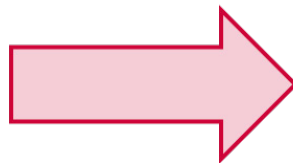# Social Security Experience Panels: Appointments and Local Delivery

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming 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, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

Department for Work and Pensions → **Scottish Government**

Over 2,400 people from across Scotland have joined the Experience Panels. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.

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

2,400+
Experience Panel members

About the research

This report gives the findings of the 'making, changing and attending social security appointments' and 'local delivery' research.
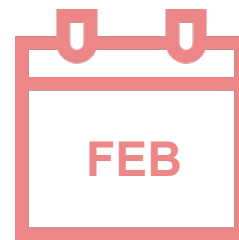
2456 invites

550 survey responses

The research took place in

FEB

2019

14 Focus groups

9 Locations

The research asked Experience Panel member views on:

Booking, changing and cancelling appointments;

What information should be provided before an appointment;

How appointments could be made a positive experience; and

Views on home visits, potential 'drop-in' seminars and the local delivery of Social Security Scotland services.

Survey participants were aged between
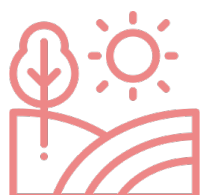
16 – 79
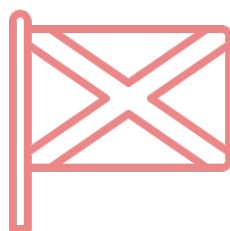
years old

34%
Man or boy

66%
Woman or girl

81%
lived in an urban location

19%
lived in an rural location

Participants took part in
31
out of
32
local authority areas

Most survey participants had a **disability** or **long term health condition (89%)**, including:

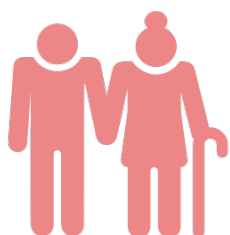chronic pain

severe hearing impairments

severe visual impairments

other kinds of long term health condition

More than half (48%) of survey participants were:

a carer due to **old age,**

a carer to a **child**, or

a carer to an **adult.**

Demand for Appointments

Most survey respondents said they would want an appointment with a Social Security Scotland staff member at some point.

We asked why people would want an appointment with Social Security Scotland:

Accessibility

Many respondents told us they had accessibility needs which meant that appointments were the best way to solve their queries.

"Because I am severely sight-impaired […] [it is] difficult for people like me to use phones and you can't get magnification on the internet."

Consistency and reliability

Some respondents said that making an appointment would be the best way to get correct information.

"Mail gets lost, doesn't reach where it is supposed to…"

Information Seeking

Many respondents said they would need an appointment to get information about a benefit or eligibility.

"I would like to sit down with someone who can tell me what I can claim for. I just don't have a clue."

Some respondents said they were not comfortable getting information on their own, especially those who found using computers hard.

"Appointments serve as a point of contact [with Social Security Scotland] in order to provide clarity and provide reassurance over processes."
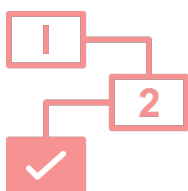
Checking status

Some participants said that an appointment would let them stay in touch with Social Security Scotland. They could get updates on existing applications.

Other reasons

Many participants gave other reasons for appointments. This included being able to make or get an update on a complaint they had made.

Types of Appointments

We asked respondents how interested they would be in different types of appointments.
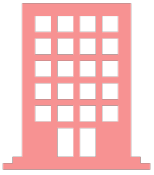
Face to face appointments

Over eight in ten respondents said they would be very interested or interested in a face to face appointment.
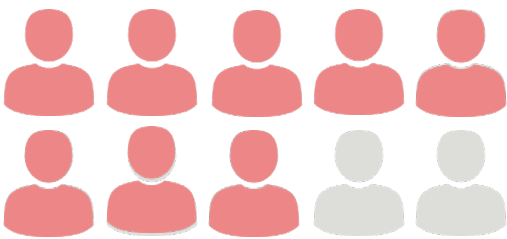
One in five of respondents said they would like a home visit.

Just under three in ten said they would come to a Social Security Scotland venue.

Over half of respondents said they would sometimes visit a Social Security Scotland venue, and would sometimes want a home visit.

Overall, eight in ten respondents said they would – at some point – like to come to a Social Security Scotland venue.

Telephone

Seven in ten respondents said they would be very interested or interested in a telephone appointment.

Both survey respondents and focus group participants wanted Social Security Scotland to call them at an agreed time.

Skype

Skype provides video chat and voice calls between computers, tablets and mobile devices.

Just under four in ten survey respondents said they would be very interested or interested in a Skype appointment.

Many focus group participants liked the idea of Skype appointments. They saw it as an 'easy' way of speaking to Social Security Scotland for general enquiries.

Many said they liked the face to face side of Skype.

Some participants had worries around Skype. These included: security of personal information, availability of internet in rural areas and people's knowledge and skills with computers.

Web chat

Web chat is a type of Internet online chat.

Survey respondents were split down the middle on whether they were interested in web chat appointments.

Focus group participants were also split. Those who did like the idea of web chat felt it was good for short, simple queries. They liked the idea of not having to leave home.

Others liked that you could save a record of the conversation to use in the future.

Those who did not like the idea of web chat said it was because you cannot see each other.

Overall preference

We asked respondents what type of appointment they would want the most. The most popular options were a face to face appointment or telephone. The least popular option was Skype.
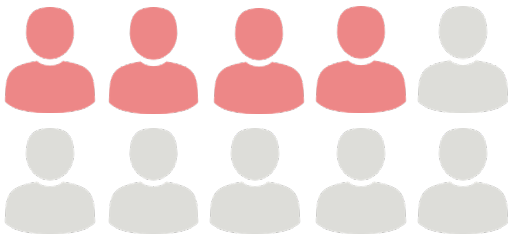
If they needed more than one appointment:
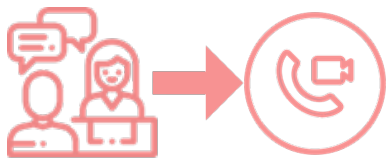
Respondents who wanted their first appointment to be face to face were more likely to want different types of appointments later.
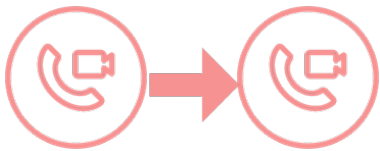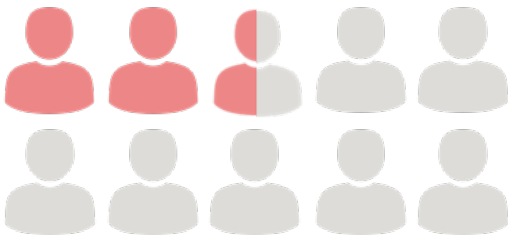
Very few respondents who wanted their first appointment to be Skype or web chat wanted to switch to a face to face appointment later.
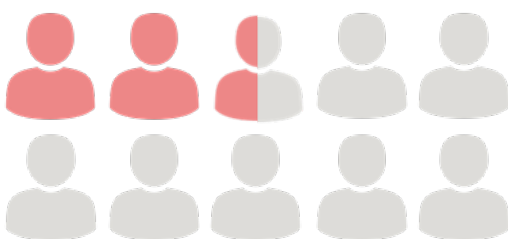
Booking an appointment

Under half of respondents said they didn't mind how they booked an appointment.

Around one quarter wanted to pick a slot themselves with any advisor.

Around one quarter wanted to referred to advisor who would be best placed to discuss a topic. The advisor would then be in touch to arrange a slot for them.

The most popular option for booking an appointment was online (just under six in ten respondents).

Telephone was also popular (almost three in ten respondents).

The least popular ways of booking an appointment were through an app or in person at a Social Security Scotland building or local venue.

Before the appointment

Appointment confirmation

The most popular method for getting a confirmation of a booking was by email (nearly half of respondents).

Text message and post were also popular (with around one quarter of respondents each).
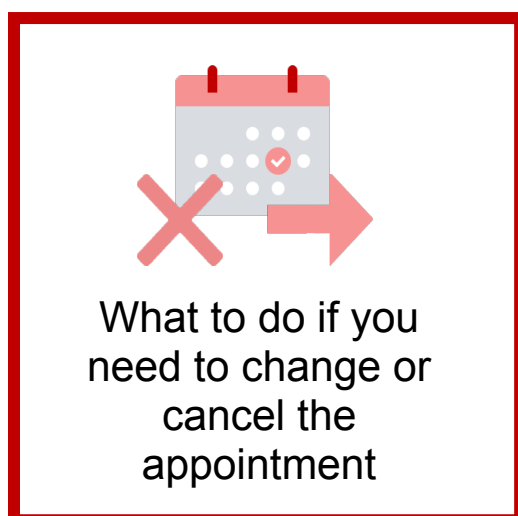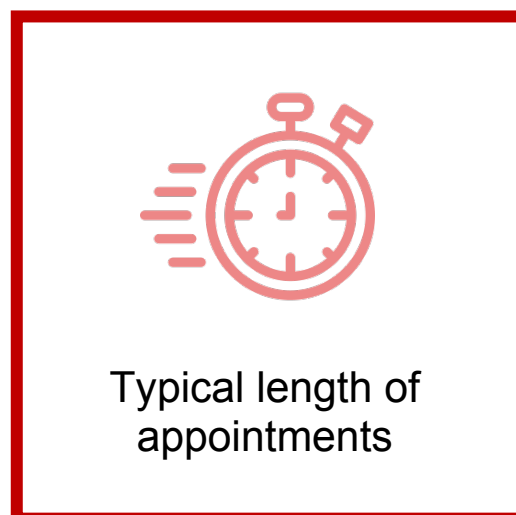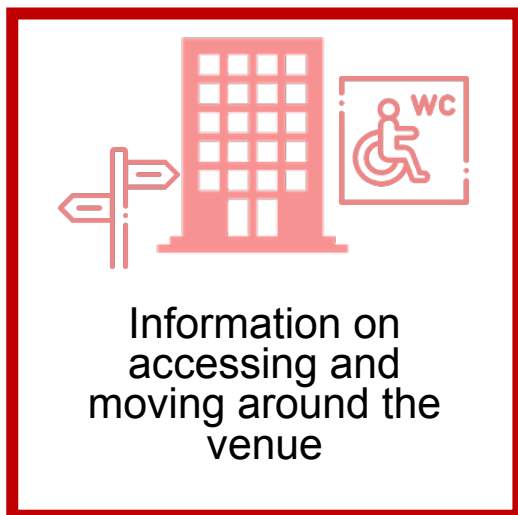
The least popular options were by telephone (1 per cent) and social media (0 per cent).

Almost all respondents said they would find the following information useful with their appointment confirmation:

✓ Parking information
✓ Building information

- ✓ Public transport routes
- ✓ Information about what will happen on the day
- ✓ Information on how to change an appointment
- ✓ Information on how to tell Social Security Scotland about accessibility needs
- ✓ What to bring to an appointment
- ✓ If it is possible to bring someone else to the appointment
- ✓ Information about the meeting room and the equipment available inside it

Focus group participants also said they would find the following information useful before their appointment:

Information on accessing and moving around the venue

Typical length of appointments

What to do if you need to change or cancel the appointment

Information on travel expenses

Some participants said the information should be personal to their appointment.

> "I would like an information sheet that this is what we will cover […] without being hit with lots of information."
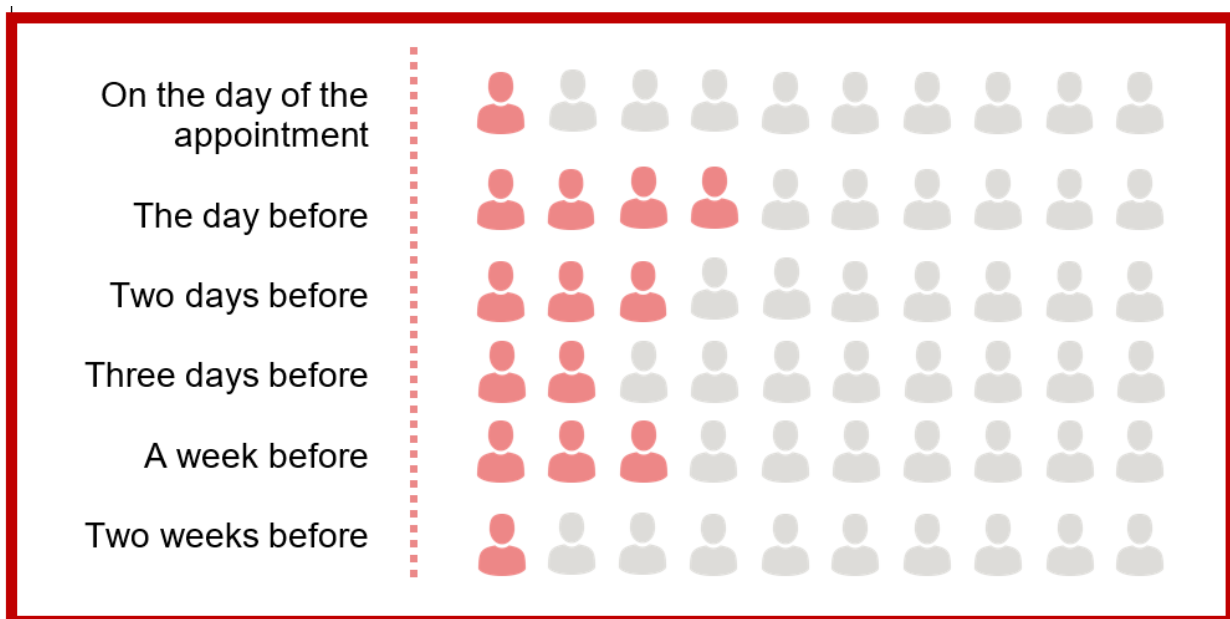
Appointment reminder

Almost all respondents said they would like a reminder of their appointment (over nine in ten).

The most popular channels for a reminder were text or email, followed by post. The least popular channel was telephone.

Most respondents wanted their reminder the day before the appointment (four in ten):

Seven in ten respondents said they would want the option to cancel or change their appointment by themselves.
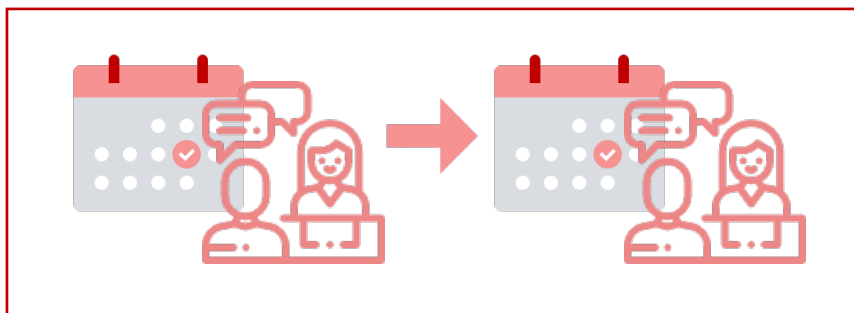
Three in ten said they would prefer to ask Social Security Scotland to do this for them.

 The most popular way to change or cancel an appointment was online, with nearly two-thirds of respondents choosing this option.

At the appointment

We asked respondents if they would like to speak to the same person if they needed more than one appointment to resolve an issue.

Almost all respondents said it was very important or important that they speak to the same person each time (nine in ten).

The most common reasons respondents gave for wanting to speak to the same staff member at each appointment were:
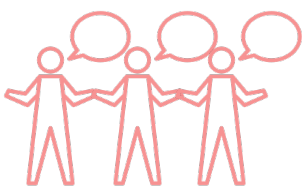
 Not having to explain themselves over and over;

Fear of information being lost;

Having someone 'know' them and their needs; and

Having a more personalised service.

Appointment length

Over seven in ten respondents felt an appointment should last longer than 15 minutes.

Four in ten felt it should last longer than 20 minutes.

Just over one in ten felt it should last longer than 30 minutes.

In the future, Social Security Scotland may allow third parties to book appointments for their clients. An example of a third party could be an advocate or a carer.

Just under three in ten respondents said a third party had booked an appointment for them in the past.

Eight in ten respondents said they were either completely comfortable or quite comfortable with a third party booking an appointment for them.

Home Visits

The most common reason survey respondents said they would need a home visit was due to their disability, mental health or long term health condition (nearly eight in ten respondents). This was followed by mobility issues (nearly half of respondents).
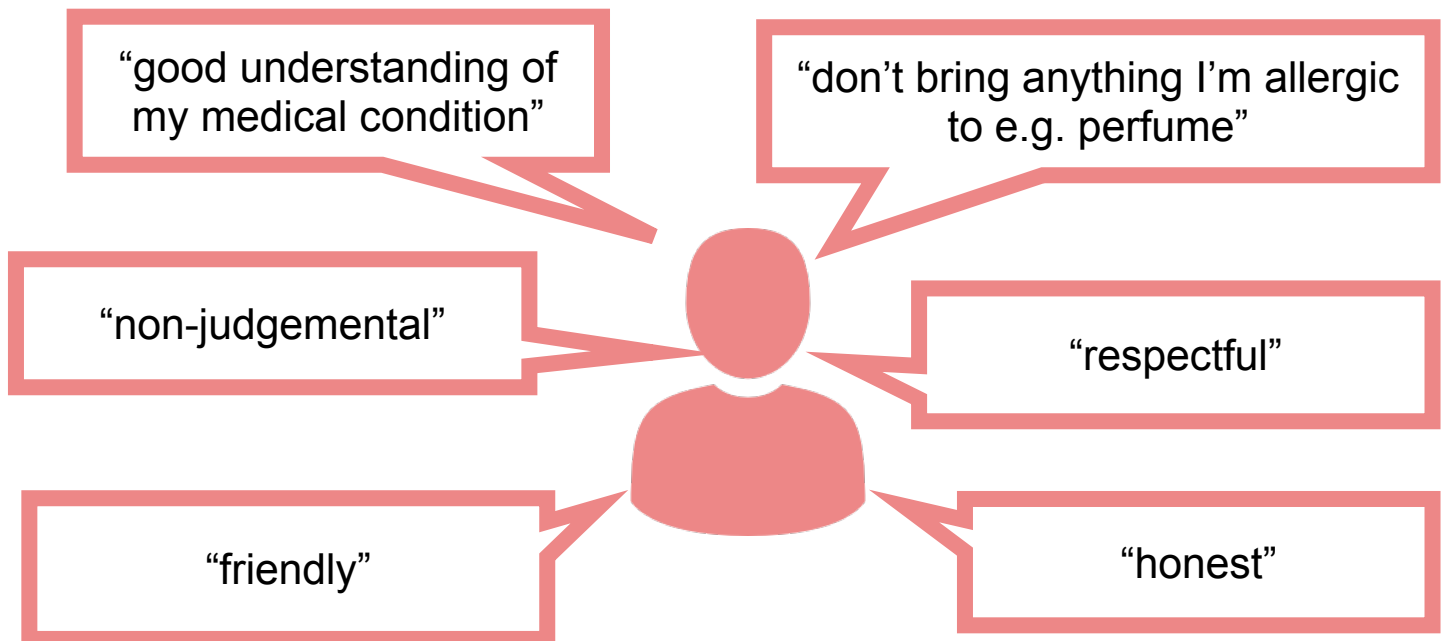
Around one fifth of respondents said caring responsibilities might stop them from visiting a Social Security Scotland office.

16 per cent said they would struggle with transport.

We asked focus group participants what Social Security Scotland client support advisers should be like during a home visit:

"good understanding of my medical condition"

"don't bring anything I'm allergic to e.g. perfume"

"non-judgemental"

"respectful"

"friendly"

"honest"

Suggestions to make the home visit a good experience included:

client support advisers showing up on time

informing clients in advance about what will be covered

knowing the name of the client support adviser

the client support adviser calling the client before visiting to introduce themselves

Drop-in sessions

In the future, Social Security Scotland may offer drop-in sessions at their buildings or other local venues.

Three quarters of respondents said they would be interested in attending a drop-in session.

We asked what people would use drop-in sessions for.

The most popular topics were to ask about eligibility (eight in ten) or to get guidance about other support services available (eight in ten).

Three quarters of respondents said they would ask about specific benefits. Two thirds said they would get help with an application.

The least popular option was to get guidance on how to check the status of an application. This was still chosen by just under six in ten respondents.

Focus group participants agreed that drop-in sessions could be a good way to ask general questions about the benefit system.

"Local community venues, local clubs […] we know there are a lot of people needing help so having this would be greatly appreciated."
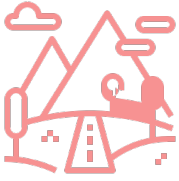
Local Delivery

We asked focus group participants their views on what is 'local'.

There were mixed responses on what is local from participants from urban areas. Some participants mentioned the city centre as local.

Others felt that local depends on how easily someone is able to travel.

Participants from rural areas expected a local service to be near where they lived. They described local services as being more spread out in in these areas.

All participants felt that a local service should be fully accessible.

Travelling to local services

We asked focus group participants how would they usually expect to get to a local service. Participants mentioned several barriers with public transport.

Participants told us how buses can be unreliable.

The cost of public transport was also a concern for a few participants.

"You need to be aware of transport issues - trains late or cancelled. Some sort of flexibility needed in case of emergency."
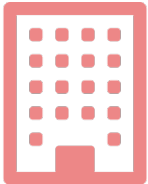
Travelling by car was an issue for some. A few participants told us that parking in the city could cause problems.

"A lot of people don't like driving in (city) and struggle to park."

Accessing local services

We asked focus group participants how they would want to speak to their local services. The most common response was face to face within a private space.

The majority of participants felt that the local services should be delivered in places that are well known, i.e. community centres.

"Pop up options in local schools, after hours/weekends, church halls, community centres, etc."

"Place people know, council or other service."

A few participants suggested a mobile service.

"A van that can go around with a staff member with leaflets and resources."

Participants told us that the venues should be welcoming, accommodating to each individual, and have access to parking.

"To be as accessible as possible both in transport and in physical access."

We asked participants if there was anywhere we should not deliver local services. Many participants commented that local services should not be in a DWP centre, or a job centre.

Expectations of a local service

We asked focus group participants what sort of services they would expect to get from a local Social Security Scotland service.

Some participants said that they would expect to 'drop into' a local Social Security Scotland venue to speak to a member of staff face to face.

"It's really important that you can talk to someone face to face and that person has the capacity to answer your questions."

Participants expected the following services from local delivery:

- ✓ information about their eligibility to particular benefits
- ✓ information about the application process
- ✓ help with application forms
- ✓ signposting to other services and organisations
- ✓ written materials and leaflets
- ✓ private areas
- ✓ trained, knowledgeable and helpful staff

We told participants that there were some things a local service would not be able to do. Participants gave various suggestions for how Social Security Scotland should make people aware of this:

Posters and information leaflets in local delivery venues and other local, community venues

Advertising through TV, radio, newspapers, and social media

Information available in a range of accessible formats

"Leaflets in writing in local delivery space, library, and child care centres. Posters showing what is devolved to Scottish Government or with UK Government, what they are responsible for."

"Some in braille, some online, TV campaign, media campaign broad range of formats."

What's next?

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Experience Panels in the development of Scotland's new social security system.

These findings have been used to inform the design and development of appointments and local delivery.

Further research is planned to understand the needs of 'seldom heard' groups, for example, prisoners. This will look into how these groups would want to meet with Social Security Scotland and if any additional considerations need to be put in place for them.

How to access background or source data

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

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

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

This report is available on the Scottish Government Publications Website (http://www.gov.scot/Publications/Recent)