Social Security Experience Panels – Social Security Scotland Appointments and Local Delivery

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

social research

Contents

Introduction

In February 2019, the Scottish Government carried out a survey and focus groups with Experience Panel members to understand their views on social security appointments, drop in sessions, home visits and local delivery of Social Security Scotland services.

This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels programme of research.

This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work.

Summary

Demand for appointments

The majority of survey respondents said they would want to make an appointment to speak to a Social Security Scotland staff member at some point (85 per cent), with just fifteen per cent saying they would never want to make an appointment.

Reasons for wanting an appointment

Focus group participants offered reasons why they would want an appointment with Social Security Scotland across four main themes.

- **Accessibility:** having accessibility needs meant that appointments were the best way to resolve their queries.

- **Consistency and reliability:** making an appointment was felt to be more reliable than other means of contacting Social Security Scotland and would be a way to access accurate and consistent information.

- **Information Seeking:** an appointment would stem from them seeking information about a particular benefit, eligibility or some other query.

- **Checking status:** an appointment was a means of staying in touch with Social Security Scotland, so that they could get clarity over existing applications and claims, and be reassured if needed on any issues that had arisen.

- **Other reasons:** participants gave other reasons for appointments, the most common being to make, resolve or get an update on any complaint they had made about Social Security Scotland.

A small number of participants said they would never expect to make an appointment, as they believed everything could be done online.

Types of appointments

Face to face

- Over eight in ten respondents said they would be 'very interested' or 'interested' in a face to face appointment (84 per cent).

- A fifth of all respondents said they would like a home visit (20 per cent) and just under three in ten said they would come to a Social Security Scotland office or venue (27 per cent). Just over half of respondents said they would sometimes visit a Social Security Scotland venue, and would sometimes want a home visit (54 per cent).

- Overall, just over eight in ten respondents said they would – at some point – like to come to a Social Security Scotland office or venue (81 per cent).

Telephone

- Just over seven in ten respondents (71 per cent) said they would be 'very interested' or 'interested' in a telephone appointment.

- The majority of respondents wanted Social Security Scotland to call them at the agreed time (88 per cent), with just over one in ten wanting to call Social Security Scotland (12 per cent). Focus group participants also tended to believe Social Security Scotland should call them at the time of their appointment.

Skype

- Just under four in ten respondents said they would be 'very interested' or 'interested' in a Skype appointment (38 per cent), with the majority saying they were 'not that interested' or 'not interested at all' (62 per cent).

- Many focus group participants expressed a favourable opinion of Skype appointments, seeing it as a 'convenient' and 'easy' way of speaking to Social Security Scotland, particularly for general enquiries, and discussing their eligibility for benefits. Many said they liked the face to face aspect of Skype.

- However some participants had concerns, particularly around the security of their personal information, the reliability of internet in rural areas and computer literacy.

Web chat

- Survey respondents were split down the middle on whether they were interested in web chat appointments, with roughly half saying they were 'very interested' or 'interested', and the rest saying they were 'not that interested' or 'not interested at all'.

- Focus group participants were also split. Those who did not like the idea of web chat said it was because it lacked the 'face to face element' that you might get in person or with a Skype appointment.

- Those who did like the idea of web chat felt it was ideal for short, simple queries. They liked the idea of not having to leave home, and being able to speak to Social Security Scotland outside of an agency office. Others liked that you could save a record of the conversation to refer to in the future.

General appointment preference

- We asked respondents what type of appointment they would most prefer. Respondents were generally mixed, however the most popular options were a face to face appointment (40 per cent) and telephone (34 per cent). The least popular option was Skype, with 6 per cent of respondents saying that would be their first choice of appointment.

- A significant association was observed between respondent age and preference for Skype and web chat appointments. For Skype appointments, almost seven in ten respondents aged 60 and over said they were not interested (68 per cent) compared to just over half of respondents aged under 60 (54 per cent).

Recurring appointments

- If they needed multiple appointments, most respondents said they would want a face to face appointment (61 per cent) the first time, however just under one in three would be happy with a telephone appointment (27 per cent). Digital options such as Skype and web chat were less popular with just over one in ten wanting a web chat appointment (11 per cent) and one in fifty wanting a Skype appointment (2 per cent).

- For most respondents, their general appointment preference tended to match that of their first appointment preference. In general, respondents who wanted their first appointment to be face to face tended to be more willing to have an alternate general appointment preference. Conversely, very few respondents who had a first appointment preference for a digital channel such as Skype or web chat wanted to then switch to a non-digital channel later.

Booking an appointment

Most survey respondents said they had no preference as to the booking method (51 per cent). The remaining respondents were split between the referral method (26 per cent) and the self-booking method (24 per cent).

Survey respondents tended to prefer booking their appointment online, with almost six in ten saying they would book this way themselves (57 per cent). Telephone was also popular with almost three in ten respondents (28 per cent). The least popular ways of booking an appointment were through an app (8 per cent) or in

person at a Social Security Scotland building or local venue (7 per cent). Focus group participants tended to reflect the wide range of preferences shown by survey respondents.

Before the appointment

For survey respondents, the most popular method to receive a confirmation of an appointment booking was by email (47 per cent), with text message and post also popular (26 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). The least popular options were by telephone (1 per cent) and social media (0 per cent). Almost three quarters of respondents said they would prefer to receive a digital confirmation alongside a post one (74 per cent).

Almost all respondents said they would like to receive a reminder of their appointment (94 per cent). Most respondents wanted a text or email reminder, with around a third wanting a reminder by post (32 per cent) and less than a fifth by telephone (14 per cent) (Respondents could tick multiple options).

Most respondents wanted their reminder the day before the appointment (44 per cent), however just under a third wanted it two days before (32 per cent) and just over a third wanted it a week before (34 per cent). Less than one in ten respondents wanted a reminder on the day (9 per cent) or two weeks before the appointment (6 per cent).

Seven in ten respondents said they would want the ability to cancel or change their appointment themselves (70 per cent) with three in ten saying they would prefer to ask Social Security Scotland staff to do this for them (30 per cent). Respondents were asked what would be their preferred way to change or cancel an appointment. The most popular method was online, nearly two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) would prefer to change or cancel an appointment that way.

Focus group participants said they would find the following kind of information useful prior to their appointment:

- Information on accessing and moving around the venue;
- Typical length of appointments;
- Information on travel expenses; and
- Information on how to change or cancel the appointment.

At the appointment

Respondents were asked if they would like to speak to the same person each time if they needed recurring appointments to resolve an issue. Almost all respondents said it was 'very important' or 'important' that they speak to the same person each time (98 per cent).

Focus group participants were slightly more mixed in their views. A greater number of them were more comfortable speaking to a different person each time. However these views were still in the minority.

Survey respondents and focus group participants gave various reasons for wanting to speak to the same Social Security Scotland staff member at each appointment, primarily:

- 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.

Over seven in ten respondents felt an appointment should last longer than 15 minutes (72 per cent), and over four in ten felt it should last longer than 20 minutes (43 per cent). Just over one in ten felt appointments should last longer than 30 minutes (12 per cent).

In the future, Social Security Scotland may allow third parties to book appointments on behalf of their clients. Just under three in ten respondents said a third party, such as an advocate or a carer had booked an appointment for them in the past (28 per cent). Eight in ten respondents said they were either completely comfortable or quite comfortable if a third party could book an appointment on their behalf (80 per cent), with two in ten saying they were not that comfortable, or not comfortable at all (21 per cent).

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 (78 per cent) followed by mobility issues (47 per cent). Around a fifth of respondents said caring responsibilities restricted them from visiting a Social Security Scotland office (22 per cent) with a further 16 per cent saying they would struggle with transport.

We asked focus group participants what types of behaviour client support advisers should display when visiting their homes. Participants often said they expected client support advisers to be non-judgemental and respectful of their home and privacy. Others wanted reassurance that the advisers wouldn't bring anything they were allergic to into their homes.

They expected the client support adviser to be 'honest', 'respectful' and 'friendly' and have a good understanding about the client, their disabilities and what they wanted to discuss. Other suggestions to make the home visit a positive experience included: client support advisers showing up on time; informing clients of what will be covered; knowing the name of the adviser; and the adviser calling the client before visiting to introduce themselves.

Drop-in sessions

Three quarters of respondents said they would be interested in attending a drop-in session at Social Security Scotland buildings or other local venues to find out information (75 per cent).

When asked what they would use drop-in sessions for, the most popular topics were to ask about eligibility (80 per cent) or to get guidance about other support services available (78 per cent). Asking about specific benefits and getting help with an application were also popular, chosen by over two thirds of respondents (76 and 68 per cent respectively). The least popular option was to get guidance on how to check application status, however this was still popular chosen by just under six in ten respondents (58 per cent).

Most focus group participants agreed that drop-in sessions could be a suitable environment to ask general questions about the benefit system. Some felt that drop-in sessions should always be held in non-Social Security Scotland venues - such as local community buildings – to put clients at ease.

Local delivery

Accessing a local service

The majority of focus group participants felt that a local service should be easily accessible for each individual. Some participants from urban areas said that the city centre was local to them, while others felt this depended on how easily someone is able to travel. Participants from rural areas expected a local service to be near where they lived, but acknowledged that services were more spread out in these areas.

Participants mentioned a variety of travel methods they would expect to use to get to get to a local service. Many felt that public transport could present a barrier to accessing a local service. A few participants felt that buses are unreliable and inconsistent. The affordability of public transport was also a concern for a few participants, as was parking at buildings.

Focus group participants were asked their views about how they would like to access local services. The most common response was face to face within a private space. Participants highlighted the importance of having the local service in well-known buildings and venues. Participants said that venues should be welcoming, accessible throughout, and have accessible parking. A few participants suggested a mobile service.

Many participants commented that local services should not be in a DWP building, or a job centre. Participants also felt that the local services should not be in buildings which have any religious connotations or any security guards.

Expectations of a local service

Most 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. Some participants raised the importance of other options such as skype.

Participants wanted a local service to provide both general information about the social security system and information and help specific to them. This included

getting help with application forms, eligibility and timescales. Some participants wanted to be signposted to other local services and organisations. Participants noted that it is important that a local service have areas for private meetings. Above all, participants said that they expect Social Security Scotland staff providing the local service to be fully trained, knowledgeable and willing to help.

Participants gave various suggestions as to how Social Security Scotland should make people aware of the services provided by local delivery. Some participants proposed having posters and information leaflets in local delivery venues and other community spaces. Other participants suggested advertising through TV, radio and social media. Participants noted that information should be available in a range of accessible formats.

Background and research methods

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions. As part of the work to prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels. Over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland registered as Experience Panel members.

The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design a new social security system that works for the people of Scotland, based on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

To deliver the benefits devolved to Scotland, the Scottish Government have established Social Security Scotland who will be responsible for administering Scotland's new social security system. As part of the creation of Social Security Scotland, we have worked with Experience Panel members to understand their expectations around appointments and local delivery of services.

This report details the key themes which emerged from a survey and 14 focus groups which took place in February 2019. The research explored:

- Views on how to book and change appointments;
- What information should be provided before an appointment;
- How appointments could be made a positive experience for social security clients;
- What types and formats of appointments should be offered;
- Expectations around home visits;
- Views on potential 'drop-in' seminars to be offered by Social Security Scotland in future; and
- Views on what the local delivery of Social Security Scotland should look like, including accessing a local service and expectations of the service.

Participants were recruited from the Scottish Government Experience Panels. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey and focus groups. For the appointments theme, the survey and focus groups covered broadly the same content, with the survey being used to understand general opinion and the focus groups exploring particular topics in more depth. The local delivery theme consisted of focus groups only.

This project formed part of a larger series of work which took place throughout February 2019 and covered various other topics.

Within this paper, 'participants' refers to those who took part in focus groups and 'respondents' refer to those who completed the survey. Some Experience Panel members may have completed the survey and also taken part in a focus group.

The Social Security Experience Panels are a longitudinal research project. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have experience of at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the respondents only, and are not indicative of the wider Scottish population. Percentages are given only to give a broad sense of the balance of opinion across respondents.

Focus Groups

Seven focus groups on appointments and seven focus groups on local delivery were held in locations across Scotland.[1] Post-its and flipcharts were used to facilitate discussion with participants. A Scottish Government official acted as a note taker in each session. In the interest of maintaining privacy, the focus groups were not recorded. The analysis is based on notes taken from each focus group.

Survey Method

All 2,456 Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the appointments survey. Participation in Experience Panels research is optional, and in this case 550 people chose to complete the survey (a response rate of 22 per cent).

This information was added to information from the '*About Your Benefits and You*'[2] and '*Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*'[3] surveys. The demographic data collected in these surveys was linked to the information supplied by participants of this survey as part of the longitudinal data set for this project. We could match this data for about half of survey respondents.

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[1] Appointments focus groups: Dundee, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hamilton, Johnstone and Kilmarnock. Local delivery focus groups: Inverness, Johnstone, Perth, Edinburgh x 3 and Dundee.

[2] Scottish Government (2017). *Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Quantitative Research Findings*. [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/

[3] Scottish Government (2018). *Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*. [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/

One third of survey respondents who we could link with demographic data identified as 'man or boy' (34 per cent) and two thirds as 'woman or girl' (66 per cent).

Table 1: Gender of survey respondents (n=355)

Gender	%
Man or boy	34
Woman or girl	66
Total	100

Eight in ten survey respondents were aged 45 or over (80 per cent) with just under two in ten aged between under 45 (19 per cent). No respondents whose age information we could link were aged 80 or over.

Table 2: Age of survey respondents (n=363)

Age	%
16 – 24	1
25 – 44	18
45 – 59	54
60 – 79	26
80 or over	0
Total	99[4]

Almost nine in ten survey respondents (89 per cent) considered themselves to have a disability or long term health condition.

Table 3: Disability status of survey respondents (n=362)

Disability Status	%
Disabled	89
Not Disabled	11
Total	100

The most common disability or long term health condition reported by respondents whose disability information we could link was chronic pain (64 per cent), however

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[4] Results are presented as whole numbers for ease of reading. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.

a high number had a physical disability and/or a mental health condition (60 and 40 per cent respectively).

Table 4: Disability types of survey respondents (n=359-362)[5]

Disability Type	%
Has chronic pain	64
Has a physical disability	60
Has a mental health condition	40
Has a severe hearing impairment	11
Has a severe visual impairment	8
Has a learning disability	8
Has another kind of disability or long term health condition	64

Just less than half of respondents acted as a carer for a family member or friend (48 per cent).

Table 5: Caring status of survey respondents (n=363)

Carer Status	%
Carer	48
Not a carer	50
Prefer not to say	1
Total	99

Most respondents were a carer for an adult (40 per cent), with less than two in ten a carer due to old age (17 per cent). Just over one in ten were a carer to a child (12 per cent).

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[5] Respondents were able to select more than one response to this question. The percentages are of all respondents, not just those who considered themselves to have a disability or long term health condition.

Table 6: Who do survey respondents care for (n=135)[6]

Person who they care for	%
Cares for an adult	40
Cares for a child	12
Carer due to old age	17

Over four fifths of respondents were from urban areas (81 per cent).[7]

Table 7: Location of survey respondents (n=320)

Location	%
Urban	81
Rural	19
Total	100

Respondents took part from 31 of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland.

Figure 1: Heat map of survey respondent location

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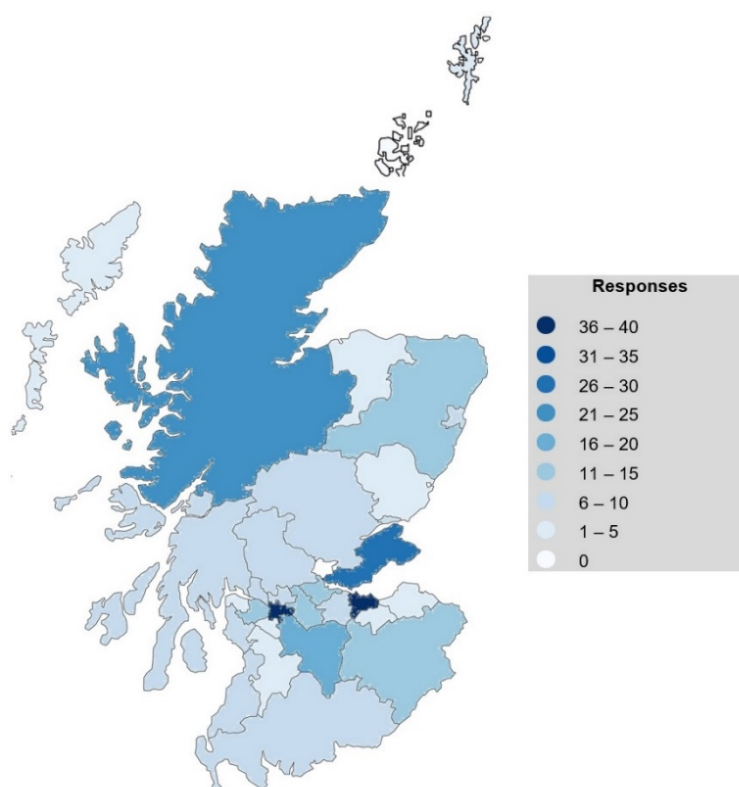
[6] Participants were able to select multiple options.

[7] 17 per cent of the Scottish population lives in a rural area: Scottish Government (2018). *Rural Scotland Key Facts 2018*. [Online] Available at. www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00541327.pdf

Respondents had experience of applying, claiming, or helping someone else apply for a range of benefits, the most common being disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (71 per cent) and Disability Living Allowance (70 per cent). Less than half of respondents had experience of the other benefits, such as Carer's Allowance (40 per cent), Cold Weather Payment (35 per cent) and the Winter Fuel payment (33 per cent). The least frequently experienced benefits were Funeral Expenses, Sure Start Maternity Grant and Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit, with less than one in ten respondents having experience of these.

Table 8: Respondents benefit experience (n=362)[8]

Benefit	%
Personal Independence Payment	71
Disability Living Allowance	70
Carer's Allowance	40
Cold Weather Payment	35
Winter Fuel Payment	33
Discretionary Housing Payment	23
Attendance Allowance	20
Universal Credit	19
Scottish Welfare Fund	18
Severe Disablement Allowance	18
Funeral Expenses	8
Sure Start Maternity Grant	7
Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit	6

More detailed demographic information on the Experience Panels as a whole can be found in 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far'[9].

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[8] Participants had experience of applying for (themselves or someone else) or receiving these benefits within the last 3 years, but were not necessarily in receipt of the benefit at the time of the survey.

[9] Scottish Government (2018). *Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*. [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083

Social Security Scotland Appointments

Social Security Scotland is becoming responsible for delivering some of the benefits that are currently administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).[10]

As a result, it is expected that clients will, in the future, need to make appointments with Social Security Scotland employees to discuss various matters relating to social security. Past research suggests a high level of interest amongst Experience Panel members for face to face interaction with Social Security Scotland employees, with as much as eight in ten respondents saying they would want to speak to Social Security Scotland in person at one point to discuss a matter relating to their benefits[11].

Reasons for wanting an appointment included:

- Getting advice on eligibility;
- Making an application;
- Getting help with an application;
- Getting information about other support services;
- Making a complaint or giving feedback; and
- Checking the status of an application[12].

This report represents a continuation of previous research carried out with Experience Panel members surrounding face to face contact with Social Security Scotland and how the process of interacting with Social Security Scotland can be improved.

For the purposes of this research, respondents were told that an appointment was a set time, booked in advance to speak to a Social Security Scotland staff member about social security in real time.

Demand for appointments

Social Security Scotland wants to ensure that booking an appointment is as easy as possible for clients.

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[10] Social Security Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government responsible for the delivery of Scottish social security policy and devolved benefits.

[11] Scottish Government (2019). *Social Security Experience Panels – Agency Buildings*. [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-agency-buildings

[12] Scottish Government (2019). *Social Security Experience Panels – Agency Buildings*. [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-agency-buildings

To understand potential client demand, we asked survey respondents if they felt they would ever need to make an appointment to speak to someone from Social Security Scotland.

The majority of respondents said they would want to make an appointment to speak to a Social Security Scotland staff member at some point (85 per cent), with just fifteen per cent saying they would never want to make an appointment.

Table 9: Do you think you would ever want an appointment to speak to someone from Social Security Scotland? (n=543)

Response	%
Yes	85
No	15
Total	100

Reasons for wanting an appointment

We asked focus group participants why they would want an appointment with Social Security Scotland. In general, participants offered reasons across four main themes.

Accessibility

Many participants told us they had accessibility needs which meant that appointments were the best way to resolve 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 participants said that making an appointment would be a way to access accurate and consistent information, rather than getting different information from different people.

"I'd like there to be some consistency. I've been told so many different things […] It always depends who you speak to, and what you're told changes all the time. The most consistent I have come into contact with are the staff in [redacted] Jobcentre, they're amazing and have a really consistent approach."

Other participants felt that appointments were more reliable than other means of contacting Social Security Scotland.

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

Information Seeking

Many participants said their need for an appointment would stem from them seeking information about a particular benefit, eligibility or some other query. For some, an appointment would be the result of not being able to find the information they needed themselves.

"Because I get lost in a system I don't understand. So I can better understand entitlements…"

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

Many participants felt the system was designed to be complex, and that it should be Social Security Scotland's responsibility to proactively inform people of their entitlements.

Some participants said they were not comfortable seeking out information on their own, particularly those who had difficulties using a computer.

"You need to consider we are not all computer literate – there needs to be many channels…"

Checking status

Some participants said that an appointment was a means of staying in touch with Social Security Scotland, so that they could get clarity over existing applications and claims, and be reassured if needed on any issues that had arisen.

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

Other reasons

Many participants gave other reasons for appointments, the most common being to make, resolve or get an update on any complaint they had made about Social Security Scotland.

A small number of participants said they would never expect to make an appointment, as they believed everything could be done online.

"Why would you need an appointment? I thought everything was done online now?"

Types of appointment

In the future, Social Security Scotland may offer different types of appointments to clients. This will enable people to contact and speak to Social Security Scotland in the way that is most convenient for them.

Four types of appointment were presented to survey respondents and focus group participants:

- In person, face to face appointments;
- Telephone appointments;
- Skype appointments; and
- Web chat appointments.

Face to face appointments

We asked survey respondents how interested they would be in a face to face appointment. A face to face appointment is where both the client and a Social Security Scotland staff member are physically present in the same location – it does not include face to face video appointments, such as through Skype.

Over eight in ten respondents said they would be 'very interested' or 'interested' in a face to face appointment (84 per cent), with just under two in ten saying they would not be interested (17 per cent).

Table 10: How interested would you be in having a face to face appointment? (n=545)

Response	%
Very interested	43
Interested	41
Not that interested	12
Not interested at all	5
Total	101

Respondents were asked where they would like a face to face appointment to take place. In the future, Social Security Scotland will offer home visits as well as allowing clients to visit Social Security Scotland offices and venues.

A fifth of respondents said they would like a home visit (20 per cent) and just under three in ten said they would come to a Social Security Scotland office or venue (27 per cent). Just over half of respondents said they would sometimes visit a Social Security Scotland venue, and would sometimes want a home visit (54 per cent).

Overall, just over eight in ten respondents said they would – at one point – like to come to a Social Security Scotland office or venue (81 per cent).

Table 11: Where would you like a face to face appointment to take place? (n=547)

Response	%
In a Social Security Scotland venue or office	27
In my home	20
Sometimes I would visit a Social Security Scotland location, sometimes I want an appointment in my home	54
Total	101

No significant associations[13] were detected between gender[14] or age[15] and appointment preference. The data suggested that respondents with a long term health condition or disability tended to prefer home visits, with just over one in ten non-disabled respondents requesting a home visit (12.5 per cent) compared to almost one in five disabled respondents (18.5 per cent), however this association was not statistically significant and is based on relatively small numbers of non-disabled respondents[16].

Telephone appointments

Respondents were asked how interested they would be in a telephone appointment. Just over seven in ten respondents (71 per cent) said they would be very interested or interested, with just over one in ten saying they would not be interested at all (13 per cent).

Table 12: How interested would you be in a telephone appointment? (n=544)

Response	%
Very interested	27
Interested	44
Not that interested	17
Not interested at all	13
Total	101

Many felt phone appointments were a 'quick', 'cheap' and 'easy' way to communicate with Social Security Scotland. Some participants wanted robust

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[13] Responses were split into two groups: those who would ever want a face to face appointment, and those who said they would always want a home visit. This data was then statistically tested with gender, age and disability status to determine any potential associations between specific client groups and appointment preferences.

[14] χ^2 (1, n=142) = 0.37, = >.05
[15] χ^2 (1, n=359) = 0.14, p = >.05
[16] χ^2 (1, n=362) = 1.541, p = >.05

security procedures before the call happened, such as using a security code to verify identities.

> "But you need some sort of security code so that I can be confident I am speaking to Social Security Scotland and it's not a spam phone call."

Other participants cautioned that telephone appointments would not be suitable for them, highlighting the importance of having alternative options available.

> "Telephone appointments are of no use to deaf people."

At the time of a telephone appointment, the majority of respondents wanted Social Security Scotland to call them at the agreed time (88 per cent), with just over one in ten wanting to call Social Security Scotland (12 per cent).

Table 13: What should happen at the time of a telephone appointment? (n=519)

Response	%
You call Social Security Scotland at the agreed time	12
Social Security Scotland calls you at the agreed time	88
Total	100

Focus group participants also tended to believe Social Security Scotland should call them at the time of their appointment. Some suggested this would ensure even those who did not have credit on their phone would be able to receive the call.

> "I like the idea of telephone appointments, and it's better if Social Security Scotland calls me in case I don't have credit on my phone."

Skype appointments

In the future, Social Security Scotland may offer additional types of appointments to clients, such as through Skype. Skype is an online video chat service where a client would communicate with Social Security Scotland using their computers camera and microphone.

Just under four in ten respondents said they would be 'very interested' or 'interested' in a Skype appointment (38 per cent), with the majority saying they were 'not that interested' or 'not interested at all' (62 per cent).

Table 14: How interested would you be in having a Skype appointment? (n=544)

Response	%
Very interested	13
Interested	25
Not that interested	26
Not interested at all	36
Total	100

Many focus group participants expressed a favourable opinion of Skype appointments, seeing it as a 'convenient' and 'easy' way of speaking to Social Security Scotland. Some were already familiar with using Skype.

"Yes – I talk to my family on Skype – happy with that…"

Many said they liked the face to face aspect of Skype, and that it still felt as if you were connecting with a person. Participants said they felt Skype appointments would be ideal for general enquiries, and discussing their eligibility for benefits.

"I think it would be good for people with physical disabilities. I can get about but there are worse off than me. Skype is better than a phone call because of the human interaction."

However some participants had concerns, particularly around the security of their personal information or the reliability of internet in rural areas.

"Hackers and confidentiality. And what if you don't have the internet – or your signal drops?"

It was suggested that clients may need some reassurances about using Skype, such as a guarantee of confidentiality, information on how their information would be protected and easy instructions on how it worked.

A small number of participants felt they would never want a Skype appointment as they did not want to use computers. Despite this, focus group participants tended to be mostly positive about having Skype as an option even if some would not want to use it.

Web chat appointments

Survey respondents were split down the middle on whether they were interested in web chat appointments, with roughly half saying they were very interested or interested, and the rest saying they were not that interested or not interested at all.

Table 15: How interested would you be in having a Web chat appointment? (n=546)

Response	%
Very interested	23
Interested	28
Not that interested	20
Not interested at all	30
Total	101

Focus group participants were also split. Those who did not like the idea of web chat said it was because it lacked the 'face to face element' that you might get with an in person or Skype appointment.

"Going towards web based services means losing personal service…"

Others expressed unease that you 'couldn't see who you are talking to'. Many said they would only want to use web chat as a last resort.

"I'm not keen. You don't know who you're chatting to. It's fine for simple questions like correct postal address, but it's not possible to do things like verify your identity."

"Web chat feels like it's just going out into the ether…"

However for those who did like the idea of web chat, they felt it was ideal for certain types of communication with Social Security Scotland – for example, short, simple queries or questions that would not necessarily require a full appointment. They liked the idea of not having to leave home, and being able to speak to Social Security Scotland outside of an agency office.

"You don't need to leave home, much simpler [as] you're not in their domain."

Some participants suggested having a photo accompany the web chat would make the service feel more 'human'.

"A photo would make it feel more real and more personal…"

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

General appointment preference

We asked respondents what type of appointment they would most prefer. Respondents were generally mixed, however the most popular options were a face to face appointment (40 per cent) and telephone (34 per cent).

The least popular option was Skype, with 6 per cent of respondents saying that would be their first choice of appointment.

Table 16: General appointment preference (n=541)

Type	%
Face to face	40
Telephone	34
Web chat	20
Skype	6
Total	100

A significant association was observed between respondent age and preference for Skype and web chat appointments[17]. For Skype appointments, almost seven in ten respondents aged 60 and over said they were not interested (68 per cent) compared to just over half of respondents aged under 60 (54 per cent).

For web chat appointments[18], just over six in ten respondents aged 60 and over said they were not interested (62 per cent) compared to just over four in ten respondents aged under 60 (42 per cent).

There was no suggestion that respondents in rural areas were more interested in using digital solutions to communicate with Social Security Scotland (i.e. Skype and web chat), and in some cases respondents in rural areas were less interested in using digital solutions.

For telephone and web chat appointments, rural respondents showed similar levels of interest as those who lived in urban areas. For Skype appointments, rural respondents were slightly less interested than those in urban areas, with interest levels of 42 and 37 per cent respectively. These associations were not statistically significant.

Recurring appointments

Some clients may need to arrange multiple appointments to resolve their issue. In these cases, we asked respondents to tell us what they would like their first appointment type to be.

Most respondents said they would want a face to face appointment (61 per cent) the first time, however just under one in three would be happy with a telephone appointment (27 per cent). Digital options such as Skype and web chat were less

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[17] χ^2 (1, n=358) = 5.350, exact p = 0.021

[18] χ^2 (1, n=358) = 11.230, exact p = .001

popular with just over one in ten wanting a web chat appointment (11 per cent) and one in fifty wanting a Skype appointment (2 per cent).

Table 17: First appointment preference (n=541)

Type	%
Web chat	11
Telephone	27
Face to face	61
Skype	2
Total	101

When the results of Table 16 and Table 17 are compared, there was a 21 per cent difference in face to face appointments as a first appointment compared to general appointment preference. This may indicate a preference towards having a face to face appointment to start with, before transitioning to other types of appointment for future contact with Social Security Scotland.

Respondents were also slightly less likely to favour web chat appointments for a first appointment than they were overall, suggesting web chat could be preferable for use in follow-up appointments, however further research is needed to confirm this.

Respondents were generally unlikely to prefer Skype appointments irrespective of appointment type, with just four per cent difference between first appointment preference and general appointment preference.
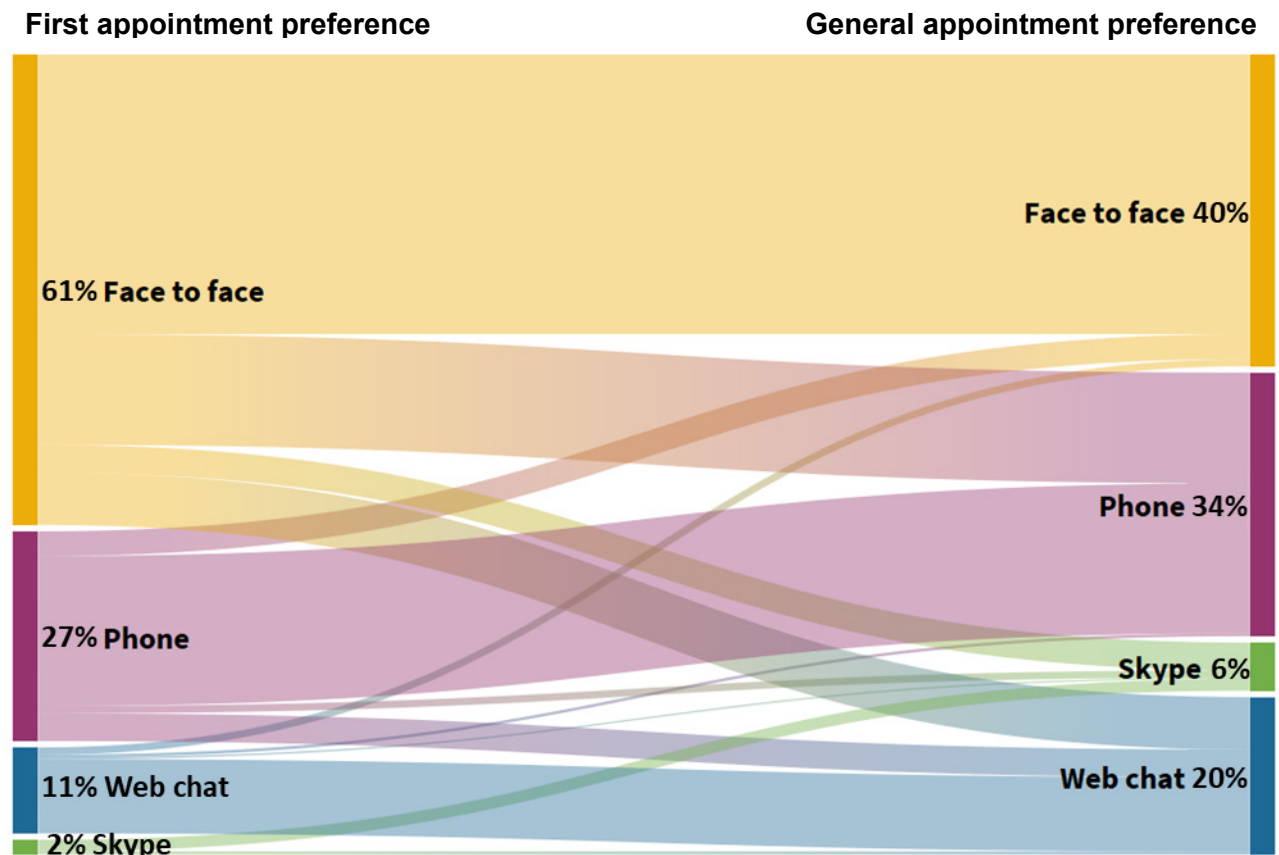
Table 18: First appointment preference compared to general appointment preference (n=541)

Type	First Appointment Preference	General Appointment Preference	Difference
Web chat	11	20	- 9
Telephone	27	34	- 7
Face to face	61	40	+ 21
Skype	2	6	- 4

Figure 2 shows that for most respondents, their general appointment preference tended to match that of their first appointment preference. The greatest difference between first appointment preference and general appointment preference was with face to face. Whilst the majority of those who said their first appointment preference was face to face said that was also their general appointment preference, 21 per cent transitioned to other appointment types. This was most commonly phone, however web chat was also popular.

In general, respondents who wanted their first appointment to be face to face tended to be more willing to have an alternate general appointment preference. Conversely, very few respondents who had a first appointment preference for a digital channel such as Skype or web chat wanted to then switch to a non-digital channel later.

Figure 2: Flow from first appointment to general appointment preference

First appointment preference   General appointment preference

61% Face to face

27% Phone

11% Web chat

2% Skype

Face to face 40%

Phone 34%

Skype 6%

Web chat 20%

Booking an appointment

Social Security Scotland is considering two methods of booking an appointment – the 'referral method' and the 'self-booking method'.

The 'referral method' is where clients contact Social Security Scotland and tell staff what they would like to discuss. The staff member will then refer their case to a specific advisor, who will contact the client to arrange a date and time for the appointment.

The 'self-booking method' is where the client would contact Social Security Scotland, pick a date and time themselves and book an appointment with a non-specific Social Security Scotland advisor.

Respondents and participants were advised that under the referral method, there may be a greater chance of speaking to the right person for their issue first time, meaning there would be less need for future appointments. Under the self-booking method, they would be able to instantly know the date and time of their appointment, but the advisor may not have the specialist knowledge to resolve their issue on the day.

Most survey respondents said they had no preference as to the booking method (51 per cent). The remaining respondents were split between the referral method (26 per cent) and the self-booking method (24 per cent).

Table 19: Booking method preference (n=545)

Method	%
Referral method	26
Self-booking method	24
No preference	51
Total	101

Booking channel

When asked their preference, survey respondents tended to prefer booking their appointment online, with almost six in ten saying they would book this way themselves (57 per cent). Telephone was also popular with almost three in ten respondents (28 per cent). The least popular ways of booking an appointment were through an app (8 per cent) or in person at a Social Security Scotland building or local venue (7 per cent).

Table 20: Booking channel (n=405)

Channel	%
Online	57
Telephone	28
App	8
At a Social Security Scotland office or local venue	7
Total	100

Focus group participants tended to reflect the wide range of preferences shown by survey respondents. Some were happy to book online or through an app, whereas others preferred telephone or in person bookings.

Ultimately, participants wanted a method of booking appointments that was easily accessible for them, whether that be online, telephone or at a Social Security Scotland venue.

Before the appointment

Appointment confirmation

Once a client has booked their appointment, Social Security Scotland will send them a confirmation of their booking. Survey respondents were asked how they would like to receive this confirmation. The most popular method was by email (47 per cent), with text message and post also popular (26 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). The least popular options were by telephone (1 per cent) and social media (0 per cent).

Table 21: How would you like to receive your appointment confirmation? (n=539)

Method	%
Email	47
Post	25
Telephone	1
Text	26
Social media	0
No preference	2
Total	101

Respondents were also asked if they would still prefer to receive a digital confirmation alongside a post one. Almost three quarters of respondents said they would (74 per cent).

Table 22: If you received a post confirmation, would you want one by a digital method too? (n=542)

Duration	%
Yes	74
No	26
Total	100

Respondents were asked what information they would find useful in their appointment confirmation. Almost all respondents said they would find all of the suggested information useful.

Table 23: What information would you find useful to be included with your appointment confirmation? (n=522-542)

Information	Very useful or useful	Not that useful or not useful at all
Parking information	81	19
Building information	92	8
Public transport routes	80	20
Information about what will happen on the day	99	1
Information on how to change your appointment	99	1
Information on how to tell us your accessibility needs	92	8
What to bring to your appointment	100	0
If you should bring someone else to the appointment	96	4
Information about the meeting room and the equipment available inside it	85	15

Pre-appointment information

Focus group participants were also asked what types of information they would find useful prior to their appointment. Participants across most focus groups tended to suggest similar types of information, such as:

- Information on accessing and moving around the venue;
- Typical length of appointments;
- Information on travel expenses; and
- Information on how to change or cancel the appointment.

Some participants suggested the information should be personalised to their appointment, including information such as who they would be talking to, what documents they should bring and how to get to the venue from their home address.

Some participants suggested a pre-appointment information sheet was the best format to supply this information.

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

A small number of participants also suggested that Social Security Scotland emphasise that bringing along a friend, family member or advocate to these meetings would be welcome, and reassure clients that this is something they could do.

> "Know that you can take someone with you [to] be a second pair of eyes and ears…"

Appointment reminders

Respondents were asked if they would like to receive a reminder of their appointment. Almost all respondents said they would (94 per cent).

Table 24: Would you like a reminder before your appointment? (n=546)

Response	%
Yes	94
No	6
Total	100

Most respondents wanted a text or email reminder, with around a third wanting a reminder by post (32 per cent) and less than a fifth by telephone (14 per cent) Respondents could tick multiple options.

Table 25: How would you like to receive your reminder? (n=511)

Channel	%
Text	69
Post	32
Email	57
Telephone	14

Most respondents wanted their reminder the day before the appointment (44 per cent), however just under a third wanted it two days before (32 per cent) and just over a third wanted it a week before (34 per cent). Less than one in ten respondents wanted a reminder on the day (9 per cent) or two weeks before the appointment (6 per cent).

Table 26: When would you like to receive your reminder? (n=511)

When	%
On the day of the appointment	9
The day before the appointment	44
Two days before the appointment	32
Three days before the appointment	17
A week before the appointment	34
Two weeks before the appointment	6

Changing appointments

In the future, Social Security Scotland wants to make sure that clients are able to easily change their appointments if needed. To determine the need for this service, respondents were asked if they would ever want to change or rearrange their appointment themselves. By 'themselves' we mean that they would do it using an automated system such as online or using an automated telephone menu.

Seven in ten respondents said they would want the ability to cancel or change their appointment themselves (70 per cent) with three in ten saying they would prefer to ask Social Security Scotland staff to do this for them (30 per cent).

Table 27: Would you ever want to cancel or change your appointment yourself? (n=545)

Response	%
Yes	70
No – I'd want to ask Social Security Scotland staff to do this for me	30
Total	100

Respondents were asked what would be their preferred way to change or cancel an appointment. The most popular method was online, nearly two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) would prefer to change or cancel an appointment that way.

Table 28: Preferred way to change or cancel appointment (n=381)

Channel	%
Online	65
Use an automated phone system	17
Use an app	9
Another way	9

Respondents who said that they would prefer to change or cancel an appointment 'another way', were given a free text box to specify. The vast majority said that they would like to speak to someone over the phone. Other suggestions were post, text or a combination of different methods.

At the appointment

Speaking to same person each time

Sometimes it may take more than one appointment to resolve a client's issue. In these circumstances, we wanted to understand whether the client would rather speak to the same person each time, or was happy speaking to different members of staff.

Respondents were asked if they would like to speak to the same person at each appointment. It was made clear that we were not referring to speaking to the same person every time they contacted Social Security Scotland – instead it was explained that we are referring to circumstances where they had to have multiple appointments to discuss a discrete issue.

It was also made clear to respondents that there was a trade-off between both answers. If was explained that if people wanted to speak to the same person each time, this may mean a more personal level of service, however the downside may be increased waiting times, especially if the individual member of staff is on holiday or has a particularly high case load. Alternatively, if people wanted to speak to a different person each time, it may reduce waiting times at the cost of familiarity with individual cases.

Almost all respondents said it was 'very important' or 'important' that they speak to the same person each time (98 per cent). Just two per cent said it was 'not that important' and no one said it was 'not important at all'.

Table 29: How important is it to speak to the same person each time? (n=438)

Response	%
Very important	60
Important	38
Not that important	2
Total	100

Respondents gave various reasons for wanting to speak to the same staff member at each appointment. For many, it was about 'not having to explain their issue each time they called'. Others felt that there was a risk of their information being lost or forgotten. A small number felt that having the same employee interact with them each time would lead to a more personalised service.

Focus group participants were slightly more mixed in their views. A greater number of them were more comfortable speaking to a different person each time if it improved waiting times, and if there was a robust case management system meaning staff were able to quickly understand the important facts about their case.

"To be honest, it wouldn't bother me as long as all the information is held centrally, which then is in front of them [staff]."

Some participants felt it was unlikely that staff would be able to remember individual cases anyway.

"They might deal with 300 people in between your two appointments. If you think that they remember you then I think you're sadly mistaken."

Generally those who prioritised speed said they would be happy speaking to different people, with some even expressing concern that Social Security Scotland trying to accommodate the expectation of a single point of contact could cause delays.

However these views were still in the minority, and most participants still said they would prefer to speak to the same staff member at each appointment, even if that meant waiting several weeks for an appointment.

"Having consistency is important…"

Some felt that they would want to speak to the same person every time they contacted Social Security Scotland, and not just for appointments, although many participants felt this wasn't likely to be practical.

Overall, participants raised similar reasons for wanting to have a single point of contact with Social Security Scotland, primarily:

- 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 Duration

Survey respondents were asked how long they felt their first appointment should last. Over seven in ten respondents felt an appointment should last longer than 15 minutes (72 per cent), and four in ten felt it should last longer than 20 minutes (43 per cent). Just over one in ten felt appointments should last longer than 30 minutes (12 per cent).

Table 30: How long should the first appointment last? (n=535)

Duration	%
Between 5-10 minutes	8
Between 10-15 minutes	20
Between 15-20 minutes	29
Between 20-25 minutes	8
Between 25-30 minutes	23
Over 30 minutes	12
Total	100

In the future, Social Security Scotland may allow third parties to book appointments on behalf of their clients.

Just under three in ten respondents said a third party, such as an advocate or a carer had booked an appointment for them in the past (28 per cent).

Table 31: Have you ever had a third party book an appointment for you? (n=501)

Response	%
Yes	28
No	72
Total	100

Respondents were asked how comfortable they would be if a third party could book an appointment on their behalf. Eight in ten respondents said they were either completely comfortable or quite comfortable with this (80 per cent), with just over two in ten saying they were not that comfortable, or not comfortable at all (21 per cent).

Table 32: How comfortable would you be if a third party could book an appointment on your behalf? (n=544)

Comfort	%
Completely comfortable	46
Quite comfortable	34
Not that comfortable	14
Not comfortable at all	7
Total	101

Home Visits

Survey respondents were asked why they would need a home visit. The most common reason was due to their disability, mental health or long term health condition (78 per cent) followed by mobility issues (47 per cent). Around a fifth of respondents said caring responsibilities restricted them from visiting a Social Security Scotland office (22 per cent) with a further 16 per cent saying they would struggle with transport.

Table 33: Why would you need a home visit? (n=367-399)

Response	%
Due to my disability, mental health or long term health condition	78
I have caring responsibilities	22
There are poor transport links in my area	16
I have poor mobility / find moving around difficult	47

What would make a home visit a negative experience

Social Security Scotland wants to make sure that home visits are a positive experience for clients. We asked participants in the appointments and local delivery focus groups what types of behaviour client support advisers should avoid when visiting their homes.

Respondents often said they expected client support advisers to be respectful and to not argue or rush them. They wanted advisers to 'not be judgemental' and to try and not make assumptions about how the client lived. This was particularly the case if the house was unclean or untidy, as many respondents said they found it difficult to do housework.

"Avoid being judgemental if [the] house is not as tidy or clean as they think it should be as having disabilities [makes] it difficult to do housework."

"It should go without saying but one of the most important things is to be treated with respect"

Respondents said they expected the adviser to 'respect their privacy' by not 'appearing unexpectedly' or 'wandering around their home'.

"[Don't] snoop, look around, and demand to see different rooms."

Some respondents requested the adviser not wear any scents or perfume, as they found these difficult to deal with due to their disability.

"Not wearing strong perfume. One PIP assessment for my husband, the assessor must have been wearing a gallon of the stuff which set his allergies off."

Others wanted reassurance that the adviser wouldn't bring anything they were allergic to into their homes.

"Avoid wearing products, or having handled products pertaining to the allergies listed/notified prior to the appointment."

What would make a home visit a positive experience

Respondents gave various ideas on how a home visit could be a more positive experience for them. Many respondents made reference to the client support adviser's knowledge, behaviour and attitudes whilst in their home. They expected the adviser to be 'open and honest', 'respectful' and 'friendly'. Some respondents made clear that advisers should only talk about what they were there to discuss, and to avoid making any comments about the client, their home or their lives.

"A positive attitude, wants to talk to people, gives people time."

"The person that is on the frontline is Linch pin, that person has got to be someone that somebody who is scared has a bond with, feels safe with, not judged, it needs a very specific type of person to do that"

Many respondents felt the adviser should have a good understanding about the client, their disabilities and what they wanted to discuss.

"Making sure they have access to all information so that questions can be fully answered at the time."

"Having a good understanding of my medical condition and how this affects my daily life, and accepting these limitations."

Other suggestions included:

- Client support advisers having a good understanding of the client's wants and needs;
- Client support advisers showing up on time;
- Informing clients of what will be covered at the home visit prior to the appointment taking place;
- Knowing the name of the client support adviser who would be carrying out the home visit and showing ID; and
- Client support advisers calling the client before visiting to introduce themselves.

> "Having information about what would happen would be beneficial so perhaps a letter to come in advance to explain what will happen on the day or a video on the website with someone explaining what will happen."

> "Potentially a telephone call in advance of the home visit to explain what will happen would be worthwhile"

Drop-in sessions

In the future, Social Security Scotland may offer drop-in sessions at their buildings or other local venues. Drop-in sessions would be seminar-style events where clients could attend at a set time, be given information from a Social Security Scotland staff member and then able to ask questions.

Drop-in sessions would be open to the public and questions asked at the event would be asked and answered in front of the group. It is expected that the sessions would cover general topics surrounding social security in Scotland, such as how to apply for a benefit, how to check the status of applications, question and answer sessions for specific benefits and guidance on other support services that may be available to clients.

Three quarters of respondents said they would be interested in attending a drop-in session to find out information (75 per cent).

Table 34: If Social Security Scotland offered drop-in sessions, would you be interested in using these to find out information? (n=545)

Response	%
Yes	75
No	26
Total	101

Focus group participants suggested drop in sessions could be held in local venues rather than Social Security Scotland buildings. Some felt this could make people more comfortable when interacting with Social Security Scotland.

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

> "Have the service where it suits people – it may be a community centre – it needs to be accessible…"

When asked what they would use drop-in sessions for, the most popular topics were to ask about eligibility (80 per cent) or to get guidance about other support

services available (78 per cent). Asking about specific benefits and getting help with an application were also popular, chosen by over two thirds of respondents (76 and 68 per cent respectively). The least popular option was to get guidance on how to check application status, however this was still popular chosen by just under six in ten respondents (58 per cent).

Some participants said they felt that drop in sessions could 'reduce [the] stigma' around claiming benefits. Most agreed that drop-in sessions could be a suitable environment to ask general questions about the benefit system. Some felt that drop-in sessions should always be held in non-Social Security Scotland venues - such as local community buildings - to put clients at ease.

Some participants referenced other 'drop-in style' events as an example of how the drop-in sessions could work. For example, one participant suggested that there be a public session with staff members with private rooms available if someone needed to talk about a particular issue.

Table 35: What would you like to use drop-in sessions for? (n=405)

Response	%
To ask about eligibility	80
To ask about other support services available	78
To get help with an application	68
To ask about specific benefits	76
To check status of my application	58

In addition to the topics listed above, respondents suggested several other topics, including:

- How to fill in Social Security Scotland forms;
- How to find information online; and
- Information on other government services people may be eligible for.

Local delivery

In addition to headquarters in Dundee and a base in Glasgow, Social Security Scotland will be delivering services in local communities across Scotland. This means delivering an accessible and person-centred service by providing a local presence across Scotland to meet people's needs. Local services are being located wherever possible in buildings people already use.

We asked focus group participants what the local delivery of Social Security Scotland should be like and their expectactions of the term 'local'.

Accessing local services

Participants were first asked about the type of area they live in and where they would expect a 'local' service to be. The most common response from participants from both rural and urban areas was that they expected a local service to be easily accessible.

"People don't have mobility or funds to travel to (city). To make service work well there has to be something more geographically accessible. Needs to be physically reachable."

"Somewhere if you don't have a car, it's easy to get to by bus."

"It's not a question of looking at distance; it needs to take into account how well a person can travel."

Participants from rural areas expected a local service to be near their area but acknowledged that services were more spread out in these areas.

"Nearest biggest town."

Some participants who came from urban areas told us they felt that local services for them was within the city, with a few mentioning the city centre to be local. For other participants, this was not the case. These participants felt it depends on how easily someone is able to travel.

"Town centre of city. Like where jobcentre is, main street and accessible."

"Some people who live in the city even think coming into city centre is not local."

We asked focus group participants how would they usually expect to get to a local service. Participants mentioned a variety of travel methods to get to a local service. Many focus group participants felt that public transport could present a barrier to accessing a local service. A few participants told us that buses are unreliable and inconsistent. The affordability 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 - train delays, etc."

"Buses can be once an hour."

> "Experience change in bus time tables from summer and winter, less buses in winter."

> "Price can be a barrier."

Some participants discussed driving as a means to travel to get to a local service. The most common issue with driving was parking. Participants told us that parking could cause problems, particularly in the city centre.

> "A lot of people don't like driving in [city] and struggle to park."

Focus group participants felt that there were some factors that could affect what is deemed local. For example, some participants said that health conditions and disability can affect getting to a local service, especially if it involved unreasonable distances.

> "Health conditions people cannot sit in a car for a certain length of time, useful to have satellite regions where this is a possibility for not having to travel so much."

> "3 to 4 hour journey for 1 hour meeting is unreasonable."

We asked focus group participants how they would want to speak to their local services. The most common response to accessing local services was face to face within a private space. Participants repeated the importance of having local services in well-known community buildings and venues. A few participants suggested a mobile service.

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

> "Place people know, council or other service."

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

Participants told us that the venues should be welcoming, accessible, accommodating to each individual, and with parking available.

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

> "Be like a community centre - a place where you can go in and there's a community feel about it, a café etc. so if it's busy you can have a cup of tea to wait."

Participants were asked if there was anywhere they would not want to meet with Social Security Scotland staff through a local delivery service. The most common response from participants was that local services should not be in a DWP building, or a job centre. Participants also felt that the local services should not have any religious connotations or any security guards.

"I wouldn't go to DWP or institution - traumatic for people to go to due to previous experiences."

"People not happy to go somewhere with religious connotation."

"Not like [organisation] with security staff who can come across as aggressive."

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."

"Want to be able to walk into an office and be dealt with rather than being pushed about from pillar to post."

Whilst most participants envisaged a local delivery service as being face to face, some participants raised the importance of other options such as skype.

"Some folk with autism prefer computers such as skype, Facebook, FaceTime".

Participants would expect to use this service to get help with application forms, get information about their eligibility to particular benefits and about timescales for the different stages of the application process. Some participants wanted to be signposted to other local services and organisations. As discussed above, these are the same topics that Experience Panel members said they would use drop-in sessions for.

"Not everyone knows that being entitled to one thing can mean you are entitled to more."

"Advice and support on how to complete the forms. Where to go for extra advice over and above that. Pinpointing way of where to go."

> "Local service should look at tying up with CAB, help with the knowledge base."

Participants expected there to be written materials such as information sheets and leaflets available at local delivery venues.

> "A self-service option would be good if no advisors free – either a folder with information and FAQ or a touch screen device with info held electronically."

Participants therefore wanted a local service to provide both general information about the social security system and information and help specific to them. For that reason, some participants noted that it is important that a local service have private, sound proofed areas where people can discuss private and personal information. A few participants said that it would be useful to take away written notes of their meeting.

> "Even for drop in and enquires I would want screens/ private booth so others cannot overhear my name or details."

> "It would be good to come away with a note of what was said when you've seen Agency staff so you can look back and know what will happen next and what's expected."

> "Private space to speak confidentially."

Above all, participants said that they expect Social Security Scotland staff providing the local service to be fully trained, knowledgeable and willing to help.

> "Staff should be trained to answer your questions and be knowledgeable about a range of issues."

> "Friendly receptionist, can trust, smile, wants to be there."

Focus group participants were told that there were some things a local service would not be able to do, for example, make a decision on an application or help with UK benefits. Participants were asked how Social Security Scotland should make people aware of this and the services provided by local delivery. Participants gave various suggestions. Some participants proposed having posters and information leaflets in local delivery venues and other local, community venues such as sports centres, supermarkets, and advocacy services. Other participants suggested advertising through TV, radio and social media.

> "Green tick and red cross something visual and graphic for people to realise what does come under."

> "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."

> "TV adverts, radio adverts. Newspapers."

Participants noted that people should be clearly signposted and that information should be available in a range of accessible formats.

> "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.

The content of this report has been used by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to inform the design and development of appointments and local delivery. It has provided insight into how clients would like to interact with Social Security Scotland, such as preferences for communication channel and appointment times.

Further research is planned to understand the needs of 'seldom heard' groups, for example, prisoners. This will consider how they would want to interact with Social Security Scotland, and if this would require any additional considerations to be put in place to accommodate these particular groups.

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.

social research

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GOVERNMENT SOCIAL RESEARCH

Social Science in Government