

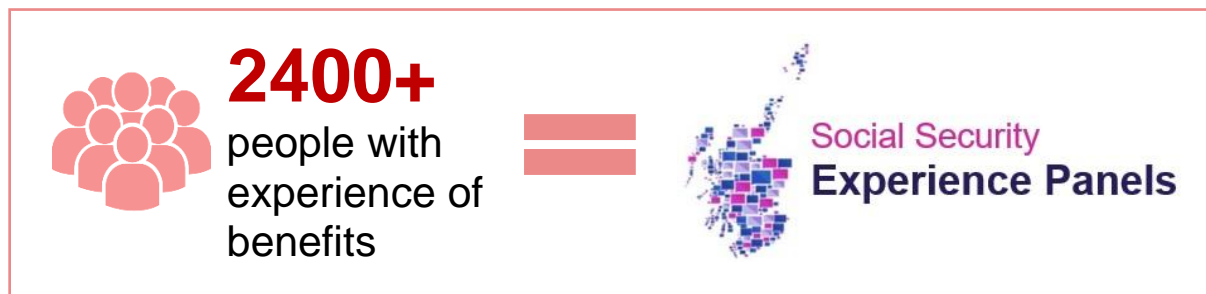
Social Security Experience Panels: Advocacy Standards

Background

The Scottish Government are becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).



To prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the **Social Security Experience Panels**.

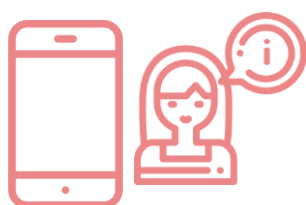


Experience Panel members all have experience of **claiming at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland**.

The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design Scotland's new social security system.

About the research

This report gives the findings of the research on Advocacy Standards.



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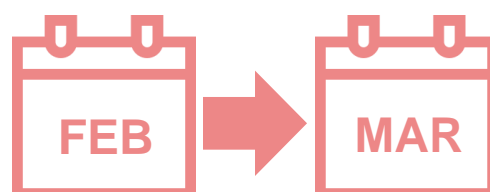
phone
interview



10

focus
groups

The research took place in



2019

The research explored:



How advocacy
services should run



How advocacy
organisations should
perform



Where and how
people would like
information about
advocacy

30+

participants took part



8

locations

Advocacy Standards

The Scottish Government have written some standards for advocates and advocacy organisations. These standards set out what organisations should do and how they should perform. **The vast majority** of panel members **agreed with all** of the draft standards.

The standards were split into **five** themes:



People-centred



Quality of service



Training and experience



An independent service



Accountability

More information on the draft standards can be found here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-advocacy-service-standards-consultation/>

Theme 1: People-centred

Throughout focus groups and the interview, participants told us what a people-centered advocacy service meant to them.



Participants told us that this means **putting people first**.

Many participants told us it is about treating everyone as an **individual**. They told us that people have different needs and that advocacy services should be **designed around an individual's needs**.



To recognise the needs of a person, many said that advocates must be **understanding**. Participants said it is important that an advocate understands an individual and **how their condition or disability might affect them**.

“It’s important that the advocate really knows the person and looks into their condition”

Participants also told us that a people-centered advocacy service means people should be treated with **dignity** and **respect**. Some also told us that **both the** advocate and the client must be treated this way.

Theme 2: Training

In focus groups, participants spoke about the importance of having a high level of training for staff.



Participants told us that it is important that advocates are well trained. They also told us advocates must be trained to **understand the social security system**.



Some participants told us that currently, the quality of advocacy services can depend on many different factors. They told us it is important to make sure **everyone receives the same training and follow the same rules**.



Participants also told us it is important that advocates **regularly take part in training and update their skills**. One participant said it might be helpful to have refresher courses for advocates.



In focus groups, participants also talked about the need for a **service for advocates**, to help them get **advice and support**.



Some participants suggested that advocates should take part in **human rights training**.

Theme 3: Accountability



Participants told us that they should **be able to give feedback** on how they think an advocate or advocacy service is performing.

“Capturing good feedback helps build up [a] better service”



Many participants told us that it is important that they have somewhere to go to **complain** if they are unhappy with an advocate or advocacy service.

“A complaint isn’t necessarily a bad thing and it can improve the service and help it learn from mistakes”



Participants told us that **complaints should be taken seriously and responded to quickly.**



Some participants suggested that advocacy services should be **regularly reviewed** to make sure they are performing well.



One participant told us it is important that advocacy services are reviewed to make sure that **public money is being spent properly.**



In focus groups, some suggested that there should be a **place for advocates to go** if they have any **worries or concerns**.

Making advocacy accessible

We asked participants how we could make the standards **are easy for people to read and understand**.

Participants told us that the standards should be written in **plain English** and **avoid using jargon**.

“Use plain English and avoid acronyms”



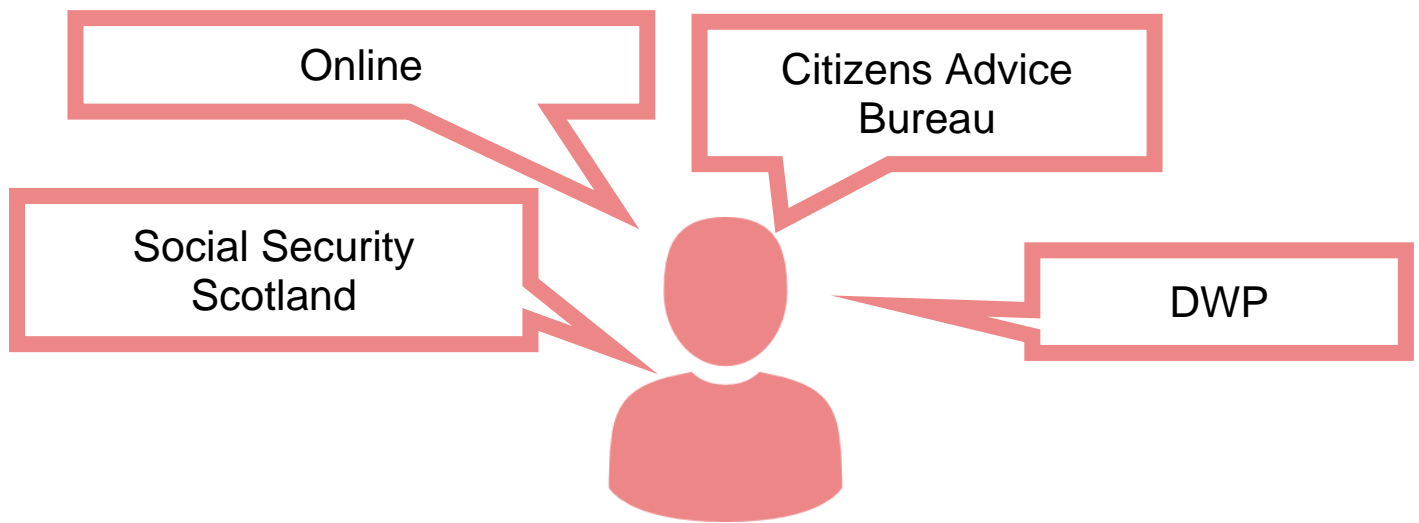
Some suggested that a **basic, easy to understand** version of the standards should be given as standard.

“better to have a version that is easy for everyone to read, they might not want to feel different and ask for easy read version”



Participants told us it is important to have standards available in different formats. These included **braille**, a **video format with British Sign Language** and advocacy information translated into **different languages**.

We asked participants **where** they would go to find out more information about advocacy services:



Some participants talked about how it can be **difficult to find information online**. They said that information should be clear and easy to find.

“DWP website has lots of info to wade through before you get to what you are looking for”

Participants told us they would like **leaflets and posters** in a range of **diffent places**. Ideas included:

- Community groups
- Doctors surgeries
- Citizen’s advice buildings
- Social Security Scotland buildings
- DWP buildings
- Libraries



Panel members told us **that they don't think there is enough information** available on advocacy at the moment.

Some suggested that **all clients of Social Security Scotland** should **be provided with a leaflet** on advocacy services.

“Everyone that comes into contact with Social Security Scotland should be handed short format leaflet about what's available.”

Participants also said that it should be made clear that advocacy is a **free service**.

What's Next?

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Experience Panels in the development of Scotland's new social security system. This will include further research on individual benefits in addition to cross-cutting work to assist in the development of Social Security Scotland.

The Scottish Government is consulting on draft advocacy standards. The consultation closes on 7 October. The consultation responses and this Experience Panel feedback will be reviewed to see what changes are needed before finalising the standards

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication

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



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