social research

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Research Findings
8/2018

Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Visual Summary of Focus Groups and Survey Research Findings

Background

The Scottish Government will become responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of work to prepare for this change, Scottish Government have set up the Social Security Experience Panels.
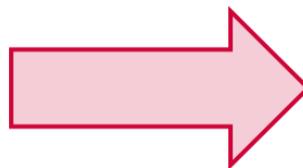
Department for Work and Pensions → **Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government will work with people who have experience of the current benefit system to design a new social security system with the people of Scotland.
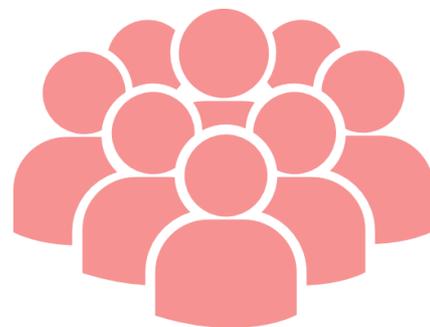
2,400 people

About the research

This report summarises the results of 'About Your Benefits and You' which was the first research activity undertaken with the Social Security Experience Panels after the recruitment stage called 'Have Your Say' finished.

1,144 people took part in the survey

274 people took part in a focus group

35 focus groups were held in:

- **Edinburgh**
- **Glasgow**
- **Dundee**
- **Aberdeen**
- **Inverness**
- **East Kilbride**

- **Ayr**
- **Airdrie**
- **Perth**
- **Hawick**
- **Dumfries**
- **Lerwick**

About You and Your Benefits aimed to find out:

About you

About your experiences
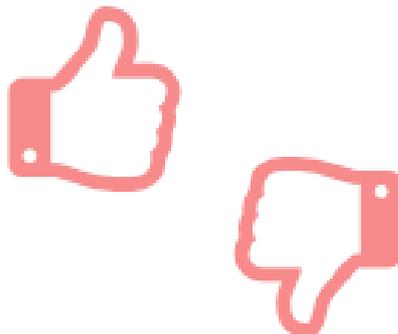
About your priorities
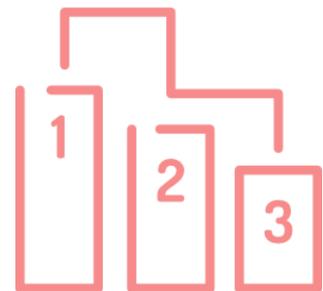
For more information about how we did the research please see the full qualitative report at available at: www.gov.scot/socialsecurity-experience-panels

The quantitative research findings are available at: http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00527173.pdf

Summary of findings

Priorities for improvement

Priorities for improvement in the new system

Respondents were asked about their top three priorities for the Scottish Government to improve in the new social security system. The majority of respondents (71 per cent) listed 'advice and support about claiming' as a priority. More than half listed 'applying for a benefit'.
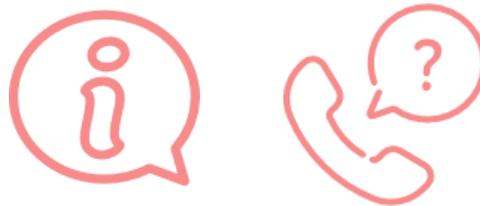
Percentage of respondents who rated each area as a priority for improvement

| Area	Percentage
Advice and support about claiming	71%
Applying for a benefit	52%
Having a claim reconsidered or going to appeal	45%
Being kept up to date about your claim	44%
General enquires about benefits	24%
Being told the result of your application	18%
Making changes to your information after the…	13%
Making a complaint	10%
Something else	2%
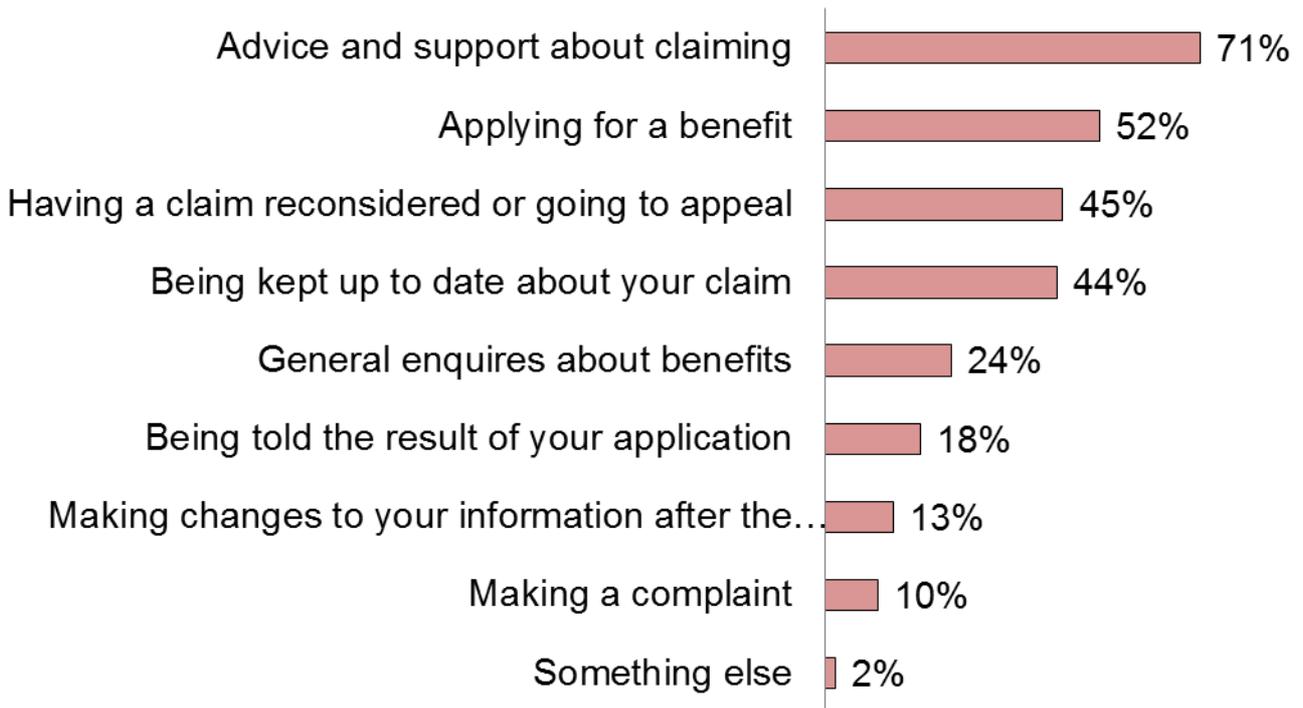
A number of respondents suggested that the whole system needed to be improved.

Some people said that it is important that services are joined up and consistent when providing information, advice and support.

Joined up services

Respondents spoke about the importance of listening to people and responding to their needs.

Reasons for prioritisation
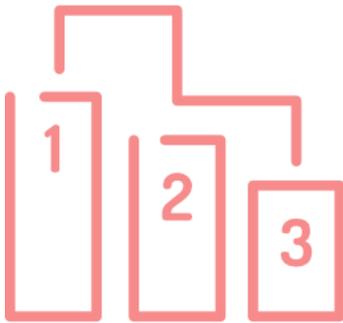
Most respondents chose these priorities because of their previous experience of the system.

Some people said that barriers to accessing the benefits system had impacted on their finances or health.

Financial impact   **Health impact**

What Works Well

Friendly, Helpful and Knowledgable Staff

The biggest factor contributing to good experiences of the current system was when staff were **polite, friendly and understanding.**

People who had been to an assessment said it was good when staff knew about their condition.

> The assessor who came to assess my son for his PIP understood his condition and helped him through the assessment by her attitude - she stood out amongst everyone else I have had to deal with.

Survey Respondent

Benefits Providing Support and Independence

In general, respondents felt that benefits provide **support to live independently** and manage their condition.

> My MP helped at the Reconsideration stage and my Mobility assessment was increased thus allowing me to retain the mobility car as without this I would have been totally housebound.

Survey Respondent

Simple, Clear and Timely Processes

People said that **simple, clear** processes work well. For example short application forms.

> My adult son has a long-term lifelong condition. He has been on benefits for many years and the application process was straight forward. Recent forms are lengthy and demanding to fill in.

Survey Respondent

Similarly, respondents spoke of good experiences where things were **done quickly.**

> Assessment appointment came quickly. Payments started quite quickly. Nurse who did assessment was experienced and understood my condition.

Survey Respondent

Flexible Approaches

People said it works well when the **system meets their needs**. For example, when there is flexibility about where or when assessments are. This might include having an assessment at home.

Others spoke about it working well when there was choice in how they can contact the current benefits system.

Choice of how to contact system

Overall Negative Experiences

A large number of people were not able to give any examples of where things worked well in their experience.

> Nothing works well with the current system it is long winded unsympathetic and almost an us against them type culture.

Survey Respondent

What Could be Improved

No flexibility in the Current System

Some people spoke about the current system not being able to meet their needs.

This included **no choice** in how application forms are completed or communication channels.

This is particularly difficult for those with mental health conditions or conditions that make certain types of communication impossible.

> As my MS progresses, I find writing and typing increasingly difficult. The thought of having to fill out a PIP form yet again next year fills me with dread.

Survey respondent

There were some practical barriers in the system:

Needing to travel to assessment centres.

Short notice for assessment or tribunal dates.

Not enough time to complete applications.

Not meeting care or support needs for disabled people.

Lack of clear information

Some people said they felt powerless when applying for benefits.

This was because of:

Not enough clear information on what to expect

Long wait times without information

Some people spoke about finding out about the system from their **friends or family** rather than being given official information.

This sometimes made people feel **worried or anxious**.

Lack of Trust

A lot of people spoke about feeling that they **don't trust** the DWP.

This included feeling distrust of both DWP and its staff.

People said that they felt they were 'on trial' and that they had to prove that they were a real claim.

Impact on Users

A lot of people spoke about the impact that applying for benefits had on them.

This included:

Worry about having enough money

Stress and anxiety
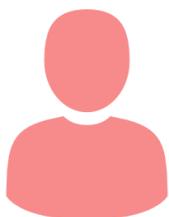
Fear of having to do it again

I spend from the time I write any form to the time I get the response on my knees mentally with fear, anxiety and stress.

Survey respondent

Use of These Findings

The findings outlined in this report, along with all findings from research with the Experience Panels, are being used to inform the design and delivery of social security in Scotland, to build a rights based social security system that works for the people of Scotland when they need it.

Further work with the Experience Panels

Research with the Experience Panels will continue throughout the coming years, allowing the Scottish Government to work with people with direct, personal experience of the current benefit system to design a new social security system that works for people. For further information please see https://beta.gov.scot/policies/social-security/engagement-on-social-security/

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication
☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

☐ are available via an alternative route

☒ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.

☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.