Social Security Experience Panels: Fraud and Error

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

social research

Contents

Introduction

Between August 2019 and September 2019, the Scottish Government carried out focus groups with Experience Panel members to gather views on fraud and error processes. This included how Social Security Scotland should respond to fraud and in cases where a client has made an error of some kind.[1] It also gathered views on how Social Security Scotland should discourage fraud in a way that reduces stigma and is based on the values of dignity and respect.

This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels programme of research. In total, 39 Experience Panel members took part in 8 focus groups across Scotland. This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work

Summary

Treating genuine client error and cases of fraud

Most participants felt that Social Security Scotland should treat honest errors and deliberate fraud differently. Many felt that honest mistakes were natural when clients were using a complicated system. They thought it was important for Social Security Scotland to support those clients who had been confused and had made a mistake. Some said that Social Security Scotland needed to reassure clients when it first contacted them about a potential problem. These participants described how stressful it was to be notified about a potential problem on a claim.

Most participants also felt that clients who tried to deceive the system on purpose should be punished. Some said that Social Security Scotland and all public bodies had a responsibility to protect public money. Others felt it was important to have firm punishments to discourage potential fraud in the future.

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[1] Clients of Social Security Scotland could make an error in various ways. This could include a client completing an application incorrectly. It could also include a client failing to report or incorrectly reporting a change of circumstances. Errors could also occur during client case review processes.

Some also talked about how cases were often more complicated than either 'an error' or 'a fraud.' They described how every case and every client was unique. These participants thought that Social Security Scotland needed to carefully consider the individual circumstances in each case before deciding what it should do. Some said that it was difficult to know how to treat cases of fraud that involved people who were vulnerable. Others talked about the need to support those who had committed fraud who were also living with long term health or mental health conditions. Several said that it was difficult to know how to treat cases of fraud that involved abusive situations.

Prosecuting fraud

Many participants felt that there were times where clients should be prosecuted for fraud. There was general agreement that fraud which had been organised by groups and involved large sums of debt should always be prosecuted.

However, participants also warned against prosecuting all cases of fraud. It was felt that the decision to prosecute a client for fraud should depend on different things. Some said that Social Security Scotland needed to be fair to the client when it decided whether to refer a client to the authorities or not.

Many had concerns that prosecuting clients for fraud could sometimes do more harm than good. Some talked about the damage that prosecution could have on households and families. Several wondered whether there could be alternative ways of treating fraud in the justice system instead of prosecution. These suggestions included giving warnings, imposing fines. Several participants discussed the option of clients repaying their debts through community work schemes. Some talked about Social Security Scotland or offering clients flexible repayment plans.

Communicating about fraud

Participants generally felt that any public communication about fraud needed to be done very carefully. Some were worried that public information campaigns could start flurries of accusations among neighbours. Several warned against information campaigns that might encourage citizens to catch 'fraudsters' in their communities.

Participants were generally divided about whether different methods of public communication about fraud were appropriate. Some thought that messages should be spread as widely as possible. These participants suggested spreading information about fraud through leaflets, posters, television, radio, and social media. These participants felt that Social Security Scotland should raise awareness about fraud among clients.

However, others felt that regular reminders – delivered more privately – would also raise awareness. These participants thought that private messages would have less chance of fuelling stigma in communities.

Language

Most participants agreed that information about error and fraud needed to be presented in clear and accessible language. Many thought that Social Security Scotland should make it clear to clients what their definitions of error and fraud were. Some also said that the language should clearly describe what processes Social Security Scotland followed in relation to error and fraud. It was felt that clear language would reduce the number of mistakes made in applications and ongoing contact. It was also felt that clear information would help to reduce stress for clients.

There was concern about the use of overly aggressive language. Many thought that intimidating language could have a damaging impact on already vulnerable applicants and clients. Several described their sense of panic whenever letters had come through their door telling them about a problem. They talked about the need to have a softer and more personal tone of language to enquire with clients about potential problems.

Others felt that it was still important to balance softer language with legal language when appropriate. These participants felt that legal language helped to inform clients that fraud was a serious offence.

Stigma and fraud

Throughout the focus groups, though not directly asked about, the topic of stigma was continually discussed. Participants generally thought that previous approaches towards error and fraud had been aggressive. They described how the system had given them a feeling of being guilty until proven innocent.

Many also felt that the overall approach to fraud had created negative attitudes towards all benefit claimants in communities.

Several said the way the issue of fraud had been handled had created difficult relationships between clients and authorities. It was felt that a combination of public information, language, and the influence of the media, had created damaging myths about how common benefit fraud actually was. Many noted that most clients were honest and didn't want to trick the system. They felt it was unfortunate that the majority of honest claimants felt stigmatised by an approach that was aimed at a small minority.

Several felt that heavy-handed approaches to fraud reduced the likelihood of people applying for what they were eligible for. A few participants described how it was difficult for Social Security Scotland to strike a balance between discouraging cases of fraud and encouraging applications from those who were eligible.

Background and research methods

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently 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. People from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits coming to Scotland were eligible to join. Over 2,400 people registered as Experience Panel members when it launched in 2017.

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.

In this research project, we conducted focus groups to ask panel members for their views about how Social Security Scotland should approach fraud and error. In particular, we asked for:

- Views on whether genuine error and cases of fraud should be treated differently;
- Views on whether clients who commit fraud should be prosecuted;
- Views on what public communication about fraud and error should be like;
- Views on the kind of language that should be used by Social Security Scotland;
- Views on the stigma associated with benefit fraud.

In total, 39 Experience Panel members took part in 8 focus groups across Scotland.[2] Groups had between 3 and 8 participants.

The Social Security Experience Panels are a longitudinal research project. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have relevant experience. The findings of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the participants only, and are not indicative of the views of a wider Scottish population.

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[2] Focus Groups were held in: Hamilton, Lanark, Irvine, Greenock, Glasgow (3), and Dundee.

Treating genuine client error and cases of fraud

Focus group participants were given a definition of 'client error' and 'fraud.'[34] Participants were then asked about whether client error and cases of fraud should be treated differently.

In response, most participants felt that Social Security Scotland should treat honest errors and deliberate fraud differently. Many felt there was a big difference between an honest mistake and a deliberate attempt to trick the system.

Treating client error

Most participants agreed that Social Security Scotland needed to support clients who made honest mistakes.

Some shared concerns about clients who were already vulnerable being treated harshly. Others talked about how clients with long term conditions or learning difficulties could often be unclear about how to use the system. They felt it was unfair if honest clients were made to feel like they had committed a crime.

> "You have to treat them differently. Sometimes there are issues with the forms right at the outset. My son isn't great at doing forms, and there are a lot of people out there who do need help completing them. Mistakes are common."

> "There is a complete difference between mistaken and deliberate withholding. People I work with have learning disabilities and autism. There is a lot of information to capture and a lot of people can struggle with that and make mistakes."

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[3] Definition of 'client error': *where someone has made a mistake on a form or didn't report something quickly enough and Social Security Scotland didn't have the right information at the right time.*

[4] Definition of 'fraud': *where the decision maker finds that the evidence shows that someone deliberately misrepresented the facts, or didn't tell Social Security Scotland about something they knew they should report.*

Many participants said that genuine mistakes were common when using the system. Participants described different parts of the system and how errors could easily occur. Some talked about the difficulties of completing applications.

"The guidance about how to fill in applications needs to be obvious. Do you fill in thinking of the worst day? Is that seen as withholding the truth?"

"Just say something like: '*We know that every day isn't the worst, but tell us about your worst day. We know that 3 bad days can ruin the other four good days.*' It should be clear that it isn't fraud to describe your bad days in applications."

Others talked about how it was possible that information could be missed and how sometimes clients might not know what they needed to do.

"It's not that person's fault. Sometimes they give you information and it gets missed."

"Big difference between fraud and genuine error. Lots of errors come when the person gets given the wrong information, then they gets done for it."

Many thought that Social Security Scotland needed to be careful about how it approached clients about errors. Some said if an error was suspected, clients should be reassured when Social Security Scotland first contacted about the problem.

These participants described how any type of notice about a problem on their claim could make them anxious or insecure. They said that Social Security Scotland needed to understand that being alerted to a problem could be very stressful for clients.

"We are all humans and we can all make mistakes. Before jumping to conclusions and putting someone through stress, you should provide support in the first contact."

"At the moment, the letter you get through sends fear down people. You should treat clients innocently until proven guilty."

> "The letters that came through were awful. They should be kind."

Many felt that small reassurances would help to build up trust. Several also thought it would mean that clients would feel more able to explain themselves to Social Security Scotland if they had made a mistake. Several thought that clients would not trust Social Security Scotland if it couldn't support them when they had made a mistake.

> "At the beginning, treat them the same. You shouldn't assume that all clients have committed fraud."

> "If someone unwittingly makes an error, then it's good to have a conversation. Talk to them about what happened."

Several were particularly concerned about the need to reassure those with long term and mental health conditions.

> "In certain circumstances, you have to be sensitive with people with long term health and mental health conditions. What is the point of treating someone too roughly if their health is worsened by this treatment? It only impacts the NHS."

Treating fraud

Most participants also felt that clients who deceived the system on purpose needed to be treated differently than those who made genuine errors.

Many said that those who were deliberately dishonest gave the rest of benefits claimants a bad reputation. Many felt that it was important for Social Security Scotland to protect and recover public money.

> "All public bodies have responsibilities to recover public money. Can't be allowed to commit fraud running to hundreds of thousands of pounds."

> "If they have committed a crime then they should be treated as a criminal. I don't think they should necessarily go to jail, but they can't just be allowed to steal tax payer money away."

Participants also suggested that different levels of fraud should be treated differently. Many felt that Social Security Scotland needed to take strong action against benefit fraud that was organised by groups and involved large sums of debt to be recovered. They also thought that Social Security Scotland should be more flexible in cases that only involved individuals and smaller amounts of debt.[5]

Some said that strong actions were needed because it was important for people to know there were consequences for doing something wrong. Others said that punishments were needed in order to deter potential fraud in the future. If there were not firm enough punishments in place to discourage fraud, several thought this could send a message that fraud was easy to undertake. Several were worried that the number of cases of benefit fraud could rise.

> "Strong action will deter fraud. People have to be aware of the consequences."

> "There have to be deterrents in all walks of life. In my point of view, stealing is stealing."

A few participants were concerned about the design of a benefits system around dignity, fairness, and respect. They thought that this approach could make Social Security Scotland more vulnerable to fraud attempts. Several were worried that Social Security Scotland could be seen as an easy target.

> "Some people think that it is going to be easier to access benefits with Social Security Scotland. I don't mean what they are entitled to, but getting extra money. Government needs to be very careful."

Treating individual circumstances in cases

Most participants thought that Social Security Scotland needed to be able to treat error and fraud differently. However, some also commented that knowing which cases to treat differently was not always easy. They said that cases

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[5] The focus group sessions asked a series of questions about how debt from fraud and error overpayments should be recovered. These findings are included in a wider section on recovering debt found in our 'Change of Circumstances' report. This is published on the Experience Panels publications webpage.

were often more complicated than either 'an error' or 'a fraud.' Several thought that Social Security Scotland needed to consider the individual circumstances in each case before deciding what it should do.

Participants listed a number of examples describing how different individual circumstances were not as straightforward as either error or fraud. Some talked about scenarios that involved people who were vulnerable. Others talked about individuals who had deceived the system, but also had a long term health condition.

> "You need to be wary about dealing with cases that involve people with mental health problems."

Several talked about how it was difficult to know how to treat cases that involved abusive situations. These participants felt it was wrong for a vulnerable person to be punished if they had been pressured into fraud by an abusive partner. It also didn't seem fair that a person was punished if they were too scared of their partner to contact the authorities about their case.

> "Depends on the circumstances. If someone is in an abusive relationship and are forced to put information down on a form, then they should be treated differently."

> "Some clients might not say anything about any errors on their claim if they are being abused. They might be scared. They could also not come forward because they don't feel able to admit what is happening in their house."

> "I know someone who was in abusive relationship, their partner was caught doing fraud. Suddenly they had all kinds of debt that she didn't know about. The government treated them as if they were lying. They weren't aware of what their partner was doing, and were scared of them."

> "Someone filled in a form because her daughter had a drug problem and needed the money for heroin. Not her fault, but we attack her and not the big drug lords."

Many were worried about how harsh treatment against error and fraud could impact on families. Some talked about concerns about how fines and

investigations could have a negative impact on any children or other dependents in the same household.

> "I knew of a case where a person had committed intentional fraud, however their child would have suffered if there was a punishment. It can be hard to call."

Others were concerned about cases of where households had committed fraud because they couldn't afford not to. These participants talked low-income families tricking the system so that they could provide basics such as food and clothes.

> "Some young parents may be committing fraud, but they are not doing it for luxury. They are doing it to make sure kids have shoes and clothes. All of their circumstances need to be taken into consideration. But they also need to be made aware that what they have done is illegal."

> "Those who have made a mistake, you can't just put them into poverty."

Prosecuting fraud

Participants were then asked if they thought that clients who committed fraud should be prosecuted.

Most participants agreed that there were times where clients who had committed fraud should be prosecuted. In particular, many felt that fraud by organised criminals should always be prosecuted.

> "If it's organised and criminal you shouldn't get dignity and respect. You get sent a formal letter and dealt with appropriately."

However, participants were divided about how the legal system should be used for individual cases. Some said that there should be no exceptions for how fraud is dealt with. These participants felt that fraud was a legal issue rather than a moral issue and that everyone who commits fraud should be prosecuted. They also thought it was wrong for a person who had deliberately misled the system to be let off.

"Everyone who commits fraud should be prosecuted. It shouldn't depend on the type of fraud it is."

"Fraud is fraud. There needs to be prosecutions as a deterrent. It's then up to the legal people to decide."

"Genuine fraud is a law issue, it is not a moral issue."

Deciding whether to prosecute or not

However, others warned against prosecuting all cases of fraud. These participants felt that the decision to prosecute a client for fraud should depend on different things.

Some said that the decision to prosecute should depend on how much money had been fraudulently claimed. Others wondered about whether prosecuting fraud was sometimes not a good use of public money.

"If it is only a small amount of fraud, then I don't think you should prosecute."

"There has to be a balance. If it costs more money to take them to court than what they're paying back then it's not really worth it."

"It's a sledgehammer to crack a nut. It costs a huge amount of money to pay for investigators. But I don't think they should just get away with it either."

Others said it should depend on an individual's record and whether it was a first offence. Several suggested that Social Security Scotland needed to find out more from the client before making a decision on whether to refer a case to the justice system. Several said it was important for Social Security Scotland to have well-trained investigation staff.

"Organised crime, 100%, there should be prosecution. But when it's down to an individual, it depends on what the process has been. Make sure that there is enough well trained staff who can decide if it is worth it."

"It depends whether or not it's a first offence. Maybe you don't prosecute on the first offence."

"Find out more. If it's only slight fraud, then don't prosecute. If there has been an error in judgement, scare them at an interview and hope it doesn't happen again."

However, other participants wondered whether prosecuting clients could often do more harm than good. Several talked about the impact of charged with fraud and how this could impact a client's future.

"You do need to prosecute some people. But you also need to think about whether there is a need to take people to court. Sometimes once people are taken to court, then they can't get another job."

"I have an issue with prosecution. My business is part of PVG scheme, I can't give them a job. One time, a person came clean, but now has a record. How can they earn money to pay the system back? Unless it is a shockingly obvious case then there shouldn't be prosecution."

Several said that they would want certain types of fraud to be properly punished no matter whether it was cost-effective or not. These participants talked about how they would want to target certain types of fraud which contributed to stigma.

"People who lie about a disability should be penalised. They only help stigmatise others who are genuinely entitled to benefits."

Other types of punishment

Some thought that there were cases where the justice system could use other types of punishment instead of prosecution. These included cautions, fines, and community pay-back schemes.

"There are other options before prosecution. Paying a fine, giving a caution. What about community service or voluntary work?"

"I think there should be a choice of community service if it's just minor fraud. If it's organised crime then that should be treated as criminal."

"Community service is probably the most effective option. It means they have to pay back to society, but not jail."

"I would love to see those who get caught do a day or two in the shelters so that they realise this is who the money is for."

"If someone claimed their mum had autism, I would like to think that voluntary work with groups of vulnerable people would help make them aware."

"I know someone who worked in a bank, committed fraud, and then was given a community payback order. This helped them understand the consequences of fraud and have a positive impact on them."

Communicating about fraud

Participants were then asked a series of questions about how Social Security Scotland should communicate about fraud to the public.

Participants generally felt that any communication about fraud needed to be approached very carefully. Many thought that raising awareness about benefit fraud and its consequences was a good thing. However, there were also concerns that public messaging about fraud could have a negative impact on communities.

Impact on communities

Several participants said that public attitudes towards benefit fraud were fragile. They thought that the public already saw benefit fraud as a big problem in communities. They said certain public campaigns about catching benefit 'fraudsters' often made communities suspicious about their neighbours. It was therefore felt that public information campaigns about fraud could be harmful. Several described their concerns that adverts might increase the number of incorrect accusations made between neighbours.

"If you put a TV advert on, you will get an upsurge of people phoning in, it will create more phone calls. If not done correctly, this can cause communities to turn on themselves."

"The government should be careful about any messaging that creates division – anything that encourages a neighbour to report a private individual."

Several were concerned about how public campaigns risked increasing levels of stigma towards the disabled community specifically.

"There have been steady increases of hate crime towards disabled people. I think any campaign isn't going to help those who need the help. I would be really concerned about this. Any campaign would reinforce this view."

Several others said it was important that any public messaging did not discourage any future applications from those who were eligible.

"You want to encourage people to apply – the bigger problem is about poverty and people not applying when they should. But we do need to have a response to fraud."

Different methods of communication

Participants were also asked about various ways which Social Security Scotland could communicate with the public about benefit fraud. These methods of communication included:

- Posters
- TV adverts
- Information leaflets
- Online information

Most participants were unable to recall examples of good communication that they believed had worked well and could be done again in the future.

Nevertheless, participants were divided about whether different methods of public communication about fraud were appropriate. Some thought that

messages should be spread as widely as possible. These participants thought that Social Security Scotland should share information about fraud through leaflets and posters, television, radio, and social media. This would raise awareness about fraud. It would also continually remind claimants about their responsibility to keep their information up to date. Some thought that market research could be conducted to ensure that any advertised message was not too hostile.

> "The information should be out there for everyone. As you never know when circumstances change and you could need it."

> "They should advertise on posters and social media. Money should be set aside to advertise about fraud on TV."

> "Messages need to be put in places people go. Places that are in the public eye."

> "Once you produce an advert, do a bit of market research and see how people respond to messages before they are put out there."

Others did not think that any public messaging about fraud was helpful. These participants felt that public communication could do more harm than good. They felt that regular reminders to clients – delivered in a more private manner - would be more appropriate. It was felt that more private reminders about fraud would have less potential for harm in the community. A few said that to avoid any confusion, fraud and error information should arrive alongside wider information about eligibility.

> "When someone is claiming for new benefit, and Social Security Scotland send you forms, a leaflet could come in the post as a reminder as well."

> "I wouldn't want posters or TV adverts. Just clear information about fraud and error when applying."

Language

Participants were then asked questions about the type of language that was used in information materials about error and fraud.

Clarity

Many felt that application forms and information materials needed to be clearer and more accessible. Using straightforward language would help to reduce the number of errors that were made when applications were made.

"The majority of people do not want to claim for something that they are not entitled to. It's about having the clarity there, to make sure people know what they are eligible for."

Some said it would be useful to have clear definitions, explaining 'error' and 'fraud' on information that was given to the public. They said that they would want clear factual information about what would happen if a fraud was suspected. A few participants also felt that the language should provide a clear sense of the consequences of fraud. Applicants and clients should know the seriousness of the committing fraud. However, participants felt that this information should be communicated in facts, rather than threats.

"It should be clear, concise, understandable that if they do make a false statement that they need to pay it back."

"People should be told it's a criminal offence, you are committing a criminal offence and this can be taken through the courts."

Several participants felt that it might be useful to state that benefits were there to help those who really needed it. Others suggested that fraud and error information should use bold text to emphasise key messages. However, others thought there was a danger that this might appear too aggressive.

Tone

Many were concerned that overly aggressive or intimidating language could have a damaging effect on applicants and claimants.

Some suggested that aggressive phrases of information materials could make people:
- feel more anxious and threatened
- feel more stigmatised
- more likely to make a mistake on applications
- less likely to come forward if they did make a mistake
- less likely to apply for benefits at all

Several participants said that they would not want language that felt overly intrusive and gave them an impression that they were being watched.

> "I think the language has to be a lot less aggressive than now. My aunt filled in a PIP form, and the form comes across like '*we are watching you! If you tell lies we will know.*' She was convinced that the language was there to scare. If you say we will try and find error, it stops people from coming forward when they have made a mistake. Language needs to be open and honest."

> "There's some types of language that don't help, such as '*are you sure that you are entitled*?' and '*have you told the truth?*' All these things, giving people great big warnings, make a vast majority of honest people very edgy without criteria. Makes people feel scared."

> "So many clients are vulnerable people so you need to be careful how you communicate with them."

Many said the approach needed to be softer and more supportive in tone. Some talked about the kind of language that could help reduce a reaction of panic and fear.

> "When someone is suspected of committing fraud, send letters out saying they are not taking someone to court. It should say they need to discuss the details with you first to get a proper explanation of everything that has happened and you should be able to respond to it."

> "You could use: '*it has come to our attention...*' or, '*are you aware that you have been paid this money?*' or, '*we think we might have found a problem.*' Those would be ways that could provide a bit more support and less of a threat in the first contact."

> "Don't make language sound too harsh. People may be forced into that situation. You need to reinforce the principles of fairness of respect."

Use of legal language

Participants were divided about the use of legal language in information about fraud. For some, legal terms made the system more intimidating. They thought that legal language could create a sense of 'us and them' between claimants and authorities. They also felt that legal terms could sometimes be hard to understand.

> "The language needs to be clear, simple, and not too legalistic."

> "The information that comes through, they are writing it as if you are in court. It would be better if letters were written in layman's terms."

For others, it was important to have a softer and friendlier tone, but continue to have a legal message at the same time. These participants felt that legal terms were appropriate because they signalled the serious nature of the agreement that a client was undertaking. They thought that legal language was useful because it also helped to inform clients that fraud was a serious offence. It was also felt that legal terms helped discourage those who might want to take advantage of the system.

> "People need to be told that fraud is a criminal offence; you could be committing a criminal offence and this can be taken through the courts."

Stigma and fraud

Participants were not asked directly about the role of stigma in the focus groups sessions. However, throughout the focus groups, the topic of stigma continually came up as a key theme of discussion.

Participants generally thought that previous approaches towards error and fraud had been aggressive. They described how the system had given them a feeling of being guilty until proven innocent. Many participants felt that the overall approach to fraud had created negative attitudes with communities. Several said that the information they received made them feel suspected. Others said that it had contributed to a breakdown in trust between them and authorities. A few said that the atmosphere had become more difficult among neighbours in their community.

"There is a sense of them and us; DWP against the claimant sometimes."

"There are costs for the kind of stigma we are talking about. It's the systems that make us feel like we do."

Myths about benefit fraud

Some noted that the number of cases of convicted fraud was actually very low. They said that only a very small minority of claimants actually wanted to trick the system. These participants felt that the general approach to error and fraud over previous years had created myths about how common benefit fraud actually was.

"We need to think about the words we use. Most people talk about scroungers, not the people who really deserve it. Everyone needs to know the percentages about those who commit fraud."

"Be honest when it comes to the problem. Don't hide. Make it clear that yes there are people not claiming what they are entitled. But this is a small number."

Several felt that it was unfortunate that a majority of honest claimants felt stigmatised because of an approach that was aimed at a small minority. They believed that the role of stigma and hostility towards fraud had helped to create negative views of all benefits claimants. Several also felt heavy-handed approaches to fraud reduced the likelihood of people applying for what they were eligible for.

A few participants described how it was difficult to strike a balance between discouraging fraud and encouraging people to apply for benefits they are entitled to.

"That's why it's difficult to have a one size fits all approach. You need warnings about the consequences of committing fraud. You also need to balance that with having a message that will also encourage people to apply."

Next steps

Insights from this research are informing decisions about how Social Security Scotland should identify and treat cases of genuine error and cases of attempted fraud. They are also informing decisions about how Social Security Scotland can take each individual client's circumstances into account to avoid putting anyone into hardship.

The findings from this work have also been used to help shape how Social Security Scotland communicates with its clients about fraud. In recent testing sessions, panel members were shown sample letters for fraud investigation that were being trialled by Scottish Government researchers. Panel members felt that the language and tone being used in the sample letters was less threatening and less likely to intimidate clients.

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

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GOVERNMENT SOCIAL RESEARCH

Social Science in Government