

Social Security Experience Panels: Help us design a way to keep Social Security Scotland staff and clients safe

Background

The Scottish Government are 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.

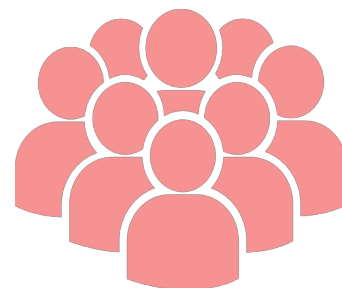
**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**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 details the findings of respondents to help design the processes for keeping Social Security staff and clients safe.



2,456

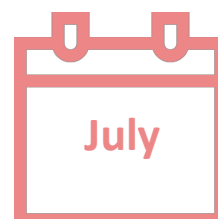
Invites



293

survey
responses

The research took place in



2019

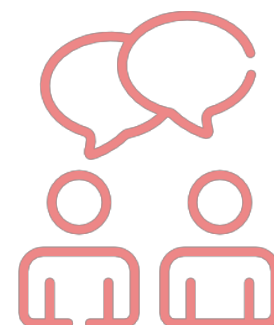
The research explored:



Situations that
cause frustration
and anger between
staff and clients



How staff can
respond when clients
may be displaying
unacceptable actions



Communication
about the process
and sharing data
with other
organisations

Participants were between

16 – 79

years old



27%

Man or boy



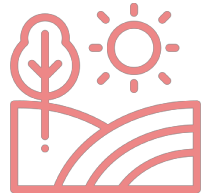
71%

Woman or girl



80%

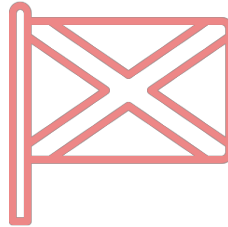
lived in an urban location



20%

lived in a rural location

Participants took part in



28

out of

32

local authority areas

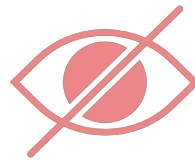
Most survey participants had a disability or long term health condition, including:



chronic pain



severe hearing impairments



severe visual impairments



other kinds of long term health condition

Situations that cause frustration or anger when interacting with organisations

This report outlines the views of people who responded to this survey. These may not be shared by all who receive benefits that will be delivered by Social Security Scotland.

We asked **what situations** can result in **feelings of frustration or anger** when interacting with an organisation like Social Security Scotland.

These were the **most common responses** from respondents:



How to reduce feelings of frustration or anger between clients and organisations like Social Security Scotland

Respondents were asked what **Social Security Scotland** should put into place to help **reduce feelings of frustrations or anger**.



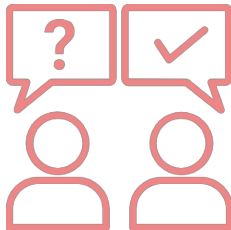
One of the **most common** responses was that Social Security Scotland should **always provide information to their clients** as to **what will happen at their appointments**.

“Ensure that people are fully aware of what is going to happen at appointments”



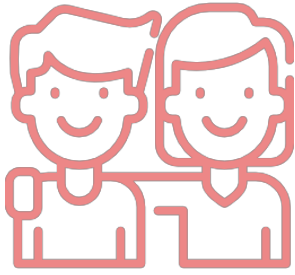
Another **popular response** was that it was crucial for **staff to be trained** to know how to interact with clients.

“Training Programmes to make aware the different situations people are having with their condition”



Respondents felt that Social Security Scotland should **focus on the clients' specific needs** and ask them how to make the interview less stressful.

“It may be during an interview the claimant is becoming frustrated because their literacy skills might not be good so using images or PowerPoint slides, explaining a process or giving them the time and opportunity to take notes”



Respondents felt that **providing a positive atmosphere** within Social Security Scotland would reduce feelings of frustration.

“Have someone welcome individuals and checking in on individuals as they are waiting to enquire if they are ok”

How Social Security Scotland can help clients with a health condition

Respondents were asked **how Social Security Scotland** can help **reduce anger or frustration** if it's due to a health condition.



Most of respondents felt that **staff should be trained** on the different conditions.

“Information about the condition should be given to the staff”

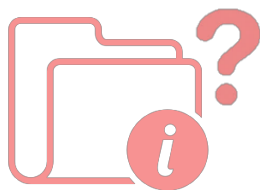


Respondents felt that **flagging individual's needs to staff** would help clients feel comfortable

in Social Security Scotland spaces. This would allow the clients to tell Social Security Scotland, **in their own words**, their condition, and tell staff how to make their experience easier.

“By allowing the client to state they have issues prior to the interview”

“Perhaps something on my system that highlighted to any member of staff my poor concentration and memory and need for short simple questions”



Nearly all (**95 per cent**) of the respondents said they would want Social Security Scotland to **store their accessibility needs or disability** to make interactions easier.



A few respondents (**3 per cent**) were **not sure** if they would want the organisation to store the information.

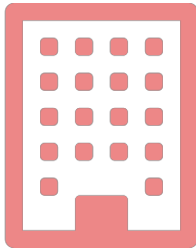
One per cent of respondents **did not want** Social Security Scotland to store any information.



Staff response to unacceptable actions

Respondents were asked how they thought **staff should respond to situations** where clients may be displaying unacceptable actions.

They were asked about situations occurring in an **office environment, over the phone, and during home visits.**



In an office environment, respondents felt that clients should be given a **safe space** where they can calm down.

“Let the person have some time to calm down in a quiet area”

Most of the respondents felt that **staff should be paired up** and should be **trained** in knowing how to handle any difficult situation.

“Each office should have two people working together who are trained in techniques to calm an angry person”



Over the phone, most of the respondents had said **staff should end the call** when faced with unacceptable action but should **always call back.**

“There should be a cooling off period allowed before the call is made again, perhaps 2 hours later”

The **majority of respondents** felt that during these situations, staff should still talk to clients **respectfully** and **patiently**.



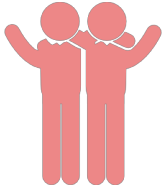
When visiting a client in their house, most of the respondents said that staff should **go in pairs** and to **leave** when faced with unacceptable actions, but **always arrange another appointment**.

“With kindness and patience. Have the time to find out what is wrong”

“Maybe visit in twos and the client could have a trusted carer in attendance”

“Advise you need to leave and will reschedule for a more appropriate time when they are not feeling so distressed”

Respondents were asked what Social Security Scotland should do when a client has displayed unacceptable actions.



The **most popular response** was for **two staff members** to be present during face to face interactions (**80** per cent).



This was followed by only allowing **contact through third parties** (**70** per cent).



Almost **nine in ten respondents** (**89** per cent) felt that it is important to alert staff before they interact with clients who had previously displayed unacceptable actions.

We asked respondents to provide further comments why they felt it was important to alert staff. Respondents talked about staff needing to be aware of potential issues, and be able to respond in the right way.

“It would be easier to anticipate potential problems and try to avoid them. Also you need to know if you should not see the client alone”

“It’s important staff are aware before visiting that a situation may escalate. But approaching clients with kindness and patience, and giving them opportunity to improve their behaviour is important”



A **small number of respondents** (4 per cent) felt that staff should **not be informed**, while **6 per cent weren't sure** if they should be informed about individuals who previously displayed unacceptable actions.

“This may cause interviewer to expect violent behaviour and behave in a more defensive manner”

“Of course measures should be taken to keep everyone safe, but I also feel that having certain information available before dealing with a new agent could make them prejudice towards the client”

Communication about the process

Respondents were asked how Social Security Scotland should communicate their decisions to those who displayed unacceptable actions.



Almost **nine in ten** respondents (88 per cent) wanted it through post

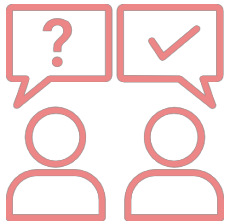


More than **four in ten** respondents (44 per cent) would want it through email

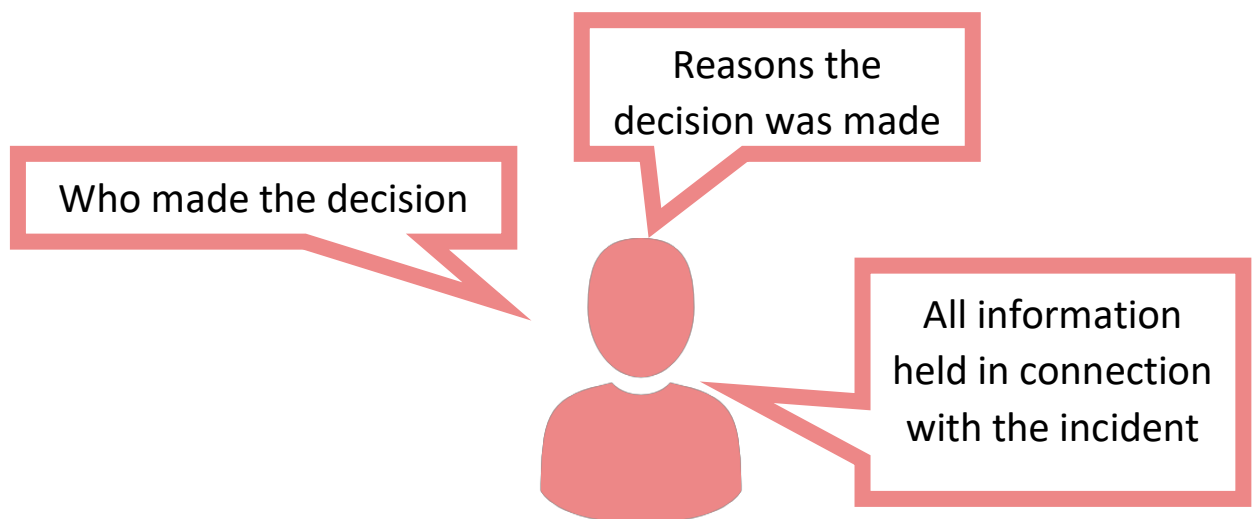


Social Security Scotland will offer the **right of review** of any decision on unacceptable actions **at any time**.

A review will include **looking at what led to the original decision** being taken and **what contact has been made since**, as well as any **impact** on the client.



Respondents were asked **what sort of information** people should be told about the decision, before deciding whether to ask for a review. Answers included:



Sharing data with other organisations



Almost half of the respondents (**46 per cent**) would feel **very comfortable/comfortable** about Social Security Scotland **sharing information** about unacceptable actions with other organisations such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) or local authorities.



The **majority of respondents** (between **78** per cent and **83** per cent) told us they were **comfortable or very comfortable** with the policy on unacceptable actions being advertised on:

- Websites
- Offices
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- GP Clinics



The **least popular** was GP clinics with one in ten (**10** per cent) saying they would feel uncomfortable with this.

Next Steps

This research is being used to inform the ongoing development and design of unacceptable actions policy. As part of this it will also will be used to help develop staff to ensure they are capable, aware and responsive to the complex needs of individuals.

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



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