

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Experience Panels: Scottish Carer's Assistance

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**



2,400+

**Experience Panel
members**

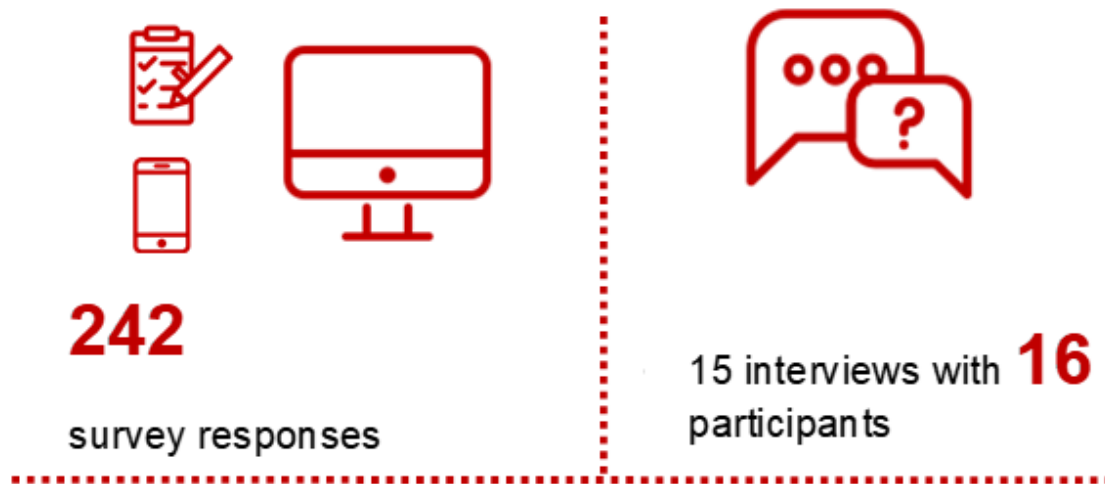
Over 2,400 people from across Scotland joined the Experience Panels when they started in 2017. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.

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

About the research

This summary sets out the findings of the research with Experience Panel members on the proposals on how Scottish Carer's Assistance could be different from Carer's Allowance.

The research included a survey and follow-up interviews.



The research took place between



The research explored views on proposals on:



Who took part

The majority of respondents (86%) were aged between

45 – 79

years old

Respondents identified as:



66 %

Female



33%

Male



77%

Most lived in an urban location



23%

Almost a quarter lived in a rural location



2%

were from an ethnic minority



78%

Most had a disability or long-term health condition



76%

Around three quarters care for a disabled adult



34%

Over a third care for someone due to old age



26%

Around one quarter care for a disabled child

Scottish Carer's Assistance when it is first introduced

A service that works well for carers

Survey respondents were asked what support Scottish Carer's Assistance could be linked to that would be helpful for carers.



Almost all (93%) said other Social Security benefits that carers may be entitled to.



Over four-fifths (85%) said Health and Social Care services.



Just over three quarters (76%) said support at the end of a caring role when a cared for person has died.



Survey respondents and interview participants indicated it would be helpful to access support organisations, carer groups and networks.



They mentioned the importance of giving clear and detailed information considering user's accessibility and needs. They also said that the information needs to be streamlined across agencies, organisations and services.



Quote from panel member:

“Any equivalent organisations, such as carer centres. Just being able to signpost people to organisations that are out there who can provide support, avenues to respite for carers and general information.” (interview participant)

Timescales for re-determinations

Most interview participants agreed with the timescales proposed for re-determinations. A few stressed the need to provide clear, simple and short information about the timescales of redeterminations and appeals.



Quote from panel member:

“The timescales seem acceptable and reasonable, but I think that you have to make clear on the letters sent out that if someone is appealing, that they have 40 days to make the appeal.” (interview participant)

Changing Scottish Carer’s Assistance payments to £0 instead of suspending or ending the award



71%

Over two thirds of survey respondents agreed with setting Scottish Carer’s Assistance to £0 for any week a carer earns too much money.



66%

Two thirds of survey respondents agreed with setting Scottish Carer’s Assistance to £0 if a cared for a person’s disability benefit is stopped or suspended.



Several respondents and participants said these proposals would avoid carers having to go through a re-application process.



Some stated that setting Scottish Carer's Assistance to £0 for any week a carer earns too much money would allow carers to take on occasional/periodical paid jobs.



Some survey respondents and interview participants mentioned that caring work and financial household expenses do not stop when earnings fluctuate or when the disability benefit is stopped or suspended.



Some thought that it is unfair to end a payment because a carer experiences fluctuation in their earnings.



Some felt that that disability benefits are frequently stopped due to administrative error and in other cases they are sometimes reinstated after appeals.



Others argued that the caring role does not stop when the cared for person is in the hospital. Some described providing help with care in hospitals.



A small number of respondents and participants said these proposals should include the provision of simple and clear guidance for certain scenarios.



Quote from panel member:

“The claim process is time consuming so having a zero payment period when there are mitigating circumstances therefore avoiding having to restart the whole claim sounds an excellent idea.”
(survey respondent)

Ending a Scottish Carer’s Assistance award when it has been £0 for six months in a row



54% of survey respondents agreed with ending a Scottish Carer’s Assistance award when it has been £0 for six months in a row.



Some survey respondents mentioned it is a reasonable time for a carer to sort out circumstances concerning paid employment or benefits eligibility.



Some also stated that the 6-month period provides a realistic time frame to acknowledge that a change in caring circumstances are permanent.



A few survey respondents felt that the proposal should allow for exceptional and personal circumstances to be taken into account in case the payments need to be reinstated.



Some survey respondents said that it is not a long enough period to cover certain situations such as longer hospital stays and lengthy appeal processes.



A few also mentioned that this proposal does not consider carers who regularly earn above the earning threshold for more than six months.



Quote from panel member:

“Long enough for them to decide on whether they should make an alternative arrangement, like find work or claim another benefit.” (survey respondent)

Views on Short-Term Assistance



Most interview participants agreed with the proposal to pay Scottish Carer's Assistance to carers when the person they are caring for is receiving short-term assistance.



They had positive views on the financial support during appeal processes. They also felt it would be reassuring for clients that they can go ahead with appeals with less financial worries.



Quote from panel member:

“I agree with the payment. This is a positive as it reduces the stress levels. People will know they still have the money coming in while the decision is under appeal.” (interview participant)

Extra payments for carers in Scotland

Payment of Carer’s Allowance Supplement in the future



48%

Almost half said Carer’s Allowance Supplement should be paid at the same time with Scottish Carer’s Assistance payments in the future.



35%

Over a third said Carer’s Allowance Supplement should be paid as a lump sum.

Many survey respondents and interview participants commented that paying Carer’s Allowance Supplement and Scottish Carer’s Assistance payments at the same time:

would provide carers a better financial support by adding to the household budget.



would avoid some carers missing out on payments due to the specific qualifying period/dates of the current Carer’s Allowance Supplement eligibility rules.



Some survey respondents and interview participants commented that paying Carer's Allowance Supplement as a lump sum:



would allow carers to use that money for themselves, in the form of respite, breaks or holidays.



would allow carers large purchases, help for seasonal budgets like Christmas or summer holidays.



would avoid Carer's Allowance Supplement payments being used for daily living costs.



Some mentioned that both methods of payment for Carer's Allowance Supplement should be available for carers so they could choose their preferred one based on their individual circumstances.



Quote from panel member:

“Paying it at the same time as Scottish Carer's Assistance offers the carer better financial security and budgetary control than waiting for a fixed lump sum payment every e.g. six months.”
(survey respondent)

Carer's Additional Person Payment

75% Three quarters of survey respondents agreed with the proposed eligibility criteria for Carer's Additional Person Payment.



Survey respondents and interview participants noted that **this payment:**

is a **recognition** and appreciation for carers who care for more than one person.



takes into account the **extra amount of care** provided and the extra cost of caring for more than one person.



Some respondents and participants felt there were **potential issues relating to the amount of caring hours** that are required to become eligible for this new payment:

hours providing care can fluctuate between cared for people and/or carers are unable to separate hours of care between cared for people.



the total amount of caring hours proposed is too high a threshold for eligibility.

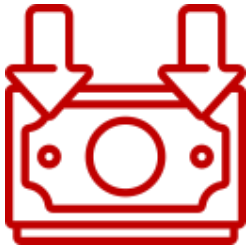


consideration of travelling hours to assist cared for people.



caring is a full-time job (or often more than full-time).





Some survey respondents felt that the amount proposed for the Carer's Additional Person payment is too low.

A few respondents and participants noted caring situations in which the carer would care for two or more people, but they still not be able to qualify for Carer's Additional Person Payment:



a carer who receives a state pension.



a carer who earns above the earning threshold



caring for elderly adults who are not in receipt of disability benefits



The majority of interview participants agreed that Carer's Additional Person Payment should be paid at the same time as a carer's Scottish Carer's Assistance Payments. They said that it would help with their household regular budget.

Quote from panel member:



"I agree because I myself care for 2 children with disabilities and one adult child with disabilities. It is hard going. It's exhausting. It means I cannot ever work because it is 24/7 and I don't ever get a break so that extra money would help massively..." (survey respondent)

Further changes to Scottish Carer's Assistance in the future

Remove education limits from Scottish Carer's Assistance



There was overall support among interview participants the proposal to remove education restrictions to allow carers in full-time education to be eligible for Scottish Carer's Assistance



Many emphasised that this proposal improves the life chances, education development and employability of young carers.



A few stated that having the option of studying full-time allows carers respite from their caring role and it also improves their mental health.



Quote from panel member:

“These young people need a chance. Imagine coming out at 18 and your whole future is caring for your loved ones [...] If something happens and the cared for person dies then they have no further education. Young carers need to be employable.” (interview participant)

Combine hours spent caring for two people

81 % of respondents agreed with the change to allow carers to add hours spent caring for two to reach the 35 hours per week requirement to get Scottish Carer's Assistance. The majority of interview participants also agreed with this proposal.



Some survey respondents and interview participants suggested that this proposal should consider individual circumstances and flexibility as hours providing care can fluctuate and overlap between cared for people.



A few survey respondents suggested that **carers who cared for more than two people** should also be able to benefit from this proposal.



Some respondents mentioned the importance of giving clear eligibility information alongside the implementation of simple application processes.

Quote from panel member:



“The change could be set to apply for carers looking after two or more people for 35 hours per week, rather than simply two, at least initially.”
(survey respondent)

Pay Scottish Carer's Assistance for 12 weeks in specific circumstances

The vast majority of survey respondents agreed with the proposal to pay Scottish Carer's Assistance for 12 weeks after the death of a cared for person. The majority of interview participants also agreed with the proposal.

90 %



Survey respondents and participants stated the importance of the time a carer needs to adjust and look for their future options.



Many respondents and participants mentioned that the carer also needs time to carry out administrative tasks and practical arrangements around the cared for person's death.



Quote from panel member:

"I do agree that extending the time when a cared for person dies is a positive. Carers will have lots of paperwork to complete, and having one less thing to worry about can only be a good thing. It also gives them time to decide if they could perhaps go back to paid employment." (survey respondent)

The vast majority of respondents agreed with the proposal to pay Scottish Carer's Assistance for 12 weeks when a cared for person goes into hospital or residential care. Most interview participants also agreed with this proposal.

91 %



Many survey respondents and interview participants noted that caring does not stop when the cared for person goes to the hospital.



A few interview participants noted that the proposal to pay Scottish Carer's Assistance for 12 weeks when a cared for person goes into hospital or residential care could provide the carer with financial stability to pay household bills.



A small number of respondents suggested that Social Security Scotland should provide clear and simple information and processes to navigate the system as part of implementing these plans.

Quote from panel member:



“Carers duties do not cease when the cared for adult goes into hospital or residential care - they still normally require support help and assistance which may be more difficult and expensive to provide if the carer has to travel further at greater expense.” (survey respondent)

Increase the amount carers can earn and still get Scottish Carer's Assistance

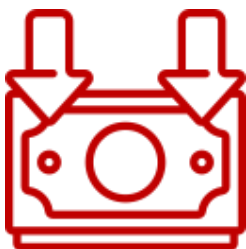
90 % agreed with the proposal to increase the earning limit for Scottish Carer's Assistance. The amount would be equivalent to the income of a carer working for 16 hours and be paid the Real Living Wage. The majority of interview participants also agreed with this proposal.



Several survey respondents and interview participants noted the positive aspects of this proposal. Many mentioned that by allowing carers to increase their earnings, they will be able to participate in paid employment and improve their mental health and wellbeing by doing so.



Some survey respondents and interview participants mentioned that this proposal reduces the fear of losing the Carer's Allowance entitlement, it considers jobs with variable hours and earnings, and it helps with the rising costs of living.



Some respondents and participants said that the proposed earnings threshold is still too low.



A few felt that all carers should be paid Scottish Carer's Assistance payments regardless their personal circumstances and there should not be an earnings threshold at all.



A few survey respondents mentioned the provision of clear information and simple processes to monitor/proof earnings and weekly working hours.



Quote from panel member:

“This would be good because many people juggling work and caring duties are in jobs which have variable hours and opportunities for earning.” (survey respondent)

Getting SCA payments for some weeks after earning over the limit

82 % agreed with the idea of making payments for some weeks after a carer earns over the earnings limit. The majority of interview participants also agreed with this proposal.



Many respondents and participants noted that this proposal:



allows a period of transition and financial adjustment for the carer.



considers jobs which do not pay the same amount on weekly or monthly basis.



lets a carer take on extra paid work, including seasonal and weekend jobs.

Some respondents and interview participants mentioned that for this proposal to work well:

Social Security Scotland needs to set up simple applications processes.



information about the proposal and its rules needs to be communicated clearly.



Quote from panel member:



“I think to keep payments as a stop gap to help carers transition to work is an excellent idea. If a person moved from having to rely on carer’s payments, into work, they would need time to adjust and cope financially...” (survey respondent)

Support for a wider group of unpaid carers: long-term carers

89% of survey respondents said that a payment for long-term carers should be considered further. The majority of interview participants also welcomed this proposal.



Many stated that a long-term carer could be identified by the prognosis of the cared for person. If the cared for person has conditions which are: unlikely to improve, progressive, chronic and/or they endure life-long debilitating diseases; their carer could be a long-term carer.



Some survey respondents and interview participants said long-term carers could be identified based on a long period of time in which the carer has provided caring work.



Many said a long-term carer could be identified as those who will never be able to take up paid employment or who had to give up full employment due to their intense caring work.



Several gave mixed views on the method of payment. Some suggested a lump sum and others suggested that the payment could be paid at the same time as Scottish Carer's Assistance payments. A few proposed that the choice of the method of payment should be offered to carers.

Quote from panel member:



“It should be for people who care for individuals on long term DLA/PIP. Neither my son or my parent are going to 'get better' from their disability, they have lifelong disabilities, and will need lifelong care.” (survey respondent)

Further views on the Scottish Carer's Assistance proposals

General views on Scottish Carer's Assistance proposals



Some survey respondents and interview participants gave positive feedback on the proposals. They mentioned that they made them feel valued, recognised and respected.



Many survey respondents noted the experiences of carers with underlying entitlements and how unfair they felt it was that they are not eligible for the changes proposed. They said they do not have access to carers benefits, supplements, concessions and discounts.



A few survey respondents stressed the importance of widely advertising Scottish Carer's Assistance proposals and their rules.



A small number of respondents noted that clear information and simplified processes regarding these benefit changes, their new rules and their eligibility criteria should be put in place.



Quote from panel member:

“It must be more widely advertised and simpler to understand if you qualify. Many don't go near a carers centre because it is mostly for older people.” (survey respondent)

Effects of SCA proposals on different groups



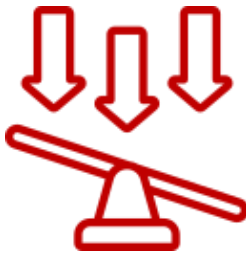
Many survey respondents and interview participants held negative views on how carers of state pension age would not be eligible for the changes proposed as part of the Scottish Carer's Assistance.



A few interview participants mentioned that the proposals and plans around Scottish Carer's Assistance would improve children's rights and wellbeing for young carers and also for carers who have children.



A few interview participants mentioned that carers from ethnic minorities and different religions can be impacted diversely by the SCA proposals because of cultural differences, ideas about what constitutes being a carer and language barriers.



Some interview participants thought the proposals would have an impact of reducing inequality. However, a few participants highlighted that the eligibility criteria are still restrictive to many carers.



A few raised concerns about circumstances which may impact on a carer's eligibility for Scottish Carer's Assistance. These included for example carers who also need care due to their long-term conditions or disabilities.

Quote from panel member:



"I'm one of the ones that falls into the gaps, because often the main carer is needing care themselves [...] it's actually all relevant, because I'm a disabled person who is caring, but if I get a carer, more gets taken off me. And the kids are having to do things that they shouldn't have to be doing at 16 and 17..." (interview participant)

Impact on rural and island communities



Many interview participants noted that carers who are located in rural and island communities have extra costs because the various key services they need are not near where they live.



A few interview participants noted the lack of carers groups/networks and various services for carers and the cared for people in rural and remote areas.

Quote from panel member:



“...caring for someone in rural areas costs a heck of a lot more than caring for someone in a town. I think for people in rural and remote locations should get an additional supplement because of the cost of travelling everywhere to do their caring.” (interview participant)

General views on caring work and payments for carers



Many survey respondents and interview participants perceived their caring work as replacing the caring work that public services should be carrying out.



Many also stated that their unpaid caring work saves governments and public services a vast amount of money.



Many survey respondents and interview participants stressed that the current value of Carer's Allowance payments is too low and does not cover the costs of living.



Many also requested to be paid minimum or real living wage that covers a basic standard of living.

Quote from panel member:



“I think that the carer role is a vital one to society. Many people do it through a sense of family obligation. Regardless, this results in a cost saving to the government and the taxpayers. The Social Care system would simply collapse if it weren't for carers...” (survey respondent)

What's next?



The Scottish Government will continue to work with stakeholders and the Experience Panels in the design and development of Scotland's social security system.



The findings in this report will be used by teams working on designing and implementing the new Scottish Carer's Assistance benefit and the Carer's Additional Person Payment.



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