

Social Security Experience Panels: Short-term Assistance Visual Summary

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of work to prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



Over 2,400 people from across Scotland joined the Experience Panels when they started in 2017. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.

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



2,400+
**Experience Panel
members**

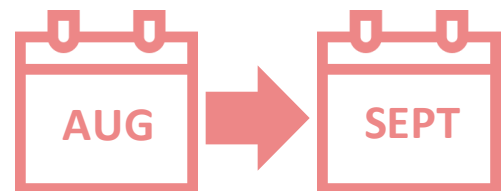
About the research

This report gives the findings of the 'Short-term assistance' research.



10 Focus groups

The research took place in



2019

The research explored:



What Short-term assistance is and expectations around how it can be accessed



Views on how to make people aware of Short-term assistance at the right time



Chance of people challenging decisions if Short-term assistance is available

39

participants took part



7

locations

Short-term Assistance

Short-term assistance is a **new payment** that will be offered by the Scottish Government. It will be available when a **decision** by Social Security Scotland **reduces or stops** someone's benefit.

If the person wants to **challenge the decision**, they can apply for Short-term assistance. It then keeps their **benefit at the original level** until the dispute is solved.



Client challenges a decision to reduce or stop their benefit

Short-term assistance

Dispute is solved at redetermination or appeal

Understanding of Short-term Assistance



The majority of focus group participants felt that Short-term assistance was a good idea.

“Nothing in place at the moment so this is a good system, means nobody is left out to dry”



Some participants had questions about how Short-term assistance would work:



Which benefits would be affected



How this could affect things like having a blue badge



The amount that you would get



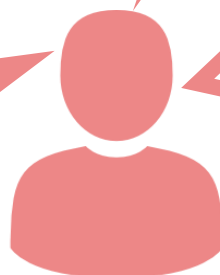
When Short-term assistance would start and stop

It should be told that you won't be taking it back

Make it clear about things that are covered with Short-term assistance and what is not covered

There should be a letter saying when it starts, when it finishes and that you don't need to pay it back

What the whole process is from start to finish. A diagram would be good. Sometimes paperwork is not easy to understand



The name 'Short-term assistance'

In a few of the focus groups, participants raised what they thought of the name.



These participants felt that the **name** Short-term assistance is **not clear** as to **what this payment helps with**. Participants felt that the name should state clearly what this payment is for.

When I hear Short-term assistance my first thought was it is people needing short term care coming out of hospital or something, not a payment

'Grant' may be good in the name to reinforce the fact it is non-repayable

Make it clear that it is Short-term assistance with money. Assistance comes in many forms so needs to be clear that it is financial



Finding out about Short-term Assistance

Getting Information about Short-term assistance



Participants would want to be told about Short-term assistance from the **start of the application process**.

“At the beginning, to reassure people”



However people had different opinions on the **amount of information** people should get at each stage.



Some participants felt that clients should be **told everything** clearly in the **beginning**.

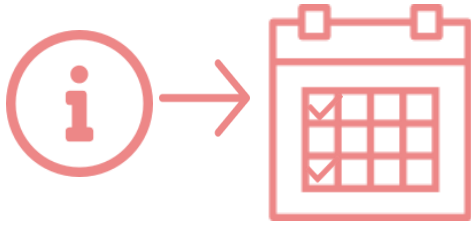
“I feel it’s important you’re told all your options at the beginning. Important it’s all laid out in the beginning and explained to us”.



Others would **only want the bare minimum**, and to only **receive detailed information** when they **need** Short-term assistance.

A few participants said that clients should be told about Short-term assistance when **going through a review** of their benefit award.

“Would like info around time of review. Anything mentioning review should have some mention of Short-term assistance”.



A couple of participants said **information** on Short-term assistance should be made **available routinely** so people are always **reminded** of it.

“Perhaps be told that it exists but leave the full details until after a decision to stop payments has been made”.

“I think every 6 months the information should be sent out about it. You need to know something exists to be protected by it. So many things are hidden, people don’t find out about it until they’re desperate”.

Advertising Short-term assistance



Most of the focus group participants felt that Short-term assistance should be advertised through different buildings that are easily accessible in various locations.

These included:



Community halls



Post offices



Doctor surgeries



This was particularly needed for people who live in **rural areas** such as **farming communities**, or who have **poor connection to the internet**.

“Buildings that most people in rural areas can access. i.e. post offices, doctor surgeries, local shops”.



Participants also felt that, for the **younger generation**, Short-term assistance should be **advertised online**. Examples participants included were:

- Government websites.
- Social media and video websites.

On the government website, as this should be the official site where you go to find these things

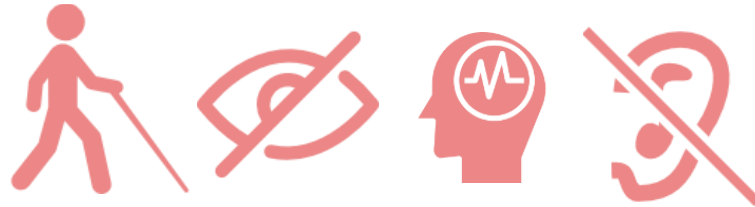
Radio message? Good for targeting different audiences, people may struggle to read, also might attract younger people

Youtube videos and info packs



A few participants felt that Short-term assistance should **advertised on TV and radio messages**.

Participants said that Short-term assistance should be **accessible for all**. This included making sure that **accessibility needs** are considered when advertising Short-term assistance.



“Use people’s own language. What they are used to in their everyday lives. My husband has impairments, it’s not just about the spoken”

Accessing Short-term assistance

Deciding to challenge a decision



We asked participants what **sort of things** they would think about when **deciding to apply** for a **redetermination or appeal**.



Many participants said they would think about **their mental wellbeing**.

“People’s health condition can put them off applying- it can take a toll on your health to have to go through the appeal process”.



We asked participants if offering Short-term assistance would make people more likely to **challenge a decision**. **Almost all** said they would be **more likely** to challenge a decision.

The **majority of participants** felt that it would:



Lessen people's financial pressure.



Give them the **confidence to challenge a decision to reduce or stop their benefit.**

“There’s nothing to lose, there’s an incentive there to help people fight and challenge a decision”

“It would take some pressure off foodbanks. Would also take away worry of doing an application worrying about what might happen or how you are going to cope during an appeal”.

A **few** participants have said having **Short-term assistance would not affect** how likely it is that clients would challenge a decision.

They said this would depend on **how they are treated.**



“It depends on overall initial interaction. My experience with DWP is better than most but still felt dragged down. Pivotal to me is to make sure the interface from the start is that you don’t feel as if you are begging people to open their personal piggy bank”.

Requesting Short-term assistance



Social Security Scotland are thinking about how people could **request Short-term assistance**. Within the focus groups, participants were told about three different options:



Tick box on a redetermination form.



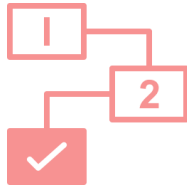
A **separate one page form** to complete.



A **tear off slip** on the letter confirming their redetermination application.

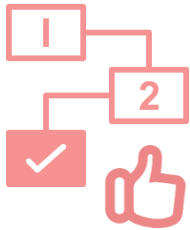


The **most popular of these choices** was having a **tick box**.



But most participants said they would prefer Short-term assistance to be **automatic** if someone challenged a decision. This would mean they wouldn't have to apply.

Automatic payment



Participants were not directly asked whether clients should have to explicitly apply for Short-term assistance.

But **nearly all groups** raised the point that Short-term assistance should be **automatic for all**.

“No-one should be penalised while there's a re-determination”.



Most participants felt that if **Short-term assistance is automatic, no one misses out**.

This could happen if they don't know about it, don't understand it, or are too proud to apply.

Participants felt that most **people would want it** so it's **easier** to allow people **to opt out** than to ask them **to opt in**.

“It would be easier if we knew it was automatic. If you didn't want the money, you can have the choice of not receiving. It is important for a lot of people who can't communicate”.



Participants felt that it would be **less stressful** if you don't need to do anything extra.

“Signing up to Short-term assistance can be a major depression for some”.



Participants felt Social Security Scotland **should tell** people **what they are entitled to** and **ensure they receive it**.

Communicating decisions about Short-term assistance

Confirming when Short-term assistance will start and stop



Participants were asked how they would want Social Security Scotland to **tell** them when their **Short-term assistance will start and stop**.



People said they would want to know about when **the payment would start as soon as possible**. So they would want a response through **text or email**.

“An email or text followed by a letter. A lot of people like a physical file. But the follow up letter should come very quickly”

“Like to know what's in the bank right away to manage money”.



However the majority of participants felt this should always be followed by **a letter**.



Participants would want to be told Short-term assistance is **stopping** as part of the **redetermination or appeal result letter**.



They said that this letter should include **information on what to do** and **contacts for additional help**.

“There should be information on where to go next if your appeal is rejected and you’re no longer getting Short-term assistance. More information you may be entitled to would be useful with the letter.”



Most participants **did not want to receive** any **information** on Short-term assistance **through a phone call**.

“Hard to remember over the phone, feel rushed, or forget easily what they need”

Telling you that Short-term assistance is stopping

Participants were asked **how much notice** they would want when Short-term assistance stops.



In the focus groups, most people agreed that people should be given **4 weeks' notice** that **Short-term assistance is stopping**.

"4 weeks for people to adjust or decide what to do".



A few participants felt that people should be given a **minimum of 2 weeks** when Short-term assistance is stopping.

"Need about 2 weeks to sort your finances before anything stops, now the benefits have stopped with no warning".

Next Steps



The Short-Term Assistance project team have used the findings from this research in their Service Design. Here are some of the decisions that have been made so far.



Short-term assistance will be clearly explained when clients get a benefit decision and during the challenge process. There will be simple tick boxes in the forms for asking for a re-determination or appeal.



All information and forms will make clear that Short-term assistance will not need to be paid back. This is unless it is found that the original claim was fraudulent.



A letter will tell clients what date they will be paid Short-term assistance from, when it will stop and that they do not have to pay it back. We are looking into sending texts or emails before this letter, as suggested by participants.



A fact sheet about Short-term assistance is being written. It could be put in local places like community halls and doctors surgeries. It could also go on the internet.



The Short-term assistance process will be tested with users before it rolls out.

If you would like to be consulted about statistical collections or receive notification of publications, please register your interest at www.gov.scot/scotstat. Details of forthcoming publications can be found at www.gov.scot/statistics.



© Crown copyright 2020

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-83960-878-0

Published by the Scottish Government, July 2020