

Social Security Experience Panels: Meeting People's Needs

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 how Social Security Scotland can support clients' accessibility, disability, and other needs.



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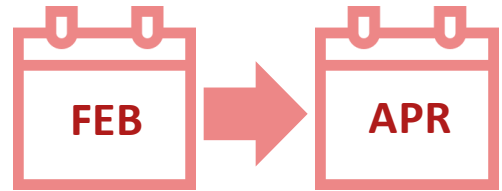
Focus Groups



234

Survey responses

The research took place in



2020

The research explored views on:



Sharing information about accessibility, disability and other needs.



How Social Security Scotland should record information about needs.



Ways Social Security Scotland can support the needs of clients.

About the survey participants

Survey participants were aged between

25 – 79

years old



32%

Man or boy



66%

Woman or girl



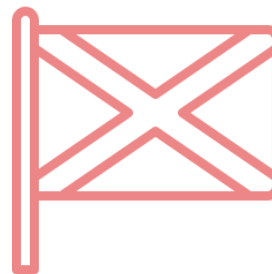
78%

lived in an urban location



22%

lived in a rural location



Respondents took part from **29** local authority areas

Most survey respondents had a disability or long term health condition (85 per cent), including:



chronic pain



mobility impairment



other kinds of long term health condition

Two in five (42 per cent) survey respondents were:



a carer due to **old age,**



a carer to a **child, or**



a carer to an **adult.**

Disability and accessibility needs



Participants agreed that it would be helpful for clients to share information about their needs with Social Security Scotland.



The most mentioned needs were issues around physical accessibility at the agency's locations.



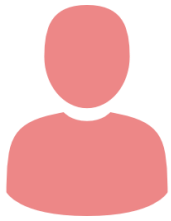
Participants also suggested measures that could be taken to create a comfortable environment and atmosphere for clients.

“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.”

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



Participants also discussed communication needs. Participants said it was important they are able to communicate in a way that suits them. This would help them not to feel stressed or rushed.



“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.”



Participants said it was important that staff understood clients' experiences are unique. They also said that staff should be aware that conditions can vary and may not be visible.



There was a range of options on how much detail Social Security Scotland should request or record. Some participants said they would be happy to share all information about their needs.



Others thought it was not necessary for the agency to have detailed information about their needs.

“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.”



“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.”

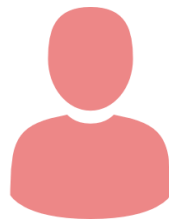


Most participants said they would like to tell the agency about their disability or accessibility needs online. They would like to do this at the same time as making an application.

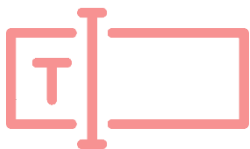
Focus group participants were asked how Social Security Scotland should record information about needs on their internal system.



Participants thought that a drop down list could be useful but might not cover the range of clients' individual needs.



“Drop down is too box ticking, not tailored to you.”



They thought that the open text box would allow more tailored information.

“Open text box is much better. Level of detail is more helpful. More tailored to the individual.”



Most participants agreed the best option was a combination of both a drop down menu and an open text box. They thought this would be efficient and be able to record important details.



“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.”

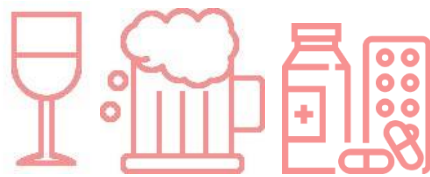
Additional needs

Other than disability, clients may have times in their lives when they need extra support. Participants talked about experiences which could affect how they interact with Social Security Scotland.

Experiences that could mean a client needs extra support included:



Mental health



Addiction



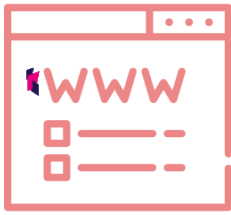
Experience of the prison system



Bereavement



Some participants said they would tell Social Security Scotland about these experiences. Others said that some clients may wish to keep certain personal information private.



Participants said they would like to tell the agency about additional needs at the same time as completing an application. Participants wanted to do this online.

Support

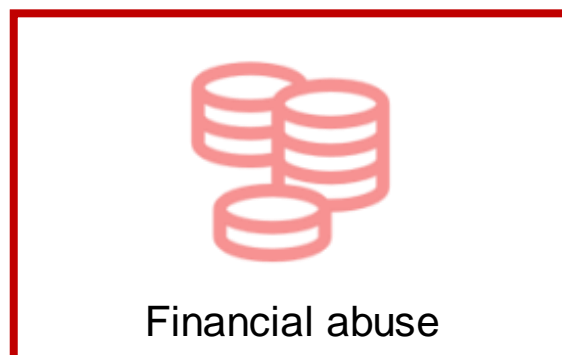


We asked what types of things Social Security Scotland could do to support the needs of clients.



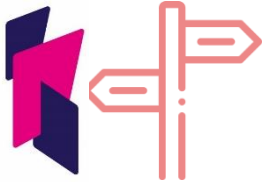
Participants thought that information on available adjustments should be available online and in leaflets.

A majority agreed that staff should be trained to recognised these experiences:

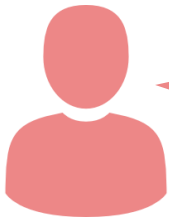




Almost all participants thought it would be helpful for the agency to have staff with extra training and experience on various topics. These staff would be called Subject Matter Experts.



Social Security Scotland could support clients by signposting them to other sources of support. This could be support groups, charities or other government departments.



“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.



Participants thought it could help if staff at reception knew about accessibility needs. Participants said this information should be limited to only relevant facts.



Lastly, participants said it was important that clients should always be treated with empathy and understanding.

Next Steps

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.



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St Andrew's House
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ISBN: 978-1-80004-730-3

Published by the Scottish Government, March 2021