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# Social Security Experience Panels: Meeting People's Needs



**EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**



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# Introduction

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. Over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits coming to Scotland registered as Experience Panel members during the launch 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.

The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design a new social security system that works for the people of Scotland. From February to April 2020, Experience Panel members were invited to take part in research to explore how Social Security Scotland can support clients' disability, accessibility, and other needs. This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels programme of research. In total, 234 Experience Panel members chose to complete the survey and 30 panel members took part in focus groups. This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work. All quotes are from panel members taken from the survey responses.

## Summary

### **Disability and accessibility needs**

Participants agreed that it would be beneficial for clients to share information about their needs with Social Security Scotland. Issues around accessibility were the most frequently mentioned needs. These often related to physical accessibility at Social Security Scotland locations as well as examples of measures that could be taken to ensure a comfortable environment and atmosphere for clients.

Participants also discussed communication needs such as communication channel preferences and flexibility in call handling and appointment times. They felt this would allow clients to engage in a way that suited them and at their own pace. Feedback also covered a range of aspects related to the experience of living with a disability or long-term health condition. Participants said it was important that staff understood the individuality of each client's experience. This included how health and wellbeing can fluctuate and that not all disabilities, and associated needs, are visible.

There was a range of opinions on how much detail Social Security Scotland should request or record. Some participants said they would be happy to share all information relating to their needs. Others thought it wasn't necessary for Social

Security Scotland to capture detailed information about the circumstances behind, or reasons for, needs-based adjustments.

When asked how they would tell Social Security Scotland about any disability or accessibility needs, the preferred option was online and at the same time as making an application. Opinions were mixed when it came to updating the information with the most popular option being only when the client offers more information.

Focus group participants were shown three examples of how information on disability and accessibility needs could be recorded on the Social Security Scotland system: an open text box, a drop down menu, and a combination of both. Participants thought a drop down menu would be an efficient way to record information but wasn't suited to capturing the potential range of clients' individual needs. Participants thought an open text box would allow more tailored information to be logged but care should be taken not to record excessive detail. A combination of both a drop down menu and an open text box was favoured by many participants. Participants thought this could strike a good balance between efficiency and ability to record important detail.

### **Additional needs**

Participants gave a range of examples of experiences in a client's life which could be shared with Social Security Scotland to allow them to provide additional support. Examples include: mental health conditions, abuse, addiction, bereavement, and experience of the prison system.

Most respondents said they would tell Social Security Scotland about additional needs resulting from personal experiences where it was relevant. Respondents did note that some clients may wish to keep certain personal information private and that this should be respected. As before, the most popular time to tell Social Security Scotland about additional needs was online alongside an application.

### **Support**

Participants were asked about measures Social Security Scotland could take to support the needs of clients. Participants agreed that information on available adjustments such as language interpreters should be available via a range of methods such as online and in leaflets. Almost all survey respondents thought that staff should be trained to recognise suicidal feelings, alcohol or substance abuse, and vulnerability to financial abuse. Almost all participants also thought it would be helpful for Social Security Scotland to have in place staff with extra training and experience on various topics known as Subject Matter Experts.

Participants also considered signposting to other support agencies or groups to be an important way Social Security Scotland could support clients. To support clients visiting Social Security Scotland, participants thought it was appropriate to share certain accessibility needs with front of house staff, but not detailed personal health

information. Finally, participants took the opportunity to highlight that clients should always be treated with empathy and understanding, as embodied by Social Security Scotland's commitment to Dignity, Fairness, and Respect.

## Background and research methods

In this research project, Experience Panel members were invited to take part in a survey and focus group discussions to explore:

- What information relating to disability and accessibility needs Social Security Scotland should know about.
- When and how members would want to tell Social Security Scotland about these needs.
- How Social Security Scotland should record these needs on an internal system.
- What circumstances may give rise to other needs such as bereavement or addiction and how Social Security Scotland should record information about these needs.
- Ways Social Security Scotland can support the disability, accessibility, and other needs of clients.

Panel members were reassured that this research was to explore how Social Security Scotland could gather and record information to meet client needs and not as a way to collect additional information relating to a claim or application.

Respondents were recruited from the Scottish Government Experience Panels. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have relevant experience of the benefits which will be delivered by Social Security Scotland. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the research participants only, and are not indicative of the views of a wider Scottish population. Percentages are given only to show a broad sense of the balance of opinion across participants. Comments or quotations from survey or focus group participants are shown in shaded boxes as illustrative examples only.

### Focus groups

During February 2020, nine focus groups were held in seven locations across Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Focus groups were facilitated by Scottish Government social researchers. To ensure the anonymity of participants was preserved, focus groups

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<sup>1</sup> Focus groups were held in: Aberdeen, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hamilton, and Stirling.

were not audio or video recorded. The content of focus groups was detailed by notetakers in attendance.

## **Survey method**

Participation in Experience Panels research is optional, and 234 people chose to complete the survey. This represents approximately 10 per cent of Experience Panel members.

Where possible, information from the survey was matched to information from the 'About Your Benefits and You' and 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far' surveys.<sup>2</sup> The demographic data collected in these surveys was linked to the information supplied previously by participants. Linking was not possible where there was missing or unclear information.

The following demographic information is given to give context to the findings from the survey. More detailed demographic information about survey respondents can be found at Annex A.

Two thirds of survey respondents (66 per cent) who we have demographic information for identified as either 'female' or 'woman or girl'. One third (32 per cent) identified as either 'male' or 'man or boy'. Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) were aged 45 to 59.

Most respondents (85 per cent) had a disability or long term health condition. Less than half of respondents (42 per cent) said they were a carer. Almost two thirds of survey respondents (65 per cent) who took part had experience of Personal Independence Payment. Over half (57 per cent) had experience of Disability Living Allowance.

Survey respondents took part from 29 of 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The majority lived in an urban area (78 per cent).

## **Disability and accessibility needs**

### **Sharing information with Social Security Scotland**

Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked what information Social Security Scotland should know about a clients' disability or accessibility

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<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2017) 'Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Quantitative Research Findings': [www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/) and Scottish Government (2018) 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far': [www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/).

needs. Overall, participants agreed that it would be beneficial for clients to share information about their needs with Social Security Scotland. Almost all survey respondents (98 per cent) said they would want Social Security Scotland to know some information about their disability or accessibility needs.

**Table 1: What information on disability or accessibility needs would you want staff to know about for you or the person you care for? (n=234)**

	%
What your need is (e.g. needs a wheelchair accessible venue)	18.4
Why you have a need (e.g. what your disability is)	12.0
Both why you have a need AND what your need is	67.9
None of the above	1.7
Total	100

There was a range of opinions however, regarding the necessary level of detail clients should share with Social Security Scotland. Some focus group participants and survey respondents were happy to share all information relating to their needs. Around two thirds (68 per cent) of survey respondents said they would want Social Security Scotland to know about both why they have a need and what that need is. These participants felt that giving detailed information would make it easier for Social Security Scotland to understand and support their needs. Some participants also said providing details about their disability or condition would allow them to highlight the individual and unique impacts on their health and everyday life. Some comments also focused on how detailed information from a client could help make staff aware of disabilities that are not visible including mental health conditions.

“Both the need and the reason are important in order to clarify exactly what is required. If only one of these is given then assumptions may be made incorrectly.”  
(survey respondent)

“It is essential to know both what the disability is AND how it affects you, as these are hugely variable and often not understood out with expert health professionals.”  
(survey respondent)

Other participants thought that whilst it was appropriate to know about a client’s needs, it wasn’t necessary for Social Security Scotland to capture detailed information about the circumstances behind that need. Less than a fifth (18 per cent) of survey respondents said that they would share their needs with Social Security Scotland but not the reasons that give rise to these needs. Some focus

group participants also said it wasn't necessary for clients to disclose too much detail about disability and accessibility needs. Participants who felt this way noted that it should be sufficient for Social Security Scotland to know about what a client needs and how to meet this, without further detail or explanation from the client.

"It's a functional thing – may not need to know what the client's condition, diagnosis is, it's what they need." (focus group participant)

"I don't think there's any need for Social Security staff to know why I have a particular need. I feel they can accommodate a need without knowing the reason behind it." (survey respondent)

### **Purpose limitation and data security**

Some participants in both the survey and focus groups stressed that it was important Social Security Scotland used information about client needs only for the purpose of providing support where possible. Participants had been reassured that this research project was about information that could help Social Security Scotland support clients. It was stressed that this information would not be used as part of a decision on their case. Even with this reassurance however, the importance of purpose limitation to participants was reflected in their comments. Participants described how previous experiences with the DWP had left them reluctant to share information that might be gathered for another purpose but then also used to inform their claim. These comments also often mentioned that disclosure of personal information relating to needs should be at the discretion of clients.

"...only information that's volunteered by the client and it is not in any way coerced out of them. And also the client should know that that information is secure – I would say that's a key requirement. And not used against me." (focus group participant)

"I think accessibility issues should not be something that people have to declare." (focus group participant)

Some participants highlighted that information about client needs should be kept safe and secure and limited to only relevant staff. Some participants also felt clients should be reassured about confidentiality and data protection rights when disclosing information about needs to Social Security Scotland.

"All information should be signed in and out...Not all staff should be able to access it. If they don't need to know then what are they doing there." (focus group participant)



## What needs Social Security Scotland should know about

### Accessibility at Social Security Scotland locations

Issues around accessibility were the most frequently mentioned needs in both focus group discussions and survey answers. A range of examples were given relating to measures Social Security Scotland should take to ensure their local locations are physically accessible. An overview of these suggestions is given below:

- Bathroom facilities should be accessible with consideration given to the size of the room and location within the building.
- Clear, bold signage and staff available to direct clients through the location.
- Disabled parking available at or near the location.
- Entrances should be step-free and wheelchair accessible.
- Furniture should be appropriate for clients with reduced mobility for example, sturdy and height adjustable.
- Hearing loop available.
- Lifts available where necessary.

As well as physical accessibility, participants also mentioned a range of factors which could be taken to ensure a comfortable environment and atmosphere for clients. These include: suitable temperatures, noise control, and no air-freshener products. Some participants also mentioned how dedicated spaces within the location could benefit clients such as: breastfeeding mothers; children accompanying a client; and clients with sensory processing conditions. A number of participants noted that due to disability or accessibility needs, a home visit from a Social Security Scotland staff member would be preferable to visiting a location.

“All premises need to be fully accessible for everyone. That means ramps/lifts, as well as stairs, to the entrances; automatically opening doors; internal lifts, proper signage - including braille where necessary; child-friendly waiting areas - i.e. a play area with toys etc.” (survey respondent)

“Sometimes the room is too hot. If you do have an accessible venue things like that needs to be considered too.” (focus group participant)

“Ensure that the option of home visit, rather than having to attend a venue for a meeting/assessment, is made clear at all times.” (survey respondent)

### Communication needs

Participants also discussed communication needs which Social Security Scotland could support. Participants said it was important for flexibility to be built into call handling and appointment times to allow clients to engage at their own pace. Some respondents also noted that communication preferences were important both in

terms of accessibility and the potential impact on mental health conditions such as anxiety. For example, a client could prefer to communicate online and may be distressed by a telephone interaction. Comments explained that by recording and supporting communication needs, Social Security Scotland could ensure clients felt able to engage in the process and avoid feeling overwhelmed and distressed. Staff training was noted as important, particularly when engaging with clients with cognitive or learning disabilities or mental health issues. Participants noted that staff should be trained to recognise communication needs and know how to handle difficult interactions.

“Sometimes, especially around the issue of benefits, the anxiety I have increased. I go mute. Communication either via email or instant message would be extremely helpful.” (survey respondent)

“People on the autistic spectrum who need things explained a certain way...they may get agitated, frustrated on the phone and are perceived to be aggressive. Staff need to know how to handle that. They may appear to be aggressive but they aren't actually. Speak to them in a calm voice.” (focus group participant)

## **Understanding the impact of disability on everyday life**

Participants noted that it was important for Social Security Scotland staff to understand that each client will have an individual experience of a disability or long-term health condition. Comments highlighted that support should be always tailored to the individual client. Many comments also emphasised that conditions can fluctuate during the day or day-to-day. Lastly, some participants also noted that it was important to take into account that not all disabilities, and associated needs, are visible.

“[It] isn't so much about the condition, it's about the person.” (focus group participant)

“Some disabilities and/or needs are not obvious and sometimes people are embarrassed at having to discuss their specific problems so I would welcome a positive and understanding approach from all concerned.” (survey respondent)

## **How and when to tell Social Security Scotland**

Over two thirds (70 per cent) of survey respondents said they would want to use an online form to tell Social Security Scotland about disability or accessibility needs. Respondents were able to choose multiple communication methods and over half also choose a paper form, face to face, and on the phone. Other methods cited were: email, home visit, message, and via someone acting on their behalf.

**Table 2: How would you want to tell Social Security Scotland about the disability or accessibility needs you or the person you care for have? (n=234)<sup>3</sup>**

	%
Online form	69.7
Paper form	56.8
Face to face	56.8
On the phone	54.7
Other	8.5

When asked to choose their preferred way to tell Social Security Scotland about disability and accessibility needs, more than two in five (43 per cent) survey respondents said via an online form. The next most popular method was face to face (23 per cent) followed by a paper form (17 per cent) and on the phone (15 per cent).

**Table 3: If you had to choose one only, which would you choose? (n=234)**

	%
Online form	43.2
Face to face	22.6
Paper form	17.1
On the phone	15.4
Other	1.7
Total	100

### **When to tell Social Security Scotland**

Two thirds of survey respondents (67 per cent) said they would want to tell Social Security Scotland about any disability or accessibility needs alongside an application. Respondents were able to select multiple options from a list of timings and 43 per cent said they would want to discuss needs before an application, on their first contact with Social Security Scotland. Almost two in five (39 per cent)

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are of total respondents as multiple methods could be selected.

said they would wait until they were arranging an appointment to share disability or accessibility needs.

**Table 4: When do you want to tell Social Security Scotland about the accessibility needs or disability you or the person you care for have? (n=234)<sup>4</sup>**

	%
Alongside application	66.7
Before you apply, on your first contact with Social Security Scotland	43.2
When arranging an appointment	38.9
Other	5.1

When asked to choose their preferred time to tell Social Security Scotland about disability and accessibility needs, half (52 per cent) said alongside an application and just less than a third (32 per cent) said before an application on their first contact with Social Security Scotland.

**Table 5: If you had to choose one only, which would you choose? (n=234)**

	%
Alongside application	51.7
Before you apply, on your first contact with Social Security Scotland	31.6
When arranging an appointment	12.4
Other	4.3
Total	100

## Providing updates

Survey participants were asked how often Social Security Scotland should update the information recorded about a client's needs. Over a third (36 per cent) said updates should only be made if the client offers more information. This echoes a theme raised in comments from both survey respondents and focus group participants about the negative impact on health and wellbeing resulting from repeated requests for updates. There was overlap in some of these comments

<sup>4</sup> Percentages are of total respondents as multiple times could be selected.

between disability and accessibility needs and information used to make a determination on an application. Comments did emphasise however that information should be recorded when a client judges it to be significant for example after a change in circumstances, and not upon request. Some comments emphasised that it was unlikely clients with certain long-term conditions would experience a change or need to give an update.

Around half of survey participants did think it was appropriate for Social Security Scotland to check for updates on clients' needs with 27 per cent saying this should be at every contact and 23 per cent saying on an annual basis.

**Table 6: How often should Social Security Scotland update the information on disability or accessibility needs they hold on you or the person you care for? (n=234)**

	%
Only update if I offer more information	35.9
Check whenever you make contact	27.4
Ask for an update on an annual basis	22.6
Other	14.1
Total	100

“When there has been a change in condition. Do not have repeat checks if the condition is chronic and will not improve.” (survey respondent)

“Check whenever you make contact. Only update if I offer more information.” (survey respondent)

## Recording disability and accessibility needs

Focus group participants were asked to give their thoughts on how Social Security Scotland should record information on clients' disability and accessibility needs. Participants were shown three examples of how information could be recorded on the Social Security Scotland system: an open text box, a drop down menu, and a combination of both. These examples can be seen at Annex B.

The purpose of the discussion was to explore how these formats might best operate as part of the internal Social Security Scotland system, seen and used only by staff members. At times during the discussions, there was some confusion among some participants some of whom framed their responses by discussing how

easy or difficult they thought it would be for clients to navigate and fill out the different formats. Researchers guided the discussion to explore the potential benefits and limitations of the different formats, as used only by Social Security Scotland staff.

## Drop down menus

Some focus group participants thought a drop down menu with a list of needs was a good way for disability and accessibility needs to be recorded. Participants noted that a drop down menu limits the detail that is captured about a client to only the relevant need. Participants also mentioned that this would make it easy for Social Security Scotland staff to see quickly and clearly what a client needs.

“It is a case of keeping it short and sweet without going into screeds of detail.”  
(focus group participant)

“Coming from a sight point of view, the drop box is easier. Can scroll through, the open text you need to read every word and it’s easy to misread that if you’re in a hurry. I think it would be easier, having a drop down like this – the advisor could ask at first point of contact. Keep it as short as possible but to cover as many things as possible.” (focus group participant)

Some participants noted that each client will have individual needs that may not be captured in a drop down menu. Participants were concerned that if the drop down menu was limited, this could miss important detail about a client’s needs. Participants also questioned how feasible it would be to have a menu that included too many options.

“Drop down is too box ticking, not tailored to you.” (focus group participant)

“It’s easy enough if you’re on this side to think that you’ve given all the information but you know there’s other things on this list that you might not be aware of, so would an adviser actually go through everything on the list, how long is the list going to be.” (focus group participant)

## Open text box

Some focus group participants thought that an open text box would allow a good level of detail to be recorded about a client’s needs. Participants also felt this would be more tailored to the individual client.

“Open text box is much better. Level of detail is more helpful. More tailored to the individual.” (focus group participant)

Some participants however, were concerned that an open text box would capture too much information and/or detail and would be too time-consuming for staff to read carefully. Participants were also concerned that comments in an open text box would rely too heavily on interpretation by staff.

“[A] text box requires more effort for staff, more guidance for professional use etc. This might not work when they get really busy.” (focus group participant)

“They [staff] would need to have training to understand the conditions fully. So I prefer the drop downs where you can add the information.” (focus group participant)

### **Drop down menu and open text box**

Some focus group participants said that a combination of both a drop down menu and an open text box would be the best option to record information about a client’s disability and accessibility needs. These participants thought that combining an open text box to the drop down menu struck a good balance between efficiency and ability to record important detail. Participants also noted that where drop down menus could not cover all possibilities, an open text box would allow this to be recorded.

“Drop down with open text...can get quick detail of need in the drop down and can look into more info. on open text within the drop down for more information.” (focus group participant)

“I prefer both of them...I think you need a free text box because you might have something that comes up that doesn't go into your tick box option.” (focus group participant)

## **Additional needs**

### **Circumstances where additional support could help**

Other than disability, clients may have times in their lives when they have more complex needs. Almost all survey respondents (95 per cent) said they agreed or strongly agreed that staff should be trained to recognise suicidal feelings, alcohol or substance abuse, and vulnerability to financial abuse.

**Table 7: Do you agree or disagree that staff should be trained to recognise the issues outlined above? (n=234)**

	%
Strongly agree	77.4
Agree	17.9
Neither agree or disagree	2.6
Disagree	1.7
Strongly disagree	0
Total	100

Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked to think about other experiences that could affect how a client interacts with Social Security Scotland. A range of examples were given with much overlap between the types of experiences discussed at focus groups and mentioned in survey responses. Some participants reiterated needs related to disability or long-term health conditions. In terms of other experiences, mental health was frequently mentioned, particularly anxiety, and the potential impact this could have on a client’s interaction. Participants also mentioned experiences of abuse, including domestic and financial abuse, and how these could impact how a client interacts with Social Security Scotland.

“If someone is suffering from anxiety, it would be good for staff to know how to calm them and make them feel at ease.” (focus group participant)

“Signs that someone is in a coercive or abusive relationship, particularly if their care giver or 'support' is involved.” (survey respondent)

Other experiences mentioned by participants include:

- Addiction
- Autism
- Bereavement
- Caring responsibilities
- Changes in financial circumstances including redundancy
- Dementia
- Experience of the care or prison systems
- Health concerns that can cause trauma such as: cancer, HIV, and PTSD
- Homelessness
- Previous military experience



- Relationship breakdown
- Social isolation
- Trauma connected with experiences with DWP

“Post-traumatic stress disorder. People who are soldiers home from active duty and could not find work. People who have brain injuries from car accidents, homelessness, bereavement.” (focus group participant)

“When someone has a new diagnosis they can be particularly fragile, breakdown of relationship, moving, death of loved one, claiming new benefit or for first time can all be very overwhelming.” (survey respondent)

## Telling Social Security Scotland about additional support needs

Survey respondents were asked if they would disclose information about additional needs resulting from personal experiences. Most respondents (88 per cent) said they would tell Social Security Scotland if it was relevant.

**Table 8: If it were relevant to you or the person you care for, would you want to tell Social Security Scotland about these needs? (n=234)**

	%
Yes	88.0
No	0.4
Don't know	11.5
Total	100

Some focus group participants also said they would be happy to tell Social Security Scotland about any additional needs that were relevant. Some participants thought this would be important for clients to share practical needs that would help them in accessing benefits, and to allow Social Security Scotland to find suitable ways to help clients in the best way possible.

“If they don't have a fixed address they don't have access to a bank account so won't be able to get the money.” (focus group participant)

“If you're going to answer people's needs, you need to know what their needs are in the first place.” (focus group participants)

Some focus group participants noted however, that some clients would not want to disclose certain personal information and that this should be respected. Others noted that whilst it could be helpful to have a record of needs, it was not necessary for Social Security Scotland to know details of personal experiences. Some participants also questioned whether it was appropriate for Social Security Scotland to know about or act on clients' personal circumstances that were not directly related to their benefit application.

“Depends on person. Person has right to say, I don’t want that information on the system but it might be on their best interest to have it on the system. It’s down to the client.” (focus group participant)

“The people who are in the grip of alcohol and substance abuse, some will present that, but some might not want to disclose it. Same with HIV in case they might face any stigma.” (focus group participant)

“You are an agency that is providing a service, but it’s not AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or gamblers AA but it’s not for SSS to intervene in that way.” (focus group participant)

## How and when to tell Social Security Scotland

Survey respondents who said they would disclose additional needs were asked how they would prefer to tell Social Security Scotland. Respondents were able to choose multiple options. Just over half said they would want to do this online (58 per cent). Half said they would want to do this face to face (50 per cent), on a paper form (47 per cent) or on the phone (46 per cent). Email was mentioned as an alternative way to tell Social Security about additional needs.

**Table 9: How would you want to tell us? (n=206)<sup>5</sup>**

	%
Online	57.7
Face to face	49.6
Paper form	47.0
On the phone	45.7
Other	3.0

<sup>5</sup> Percentages are of total respondents as multiple methods could be selected.

Most respondents (68 per cent) who said they would disclose additional needs said they would want to do this alongside an application. An equal number (40 per cent) said they would want to tell Social Security Scotland before they apply or when arranging an appointment.

**Table 10: When would you want to tell us? (n=206)<sup>6</sup>**

	%
Alongside application	68.4
Before you apply, on your first contact with Social Security Scotland	40.2
When arranging an appointment	40.2
Other	6.0

Respondents also noted that they would want to inform Social Security Scotland about additional needs following a change in circumstances. Respondents said that it should be possible to do this at any time and suggestions on how to do this included an online form and via email.

“At any stage, and it should be noted, not ‘lost’.” (focus group participant)

“Through an online form I can update any time those needs arise.” (survey respondent)

## Recording information on additional needs

Focus group participants were asked to give their thoughts on how information on any additional needs that could affect how a client interacts should be recorded. Discussion mirrored the themes discussed above with regard to recording accessibility and disability needs, with some participants unclear that these would only be used by Social Security Scotland staff. As before, participants thought a combination of a drop down menu and text box would be the most suitable way to record information on additional needs on the Social Security Scotland system.

Participants also again highlighted the importance of purpose limitation and confidentiality. They noted that information on additional needs should be kept up-to-date and secure, used to help the client, and restricted to only relevant staff.

<sup>6</sup> Percentages are of total respondents as multiple times could be selected.

“The drop downs with the further info we discussed earlier. If there is consistency, that’s better for the call handlers.” (focus group participant)

“The access needs should be available to everyone. This stuff should only be available to case workers [or] face to face staff.” (focus group participant)

## How Social Security Scotland can support client needs

### Information on adjustments

Survey respondents were asked where they would expect to see information about the different adjustments available from Social Security Scotland. Examples of adjustments include: a British Sign Language or other language interpreter, a quiet room for meetings, or an Easy Read version of a document. Most respondents (87 per cent) said they would want this information as part of an application and over half (69 per cent) said this information should be on the Social Security Scotland website. Just less than half (46 per cent) said a leaflet at Social Security Scotland locations.

**Table 11: Where would you want information about the different adjustments Social Security Scotland could provide? (n=234)<sup>7</sup>**

	%
As part of an application form information sheet	86.8
Social Security Scotland’s Website	68.8
Leaflet available in Social Security locations	46.2
Phone	24.8
Other	9.0

Other locations mentioned by participants are listed below:

- Advocacy services
- Citizen Advice locations
- Carers centres
- Community centres

<sup>7</sup> Percentages are of total respondents as multiple formats could be selected.

- GP surgeries
- Libraries
- Via Local Authorities

## Subject Matter Experts

To support clients who have different needs e.g. addiction to drugs or alcohol, Social Security Scotland are putting in place Subject Matter Experts. These staff will have extra training and experience and will support other staff members to ensure they know about additional support clients might need.

Almost all survey respondents (97 per cent) said it will be helpful or very helpful to have Subject Matter Experts in place.

**Table 12: How helpful do you think it would be to have subject matter experts in place who can support staff when they come across clients with these needs? (n=234)**

	%
Very helpful	78.2
Helpful	18.4
Unhelpful	3
Very unhelpful	0.4
Total	100

## Providing information on additional support

Almost all survey respondents (97 per cent) who said they would disclose relevant information about additional needs said they agreed or strongly agreed that staff should provide extra information about services that could help a client.

**Table 13: Do you agree or disagree that staff should provide extra information about services that can help client’s with their needs? (n=206)**

	%
Strongly agree	82.5
Agree	14.1
Neither agree or disagree	2.9
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0.5
Total	100

When asked how this should be done, respondents stressed that clients should be given information on the range of financial support they may be entitled to. This included the range benefits administered by Social Security Scotland as well as financial support from other organisations such as DWP and local authorities.

“Maybe an information pack listing all the things people are entitled to, or apply for.” (survey respondent)

“Supply contact information for other benefits / services / reductions that a claimant may be eligible for.” (survey respondent)

Respondents also said that Social Security Scotland should advise and direct clients to other forms of support available from relevant organisations. Many suggested this could be via leaflets. Other suggestions included: written information; links to websites; via advertising; over the phone; or during face to face interactions. Directing clients to other possible sources of support was also highlighted as important by focus group participants. Discussion included ‘bridging’ and ‘signposting’ to specialist support groups, advocacy services, and other public services.

“...staff might be able to signpost to another Agency if you've got a problem with mental health issue or they think you're suicidal, they can point you towards the Samaritans or you have problems with rheumatoid arthritis, they can put you on to a support group or something like that and try and make it a whole experience and try and make it as positive as possible as well.” (focus group participant)

“I tend to prefer doing things online so I would like a directory of information and resources on a website. It would be important for you to effectively advertise and promote your ability to provide this information. It should be available as leaflets, posters etc., or with direct/web chats with your staff.” (survey respondent)

“A list of support agencies / projects - if possible tailored to the condition / diagnosis of the individual. [For example] Parkinson Society, Macmillan Cancer, Mental health projects, etc.” (survey respondent)

## **Visits to a Social Security Scotland location**

Focus group participants were asked how Social Security Scotland could support clients visiting a Social Security Scotland location. In particular, participants were asked what information should be shared with front of house staff. Overall, participants felt it was important that personal information about disability and other needs was not shared with reception staff at Social Security Scotland locations.

Participants thought however, that it was appropriate to for Social Security Scotland to share details about accessibility needs. Examples included adjustments relating to vision impairments such as clients who need a guide to accompany them within the building or if the client will be accompanied by a guide dog during their visit. Examples also included if a client was in a wheelchair or would be accompanied by a carer or another individual for support. Other information it could be relevant to share about a client's needs included access to a hearing loop and ability to book parking spaces. Participants noted this type of information could be important in case of a fire drill or other safety event.

Most participants agreed that it should be sufficient for Social Security Scotland to share only the name of the client and their appointment time with reception staff to allow them to welcome clients to the building.

“Wheelchair user, walking stick user. Any accessibility problems they've got, that's about it.” (focus group participant)

“All they need to say is I'm expecting Mr and Mrs X at such a time.” (focus group participant)

## **Supporting clients through knowledge and understanding**

Survey respondents were asked what else Social Security Scotland could do to meet clients' needs in addition to Subject Matter Experts and signposting to other

services. Focus group participants also discussed alternative ways Social Security Scotland can support clients' needs.

Many respondents said that it was important all Social Security Scotland staff displayed qualities aligned with Social Security Scotland's commitment to its core values of fairness, dignity and respect. Answers highlighted that clients should be treated with empathy and kindness by staff who show a caring, helpful attitude. The importance of empathy has been highlighted several times in previous Experience Panels research projects. This was also highlighted by some focus group participants who were pleased to see personal qualities such as empathy included in Social Security Scotland job adverts.

"Having a caring and empathetic nature, one that wants to help to make people's lives that much better and to let them know we care about you." (survey respondent)

"I had a look at the person spec. for benefit advisers recently...in particular it [empathy] was actually written into the person spec." (focus group participant)

Respondents also thought that staff should have a good level of knowledge and understanding about different disabilities or long-term conditions. Respondents suggested staff training and learning from both experts and those with lived experience to accomplish this. Focus group participants described this as staff having both a broad awareness of disability-related and other needs as well as specific training. Comments from survey respondents and focus group participants also highlighted it was important for staff to consider the individual and variable impacts of disabilities and long-term health conditions.

"You could have information from the experts that your people could refer to when faced with an applicant...You don't have to have experts on hand, but for them to write info guides to work from." (survey respondent)

"I think it helps having them talk to disabled people as it helps them raise awareness so they aren't just doing online training." (focus group participant)

## 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 findings from this research will be used by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to inform decisions about the design and development of different ways to support clients. This includes ongoing work to ensure services and



information about the social security system are accessible to everyone, as well as the development of policy and legislation that underpins delivery of the social security system. We will continue to seek new ways to support our clients by listening and responding to their feedback, with a view to making meaningful improvements over the current social security system.

## Annex A: About survey respondents

Where possible, information from the survey was matched to information from the 'About Your Benefits and You' and 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far' surveys.<sup>8</sup> The demographic data collected in these surveys was linked to the information supplied previously by participants. Linking was not possible where there was missing or unclear information. The following demographic information is included to give context to the findings from the survey.

Two thirds of survey respondents (66 per cent) who we have demographic information for identified as either 'female' or 'woman or girl'. One third (32 per cent) identified as either 'male' or 'man or boy'.

**Table Annex A1: Gender of survey respondents (n=197)**

Gender	%
Woman or girl	66
Man or boy	32
Other or Prefer not to say	2
Total	100

Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) were aged 45 to 59, over a third (38 per cent) were aged 60 to 79 and 15 per cent of respondents were aged between 25 and 44.

**Table Annex A2: Age of survey respondents (n=198)**

Age	%
Under 25	0
25 – 44	14.6
45 – 59	47.5
60 – 79	37.9
80 or over	0
Total	100

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government (2017) 'Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Quantitative Research Findings': [www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/) and Scottish Government (2018) 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far': [www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/).

Most respondents (85 per cent) had a disability or long term health condition.

**Table Annex A3: Disability status of respondents (n=200)**

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>%</b>
Disabled	85
Not disabled	15
Total	100

More than half of respondents (60 per cent) had chronic pain and/or a mobility impairment (60 per cent). Over half of respondents (58 per cent) had a physical disability and around a third had a mental health condition (36 per cent). Almost two thirds (65 per cent) reported having another kind of long term health condition.

**Table Annex A4: Disability types of respondents (n=199)<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Disability Types</b>	<b>%</b>
Has chronic pain	60.3
Has a mobility impairment	59.8
Has a physical disability	58.3
Has a mental health condition	35.7
Has another kind of disability or long term health condition	65.3

Less than half of respondents (42 per cent) said they were a carer. Of respondents who said they were a carer, 88 per cent cared for an adult friend or relative. Around one third (36 per cent) were a carer due to old age and almost a quarter (24 per cent) cared for a disabled child.

<sup>9</sup> The percentage is of total respondents, not disabled respondents. Respondents were able to select multiple disability types.

**Table Annex A5: Caring status of respondents (n=198)<sup>10</sup>**

Caring status	%
Not a carer	56.6
Carer	42.4
Prefer not to say	1
Total	100

**Table Annex A6: Who do respondents care for? (n=84)**

Care status	%
Cares for an adult	88.1
Cares for a child	23.8
Carer due to old age	35.7

Survey respondents took part from 29 of 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The majority lived in an urban area (78 per cent).<sup>11</sup>

**Table Annex A7: Location of respondents (n=205)**

Location	%
Urban	78
Rural	22
Total	100

Survey respondents who took part had experience of claiming or helping someone else to claim a wide range of benefits. The most common benefits claimed by survey respondents were Personal Independence Payment (65 per cent) and Disability Living Allowance (57 per cent). The least common benefits claimed were for Healthy Start (1 per cent) and Funeral Expenses (6 per cent).

<sup>10</sup> The percentage is of total respondents who said they were a carer. Respondents were able to select multiple options.

<sup>11</sup> 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](http://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00541327.pdf).

**Table Annex A8: Respondents benefit experience (n=213)<sup>12</sup>**

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>%</b>
Personal Independence Payment	65.3
Disability Living Allowance	57.3
Carer's Allowance	31.0
Winter Fuel Payment	31.0
Cold Weather Payment	28.2
Attendance Allowance	15.5
Discretionary Housing Payment	15.5
Scottish Welfare Fund	11.3
Sure Start Maternity Grant	15.5
Severe Disablement Allowance	12.2
Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit	11.9
Universal Credit	11.3
Funeral Expenses	6.1
Healthy Start	0.5

<sup>12</sup> Respondents had experience of applying for (themselves or someone else) or receiving these benefits within the last three years, but were not necessarily in receipt of the benefit at the time of the survey.

# Annex B: Examples of how to record information about client needs

Example 1:

## Accessibility Needs:

Client has Multiple Sclerosis, they need a venue with wheelchair access and may take additional time when travelling.

Client also has difficulty hearing and needs to use a hearing loop for face to face meetings. They also need additional time when answering complex questions.

A private room has been requested for all face to face meetings.

Example 2:

## Accessibility:

- |                    |                                     |  |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| This Client needs: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A wheelchair accessible venue                    |
|                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | A hearing loop                                   |
|                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | An Interpreter                                   |
|                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Additional time when travelling                  |
|                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Additional time when answering complex questions |
|                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | A venue with a private room                      |
|                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | To bring a family member for support             |

### **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](mailto:socialsecurityexperience@gov.scot) further information.
- Cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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