



**Social Security
Experience
Panels**

NEWS

**Summer
2020**

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FREEPOST Social Security Experience Panels



Welcome from the research team

We hope this newsletter finds you doing well. In this edition we have an update on Experience Panels work. There is information on findings of recent testing sessions with Experience Panel members. We also have an interview with Amanda Bennett, the Inclusive Communication Specialist Adviser and a blog from this year's Social Security Experience Panels Intern. Finally, there is information available on research happening outside of the Experience Panels that you can take part in if you wish.

Experience Panels Update

In our last newsletter, we asked you when you thought we should start sending invites to research again. Many thanks to the 324 of you who responded. 87% said 'now', and 13% said 'not yet'. So we have started work on new projects for you to get involved in. Some of these are about particular benefits, so you will only get an invite if you have the relevant experience.

At the moment, invites will be to online surveys or phone interviews. We are also looking into ways to remotely share computer screens with you. This would allow us test online forms and websites, with technology that lets us see your screen as you try them out from the comfort of your home. As always, we will ensure we keep your personal data safe at all times.

Thinking a little further ahead, we will not be running events across Scotland this Autumn as usual. But we are planning on doing a series of surveys and phone interviews around the same time of year. One of the

things we are likely to ask about is how COVID-19 has affected how you would want to interact with Social Security Scotland.



User Researcher testing with panel members

User Researchers have been running sessions with Experience Panel members to test parts of the new Scottish social security processes. Below are three pieces about the testing that was done before the lockdown.



Child Disability Payment

We recently conducted user research at one of the all panel sessions in Edinburgh. We carried out user testing on digital material that will be available on the Social Security Scotland website. This will give information to those who are considering making a Child Disability Payment application.

We focused on making sure that information was easy to find, understand and navigate. This was for people who don't necessarily have existing knowledge of disability benefits. We worked with four participants and asked them to read through the material. We then asked them 20 questions to test how easily they could find and understand the information.

Participants made many suggestions about how we could reorder and reword information to make it easier to find. Participants said that it was important to be able to get help to make an application. They also said that it was important to find that information easily and quickly. It would also be essential to know about the length of time it will take to process an application. Finally, participants told us that information about the transfer of payments from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland would be confusing. They said that this transfer needs to be set out clearly.

Thanks to participant feedback, changes were made to ensure the information was more user-friendly. Contact details were made more noticeable on the page and additional information was added to tell the client what help could be provided. Also we have reworked information about the transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social

Security. This material was rewritten, based on feedback and has now been posted on the <https://www.mygov.scot/> website.



Assessments

In February Social Security User Researchers met with Experience Panel members in Glasgow, Kirkcaldy and Inverness.

We wanted to find out about what language should be used to describe the future Assessment service (Disability Assistance for Working Age People). What should the service and the staff that carry out 'assessments' be called?

Panel members told us they need language that is consistent and will provide them with confidence and trust when interacting with this service.

This was particularly important for those with a mental health conditions. They said the language should help them understand staff will have the relevant skills, experience and knowledge to understand their condition.

The findings from the Experience Panels were part of a submission to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP. She told the Scottish Parliament about these changes on Wednesday 1 April 2020.

'The words I'm using here are important: 'client consultation', not 'assessment', 'practitioner', not 'assessor'. This whole service is built on a relationship of trust with the client, and grounded in the professional ethics and expertise of our health and social care practitioners across Scotland.'

Thanks to the help from Experience Panel members, we have been able to make this important change.



Fraud

Social Security Scotland was looking at the way it communicates with people when they are being investigated for benefits fraud. User researchers from Social Security Scotland tested four different letters with ten Experience Panel members in Paisley, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The letters were tested to make sure they were

clear and met the Social Security values of Dignity, Fairness and Respect. The four letters tested were, one letter to invite someone to an interview about suspected fraud, a 'what happens next' letter and two decision letters.

We found that the letters were clear and informative. However, the information in them needed to be rearranged as some of the most important information was hard to find. The first letter tested was found to contradict itself at times. And the forms of ID asked for by the letter felt too limited.

We found that the fourth letter tested was confusing. The letter told the person that there would be no further action taken. It was confusing as it said that the person would not be contacted again and then said if they need to be contacted this would be done at another time. Panel members also suggested that Social Security Scotland should acknowledge the stressful process the person has been through. The Panel members stated that the agency should acknowledge their help with the investigation process.

Based on the advice of the panel members, changes have been made to the letters to make them easier to understand. Important information has been moved towards the front of the letter to make it easier to see. Changes have been made where possible to make the letters more understanding of way the person receiving them might be feeling. For example by acknowledging their help with any investigations.

An interview with Amanda Bennett



Amanda Bennett is a speech and language therapist. She is an Inclusive Communication Specialist Adviser for Social Security Scotland.



Can you tell us a little about your background?

I am an independent speech and language therapist on a fixed term contract with Social Security Scotland. Before I qualified as a therapist in 2002 I had a mixed career. This included working in youth work, literacy teaching, television and radio research and production, health

improvement including the National Aids Helpline, and European projects on ageing issues.

People understand information and express themselves in many different ways. I believe passionately that people should not be excluded from services and activities because other people do not recognise and respect these communication differences.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy working with people across a wide range of departments in the organisation and outside. It is exciting to share knowledge and ideas with individuals who have very different skills from me. It is satisfying to find answers together which remove barriers for people who want to access opportunities and services.

Could you tell us a bit more about your role?

I am an Inclusive Communication Specialist Adviser. I am employed to assist Social Security Scotland meet its legal requirement to communicate in an inclusive way. This is set out in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. This means recognising that staff, stakeholders and clients understand information and express themselves in many different ways. It means designing services so that people can interact with us where, how and when they prefer.

What are the challenges in your role?

I have found a high level of commitment within the organisation to listen to people and find ways to meet their needs. However, planning and taking action have to move quickly here. It can be challenging to keep in touch with everything that is happening and to offer support and advice at the right time.

Do you have any future plans and priorities that you can share?

Since I started in September 2019 I have been working with colleagues to develop 4 things which will help the organisation communicate inclusively:

- Leadership
- Effective involvement of people who communicate in different ways

- A skilled and knowledgeable workforce
- Shared inclusive communication resources

I continue to see these as our priorities.



'My internship with the Social Security Experience Panels' by Laura Murdanaigum

I started as an intern in the Experience Panels team in July 2019. Throughout the year, I have been working with researchers and other support staff to make sure that panel members' voices continue to be heard. It's been a busy year! A large part of my role has been organising Experience Panels events. In particular, I have been making sure that these events are accessible and comfortable for panel members. Other parts of my role have included inputting the data from surveys, processing expense forms, and publicising our research. I also write this newsletter!

I have been to a few Experience Panels events in both the summer and winter sessions to help out. You might have seen me in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow?! Having a hearing loss in both ears from birth, it feels great being able to help other disabled people with the work I do. I have enjoyed having the chance to listen to the stories of people across Scotland. It's also been great to connect with panel members about their experiences of facing additional barriers in life. It's been interesting for me because I have learnt a lot from the panel members in terms of both the good and bad things they face on a daily basis. It is also just nice to talk to panel members about the future, and how we can hope that things will get better.

Overall, the most interesting part of my internship was organising an Experience Panels event in Orkney with my manager. It was an unforgettable experience getting off the plane. This is because there was a blizzard with hail and wind that whipped me up as I was trying to get to the airport!! It was great to inform the islanders about the Panels and gather research that would influence future Scottish benefits. I felt that being a disabled person and a highlander allowed me to connect to the people that I met in Orkney.

I have enjoyed my internship very much as I have met lovely people in my own team. I have also really enjoyed educating my colleagues about disabled people. I know that the team and the organisation have benefited hugely from my knowledge about stenographers and perspective on sensory impairments.

Throughout my year here, I have learnt a lot. I have learnt how to work in a very large organisation such as the Scottish Government. I have learnt how different teams are helping to create the new Scottish social security system. I have also learnt about opportunities to meet other people across the government and learn about other work the Scottish Government is doing. But above all, I have learnt the value of listening to different groups.

Meeting other disabled people across the organisation has given me hope that disabled people will have a voice for positive change in Scotland. As I leave the Experience Panels team, I am excited to be a part of this effort in the future to make positive change. I hope to continue to work in public policy and help disabled people.



Research Opportunity on Universal Credit Scottish Choices

Are you on Universal Credit? Been offered 'Scottish Choices'? Then researchers would like to hear from you!

In 2018 we ran a survey with panel members with experience of Universal Credit. This work is now being followed up by researchers outside of the Experience Panels work.

Ipsos MORI, an independent research company, has been asked by the Scottish Government to find out what people on Universal Credit in Scotland think about Universal Credit 'Scottish Choices'. As you may know, if you are on Universal Credit in Scotland you can choose to:

- Have your rent paid direct to your landlord
- Get your Universal Credit payment every two weeks, instead of every month.

These two options are called Universal Credit 'Scottish Choices'.

We are looking for people on Universal Credit who have been offered one, or both, of these options to speak to researchers about what they think about them.

This is your chance to tell the Scottish Government what you think about Universal Credit Scottish Choices. If you were offered the Scottish Choices options but decided not to take them up, we still really want to hear your views.

The interview would last around 45-60 minutes and would be a relaxed chat at a time that suits you. The researcher would ask about things like how you decided whether or not to take up the Scottish Choices options. They would also ask what difference being on Scottish Choices has made for you.

If you would like to find out more about the research or think you might like to take part, please email Maggie.pollok@ipsos.com, or phone Rachel Ormston on 07504 038 873. The team will then contact you for a brief chat about the research and to check you are eligible (that you have been offered Scottish Choices).

This is not an Experience Panels project. But like Experience Panels research, this will be used to inform Scottish Government decisions.

There might be other opportunities coming up for panels members to participate in research beyond the Experience Panels. As always we will make sure these are optional and relevant to you.



Meeting your needs

If you have any feedback on this newsletter or ideas for what you would like to hear about in future newsletters, please let us know. You can contact us by:

Email: SocialSecurityExperience@gov.scot

Text: 07747 460 357

Phone: 0800 029 4974

BSL users can contact us via www.contactsotland-bsl.org
Textphone users can call using the 18001 prefix. Interpretation is available if required.