

Accessibility and inclusion issues about titles when applying for DBS checks

We are aware that there are some accessibility and inclusion issues in the DBS application process around which titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mx etc) applicants can and cannot select.

We contacted the DBS in February 2023 to raise these issues. You can see the letter we sent below. We haven't received a response from the DBS at the time of writing, so we're considering our next steps.

If you have any questions about the DBS process, please [contact us](#).

Our letter to the DBS:

"Dear Andrew Robertson, Eric Robinson and Dr Gillian Fairfield,

As a group of charities and social enterprises that uses the DBS on a daily basis to process 4,500 checks annually for volunteers and/or staff across the country, a number of accessibility issues have come to our attention that make the DBS process more difficult or inaccessible to some applicants. We would like to raise these with you.

The rules around the **use of social titles** (Miss, Ms, Mrs, Mr, etc) are particularly restricting to some applicants. We are calling on the DBS to make changes for increased accessibility, particularly since social titles are not legally binding and using correct titles is a matter of courtesy rather than identification.

The issues encountered are as follows:

- 1) The title 'Mx', is not available to select on the DBS application for applicants, despite the fact that it is a recognised social title by many sources of identification and proof of address, including the DVLA, HMRC, DWP, most local authorities, many major banks and utility companies. Applicants using the title 'Mx' cannot continue the process unless they choose another title (which may be incorrect for them and inconsistent with their ID documents).
- 2) The linkage of the 'title' and 'gender' fields in the DBS application process creates difficulties for applicants who use a title typically considered 'inconsistent' with their gender marker. For example, if an applicant uses the title 'Mr' and selects the gender option 'Female', the system picks this up as an 'error'. If an applicant uses the title 'Miss', 'Ms' or 'Mrs' and selects the gender option 'Male', this is also picked up as an 'error'. In these cases, the applicant cannot continue the process without changing either the title or gender entered. This is inconsistent with issuers of forms of UK Route 1 ID documents (see footnotes).
- 3) If an applicant uses the title 'Mrs', the system assumes that the applicant must have previously had a different 'maiden' surname. The applicant cannot proceed with the form if no former surname is entered. This can cause difficulties for applicants who use the title 'Mrs' but who have chosen to keep their 'maiden name'. (An estimated 10% of UK nationals who use the title 'Mrs' do not change their name upon getting married. In at least four EU countries, changing one's surname after getting married is illegal; in many other countries, it is uncommon. See footnotes for references).

Applicants can enter the same surname in the 'surname' and 'former surname' fields, but this is not clarified in the form instructions, so many applicants are unaware and this can cause confusion and delays to their application.

- 4) The DBS system does not allow the title field to be left blank, so there is no option for applicants facing any of the issues above to circumvent them in this way. This is despite the fact that there may be no title on the identity documents provided by the applicant (for example, passports and birth certificates have no titles listed on them).

We have heard from a number of our staff and volunteers that the above issues have caused confusion in the DBS process and/or been an obstacle to them accessing a digital ID. The issues outlined above tend to particularly affect women, transgender and non-binary people and as such, removing these barriers is a necessary provision for people with protected characteristics of 'sex' and 'gender reassignment' covered by the Equality Act.

In summary, we are asking for the DBS to change the following:

- 1) Add 'Mx' to the list of titles.
- 2) Unlink the 'title' and 'gender' fields of the application, i.e., remove the requirement for the applicant's title to be 'Mr' if gender is listed as male, and remove the requirement for the applicant's title to be 'Miss' 'Ms' or 'Mrs' if the applicant's gender is listed as female.
- 3) Remove the requirement for the applicant to enter a previous surname if they use the title 'Mrs', either by making it an optional field or clarifying on the form that applicants can enter the same surname in both surname fields.
- 4) Give applicants the option not to select a title.

Signed:

Susannah Hardyman, CEO, Action Tutoring

Footnotes:

- 1) References on 'maiden name' usage for applicants who use 'Mrs'
 - a) [Around 10% of women do not change their name when getting married \(Source: BBC\)](#)
 - b) [Countries where changing of 'maiden' names is uncommon or illegal \(Source: Time\)](#)
- 2) Examples of government agencies, local authorities, banks and utility companies that accept 'Mx':
 - a) [Use in the DVLA \(source: news article\)](#)
 - b) [Oxford Council, Brighton and Hove Council \(source: local news article\)](#)
 - c) [Bradford Council \(source: local news article\)](#)
 - d) [SSE / OVO Energy utilities company](#)
 - e) [HSBC Bank](#)
 - f) [Metro Bank](#)
 - g) [RBS Bank](#)
- 3) UK Passport office: "You must accept a customer's choice of title (Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms), even if the title does not match the gender on their passport." [\(Source: gov.uk website\)](#)"