Hall
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