



# Social Security Experience Panels - decision making and reviewing an award



**EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Background and research methods</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Helping clients understand decision making</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Telling clients about a decision.....	7
Helping clients understand a decision.....	9
Format and presentation .....	12
Assessment report .....	13
Criteria .....	14
Other decision letter information.....	15
<b>Reviewing a benefit award</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>What's next?</b> .....	<b>20</b>

# Introduction

In June and July 2019, the Scottish Government carried out a survey and focus groups with Experience Panel members with experience of disability benefits. This research gathered views on how Social Security Scotland can help clients understand the decisions that are made on their benefit applications. It also covered what happens when a benefit award is reviewed.

This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels programme of research. In total, 228 Experience Panel members with experience of the relevant benefits took part in this survey (a response rate of 21 per cent). 101 Experience Panel members took part in 17 focus groups across Scotland. This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work with Experience Panel members.

## Summary

The vast majority of focus group participants said that they would want Social Security Scotland to tell them about the decision on a disability benefit application by letter.

Some participants said that they would be content with finding out the decision on an application by other means such as email or text because they offer a more immediate response. However most said they would still also like a follow up letter. The least popular method of finding out the outcome of a benefit application was by telephone.

Many participants said that the option to pick a preference for how Social Security Scotland communicates with them from the outset was important.

All participants said that they would like to find out about the decision on a benefit application the same way regardless of the outcome, whether successful or unsuccessful.

Survey respondents suggested a number of ways that Social Security Scotland can help clients understand decisions which are made on benefit applications. The most common response was that the decision should be explained in clear, simple language and using an easy to understand format. Many respondents also suggested that Social Security Scotland should provide detailed and transparent reasons for the decision, the criteria and the evidence used.

Out with the main themes above, a few respondents suggested that the following from Social Security Scotland would help them understand a decision taken on their benefit application:

- Clear communication through all stages of the application, not just the decision outcome;

- A named person within Social Security to contact for follow-up;
- A copy of the face to face assessment report;
- Information about the decision making process;
- Information about who made the decision;
- Information about the appeals process; and
- Next steps, and timescales.

Almost all focus group participants said that they thought that Social Security Scotland sending a detailed explanation of why they made a decision in a report sent alongside the decision letter was a good idea. Participants said they would find the following information useful in the letter and report:

- Summary of the evidence used;
- Summary of the criteria, where the applicant has and has not met it;
- Qualifications of the decision maker;
- Next steps – the details of the award, including the amount and timescales for payment and review;
- Next steps – the right to appeal and the appeal process; and
- Contact details for Social Security Scotland to discuss the decision, ask a query or follow up.

Like survey respondents, most focus group participants said that both the letter and report should be short and written in plain English.

Nearly all survey respondents said that they would like to receive a copy of their face to face assessment report, regardless of whether their application was successful or unsuccessful. Over nine in ten respondents (93 per cent) would like to receive a copy of the report with the decision letter if they were awarded the benefit. This was slightly lower than the percentage of respondents who would like to receive a copy of the report if they were not awarded the benefit (97 percent), or if they were awarded the benefit but on a lower level of award than they were expecting (96 per cent).

Similarly, most focus group participants said that they would want to receive a copy of their face to face assessment report, regardless of whether their application was successful or unsuccessful. Some participants felt that it could be made an option for people to request the report, or have the option of opting in or opting out to receive it at the application stage.

Over nine in ten survey respondents said that they would want to receive information on the benefit criteria once Social Security Scotland has made their

decision (94 per cent). Around six in ten respondents preferred post (62 per cent) and one third preferred email (33 per cent) to receive this. Five per cent of respondents preferred 'another way' of receiving this information.

In contrast to survey respondents, most focus group participants said that they felt that the benefit criteria document would be more relevant at the application stage.

Over one third of survey respondents (36 per cent) said they would like Social Security Scotland to contact them one month beforehand to tell them if a benefit award was being reviewed. Around one quarter of respondents would like about two months' notice (23 per cent) and three months' notice (24 per cent). The least popular options were one to three weeks beforehand (12 per cent) and longer than three months (six per cent).

Over eight in ten survey respondents said they would like to receive a notification that their benefit award is ending by post (83 per cent), whilst four in ten said they would like the notification by email (41 per cent). The least popular options for a notification that a benefit award is ending were text message (14 per cent) and phone call (10 per cent).

Focus group participants held mixed views on whether they would like Social Security Scotland to contact them to tell them that a benefit award will be reviewed. Many participants said that they would rather not be told because they felt this would cause them to worry, whilst others felt that it was crucial that they be notified of a review.

Over one third of survey respondents said that Social Security Scotland should give about one months' notice (36 per cent) or about two months' notice (35 per cent) if a review found a client was no longer eligible for a benefit, or the amount they were getting was going to change. One quarter of respondents would like more than two months' notice (25 per cent). Only five per cent of respondents said Social Security Scotland should give less than one months' notice (between one to three weeks). The most common response amongst focus group participants was a 'couple of months.' The longest notice period suggested was four months, and the minimum period was one month.

If Social Security Scotland is communicating a change or end of award to a client, most survey respondents and focus group participants said they would want a detailed explanation of why the benefit award is changing and the information used to make the decision. Other information respondents said they would find useful was similar to what was requested for the initial decision letter: next steps and timescales, the right to appeal, and signposting to support and advocacy organisations that can help.

## **Background and research methods**

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions. As part of the work

to prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels. Over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits coming to Scotland have registered as Experience Panel members. The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design a new social security system that works for the people of Scotland, based on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

In this research project, we used a survey and focus groups to ask Experience Panel members their thoughts on the following:

- how Social Security Scotland can best communicate decisions which are made on benefit applications; and
- what happens when a benefit award is reviewed.

Participants were recruited from the Scottish Government Experience Panels. All Experience Panel members who have told us they have experience of disability benefits were invited to take part in the survey and focus groups.<sup>1</sup>

The Social Security Experience Panels are a longitudinal research project. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have relevant experience. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the participants only, and are not indicative of the views of a wider Scottish population. Percentages are given only to show a broad sense of the balance of opinion across participants. Throughout this report, survey respondents are referred to as 'respondents' and focus group participants are referred to as 'participants.'

Demographic information for the Experience Panel members who took part in this survey is not available for this project. More detailed demographic information on the Experience Panels as a whole can be found in '*Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*'<sup>2</sup>.

## Helping clients understand decision making

In this project, survey respondents and focus group participants were presented with a list of different documents that may be used to tell clients the decision on their application. These were a decision letter, detailed report, face to face assessment report and benefit criteria. The following sections detail the findings and key themes that emerged about each document.

<sup>1</sup> Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2018). *Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*. [Online] Available at: [www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083)

## Telling clients about a decision

Focus group participants were asked to think about how they would want Social Security Scotland to tell them about the decision on their disability benefit application. The vast majority of participants favoured a letter through the post.

Participants explained that a hard copy letter was useful for a number of reasons. They highlighted the importance of having the decision on an application 'in black and white' and of having a physical document. Some participants noted that the hard copy decision letter is currently needed to gain entitlement to other benefits and services.

"Paper copies are the best, as you can use it as proof for other things and it also makes the decision 'more real'."

Participants said they favoured a letter because they could retain it for their personal records and future use, and could return to the letter to read it as and when they needed to. They could also physically take it to other people and places for support understanding the content.

"A letter lets you take your time to decide...there needs to be a paper trail."

"Letter because it's easier to share the decision with anyone who might be helping you."

Some participants mentioned that they would be content with finding out the decision on an application by email. This was because it offered a more immediate response. However most said they would still like a follow up letter in the post. These participants highlighted concerns about email getting lost or missed within mail folders, as well as variations in the IT literacy and connectivity of people who will be applying.

"Depending where you live, email response or text notice, signal goes off and on in this town."

"Not everyone has a printer or a smartphone to show other people it – you can delete an email by accident."

The least popular method of finding out the outcome of a benefit application among participants was by telephone. Many participants felt that this form of communication would be stressful. They explained that a phone call has particular drawbacks, namely that there is no record of the conversation to return to and that it may be difficult for some people to remember or understand the detail of the conversation.

“May misunderstand if it’s over the phone – may [get] cross wires and [it’s] difficult as you can’t have proof. Some people might not remember what was said over the phone.”

Some participants felt that it is easy to miss an important phone call, or that it could happen at an inappropriate time. A few participants highlighted that a phone call would not be appropriate for some people. Examples included those with hearing loss or deafness, and those who find talking on the phone makes them nervous.

“The phone calls are carried out with no regard for where an individual is at any time and the emotional impact that this can have on the individual.”

A few participants said that they would like to find out the decision by text message or receive a text message to alert them that a decision had been made and they would receive a letter in the coming days. However these participants were in the minority.

“No, because you’re dreading what’s coming, if there’s a message that something is coming from post then this will cause stress.”

“If clients are alerted that a decision has been made by text/email, the details and further info should be immediately available at that point.”

A few participants mentioned that they would like the option of finding out the outcome of a benefit application face to face, whilst another participant suggested an online system.

“Account based system would also be good - logging into an online account to have a look at the decision after an email would be much less invasive.”

“Past experiences with the DWP are that there’s no face to face interaction with the decision makers – the Social Security Scotland decision makers should have interaction with us through the process, I’m more of a face to face person.”

Participants had individual preferences as to how they would want Social Security Scotland to tell them about a decision on an application and many felt that the option to choose a communication method is key. They envisaged a way in which they could specify a communication preference on the application form.

“People should have the option on how they’re contacted – some people are not computer literate so should always have a letter.”

“Everyone has different needs, as for me phone calls give me nervousness and emails I can take my time to read so depends on the individual.”

As well as being able to choose how they are contacted by Social Security Scotland, a few participants highlighted that the option of being able to send communications such as decision letters to a named person would be beneficial.

“Another positive communication option is if people would like mail sent to a different place, a carer, CAB, someone they trust. That means that individual can communicate the information in a supportive way.”

All participants said that they would like to find out about the decision the same way regardless of the outcome, whether successful or unsuccessful.

## **Helping clients understand a decision**

Survey respondents were asked how Social Security Scotland can best help clients understand decisions which are made on benefit applications. The most common response was that Social Security Scotland should provide information explaining the decision in clear, simple language and using an easy to understand format. Like focus group participants, many respondents said that a decision letter would help them understand the decision.

“Make sure all letters are easy to read and understand.”

“Applicants should be sent a letter which explains simply and without jargon what the decision is and the basis for the decision.”

Many respondents suggested that any decision letter should contain detailed and transparent reasons for the decision. Each aspect of the criteria should be explained fully, and highlight the evidence used.

“A full explanation on how they came to the decision and what documents they used to assist them in making the decision.”

“State clearly how decision came about. State what the criteria was and how I did or did not satisfy the criteria.”

Whilst most respondents said that a decision letter would help them understand the decision made by Social Security Scotland on their benefit application, a few respondents suggested that a telephone call or face to face meeting, followed by a letter, would be useful. A few respondents also suggested that contact details for Social Security Scotland which they could use for further information or discussion, would help them understand the decision made.

“By explaining orally via telephone conversation followed up in writing.”

“I think it would be better to have a face to face meeting to have the decision given to you with an explanation of the decision. When you get a letter with a decision, you want to speak to someone to clarify the decision and ask what this means for you as an individual. This could all be explained at a decision meeting, saving stress, numerous phone calls etc.”

Out with the main themes above, a few respondents suggested that the following from Social Security Scotland would help them understand a decision taken on a benefit application:

- Clear communication through all stages of the application, not just the decision outcome;
- Named person within Social Security Scotland to contact for follow-up;
- A copy of the face to face assessment report;
- Information about the decision making process;
- Information about who made the decision;
- Information about the appeals process; and
- Next steps and timescales.

As highlighted in the survey excerpts above, many respondents mentioned a combination of these themes when answering this question.

“Sharing all the information you have so I can check it’s accurate. Telling me why you have made the decision in clear easy to understand language matched against your criteria and tell me clearly what the next steps are and what that means. Tell me the appeals process if I need it, being clear on timescales and process and what will happen.”

“Explain, using Plain English, what decision is. How it was arrived at. What that decision means in respect of the benefit award (or no award). How to appeal that decision.”

Focus group participants were told that one idea for the future is that Social Security Scotland will send applicants a letter giving their decision, and a detailed explanation of why they made that decision in a report sent alongside the letter. Participants were asked what they thought of this format. Almost all participants said that they thought this was a good idea.

“It would make it more transparent and open. Detail and evidence of what was used to make the decision.”

Participants were asked what sort of information they would find useful in the decision letter and detailed report in understanding how Social Security Scotland has made its decision. Participants mentioned different kinds of information, and most of this mirrored what survey respondents said they would find useful in helping clients understand decisions which are made on benefit applications. The most common sort of information participants noted were:

- Summary of the evidence Social Security Scotland used;
- Summary of the criteria, where the applicant has and has not met it;
- Information about who made the decision;
- Next steps – the details of the award, including amount and timescales for payment and review;
- Next steps – the right to appeal and the appeal process; and
- Contact details for Social Security Scotland to discuss the decision, ask a query or follow up.

“Something short on appeals - if you disagree, this is what you should do, the next stage is, who to contact, timescales. A road map.”

“A clear signpost if you need to talk to someone or understand this, here’s the number to contact.”

Participants were asked why they would find this sort of information useful. They explained that the information is about them and so they are entitled to see it. Participants noted that a detailed report alongside the decision letter would also allow applicants to check that Social Security Scotland had used more than one evidence source and would provide a record of how the evidence was used. The report would also allow applicants to understand how they measured against each criteria. Participants explained that they would file the report to use in the future and would find it helpful if they needed to appeal or reapply.

“A detailed report would allow clients to see where the misunderstanding or problem has occurred and target those elements. People forget things on the form. A specific set of examples on how the supporting info has been understood, may trigger more of that, would prove useful at the reconsideration stage.”

It is for these reasons that most participants said that they would want a detailed report alongside their decision letter regardless of whether their application was successful or unsuccessful.

“I feel like a sponge that's been rung out, constantly describing myself in a negative way to make people understand. I need to fight the battle for myself, which is why the report is important.”

Only a few participants felt that a detailed report would be unnecessary if the application was successful.

“The more paperwork that goes out to everyone, the more expensive the system becomes. If you're successful you don't need that detailed report. If you want to take it forward then you can ask for it.”

## **Format and presentation**

Participants were asked how the letter and report should be formatted and how Social Security Scotland can make it as easy as possible for clients to understand a decision. Like survey respondents, most participants said that both the letter and report should be short and written in plain English.

“These benefit letters start to become like wallpaper in the house, 16 page letters that could be written in two.”

Some participants provided some thoughts on format, distinguishing what sort of information should be in the decision letter and what should be in the report. These participants felt that the letter should only contain key award information and next steps, with any references to evidence, disabilities or health conditions contained within the report.

“The letter should be basic information on how much, when available from, when the first payment will be. Then ‘please see attached report for further info regarding decision’.”

Participants explained that they would not want details of their disability or health condition on the decision letter because it is often used to access other services and entitlements.

“If in the decision letter it states that yes this person is entitled to this, you don't need to know why, if they have physical or invisible disability. All they need to know is having a letter that they are entitled to this benefit and when this is until. I don't want people to know the illnesses I have. They don't need to know my disability.”

Some participants had different ideas for formatting and presentation to ensure that it is as easy as possible for clients to understand a decision made on an application:

“If it’s too much information, colour code it for each section to easily distinguish between them to see what is most important.”

“Make sure the decision letter is on top.”

“Some people might need an explanation of the process/terms in a leaflet in easy read.”

## Assessment report

Survey respondents and focus group participants were told that one idea for the future is that Social Security Scotland will send applicants a copy of their face to face assessment report. This would be sent alongside the decision letter and detailed report.

Nearly all respondents said they would like to receive a copy of their face to face assessment report, regardless of the outcome. Over nine in ten respondents (93 per cent) would like to receive a copy of report with the decision letter if they were awarded the benefit. This was slightly lower than the percentage of respondents who would like to receive a copy of the report if they were not awarded the benefit (97 per cent), or if they were awarded the benefit but on a lower level of award than they were expecting (96 per cent).

**Table 1: Would you like to receive a copy of your face to face assessment report? (n=213-218)<sup>3</sup>**

	%
If you were awarded the benefit	93
If you were not awarded the benefit	97
You were awarded a lower level of award than you were expecting	96

Similarly, most focus group participants said that they would want to receive a copy of their face to face assessment report automatically, regardless of whether their application was successful or unsuccessful. They said they would want this for much the same reasons as they stated for the detailed decision report:

- To check that the report is accurate;
- For further information on the decision making process;
- To start the appeal process if necessary;

<sup>3</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

- To store and keep for future use or applications; and
- To have a physical document to read and/or give to others.

“Then you have everything, you don’t need to wait weeks to get a report and then you’ll have everything there and you can start your appeal and start the process quickly.”

“I’m sure if I went to doctor if I sat there and told them the assessors said this or that, I wouldn’t be able to remember, so I can hand over the report and they can read it.”

Some groups were mixed in their views however, as some participants felt that it could be made an option for people to request the assessment report, or have the option of opting in or opting out to receive it at the application stage. This is because participants thought that it might be overwhelming or distressing to receive this report, particularly if unsuccessful.

“I would say no. It’s overwhelming. It should be obvious you can request it, it’s not at the moment. It should say how to ask for it in the report.”

“A bulky package may overwhelm people.”

In contrast, one or two participants thought that the report should be sent automatically if unsuccessful.

“Distressing when you’ve been unsuccessful to have to wait for a long time to receive the report back.”

A few participants questioned the objectivity of a written report, asking whether audio or video recordings would be available.

“Information on how to get the recording of the assessment should be included in the letter/information pack. I would want to access the audio or video recordings because written reports can be very subjective and depend on the person who carried out the assessment.”

## Criteria

Over nine in ten respondents said that they would want to receive information on the benefit criteria alongside a detailed explanation of their decision (94 per cent).

**Table 2: Would you want to receive information on the benefit criteria once Social Security Scotland has made their decision? (n=216)**

	%
Yes	94
No	1
I have no preference	5
Total	100

Respondents were asked how they would prefer to receive information on benefit criteria alongside the decision letter. Around six in ten respondents preferred post (62 per cent) and one third preferred email (33 per cent). Five per cent of respondents preferred ‘another way’ of receiving this information. Their suggestions included phone, face to face, a combination of communication methods, and any personal communication preference.

**Table 3: If Social Security Scotland did send out information on benefit criteria and a copy of the evidence they used when making their decision alongside the decision letter, how would you prefer to receive this? (n=218)**

	%
By post	62
By email	33
Another way	5
Total	100

We also asked focus group participants if they would want to be sent a copy of the criteria for the benefit alongside the decision letter and detailed explanation. In contrast to survey respondents, most participants said that they felt that the benefit criteria document would be more relevant at the application stage.

“Criteria is usually a before thing, that comes with application and info. Should have it already.”

Some participants said that they would still find a copy of a criteria useful, for example, if they had misplaced the original copy or did not have the means to get the information easily.

## **Other decision letter information**

Survey respondents were asked if there anything else Social Security Scotland should include with the decision letter. The most common response was that Social

Security Scotland should include information about the right to appeal and the process of appeal.

“Information about what to do if I don't agree with the decision.”

“A clear explanation of the appeals process and all the stages involved, with timescales.”

For some respondents, this would also include what support and advocacy organisations could help them through the process following an unsuccessful decision on an application.

“Signposting of other benefits or organisations that can help.”

Many focus group participants similarly said that they would appreciate signposting to national and local external help organisations. Some participants suggested that Social Security Scotland could highlight any other benefits they may be entitled to, depending on the outcome of the application.

“Make signpost to national and regional support groups and websites.”

“Links to community support/schemes/things they could be benefiting from. Organisations in the local area.”

Some respondents said that they would like to receive information about the details of their benefit award if their application was successful. This included information on the benefit length, benefit rates, the date the benefit would start and when they could expect to receive their first payment.

“Details of what rates of benefit will be paid and when I can expect to receive the first payment and the rate and regularity of future payments.”

“Information on how long the award is for and whether any further contact will be made with a client until end of award date.”

With an open text question, respondents were asked if there is anything else they would like to add about how Social Security Scotland should communicate decisions to clients. The most common response was that clients of Social Security Scotland should be able to state their preferred method to receive communications.

“By using whatever format is preferable to that particular client and their needs.”

## Reviewing a benefit award

Participants were asked to think about what they would want to happen when Social Security Scotland reviews a benefit award. They were told that when Social Security Scotland reviews a benefit award, some clients might undergo a 'light touch review'. This is where Social Security Scotland will review the evidence it holds and decides whether to continue to award the benefit, end the award or change the amount paid to clients.

Respondents were asked how far in advance they would like Social Security Scotland to contact them to tell them it will be reviewing the benefit award. Over one third of respondents (36 per cent) would like notice about one month beforehand. Around one quarter of respondents would like about two months' notice (23 per cent) and three months' notice (24 per cent). The least popular options were one to three weeks beforehand (12 per cent) and longer than three months (six per cent).

**Table 4: How far in advance would you like Social Security Scotland to contact you to tell you it will be reviewing your benefit award? (n=217)**

	%
One to three weeks beforehand	12
About a month beforehand	36
About two months beforehand	23
About three months beforehand	24
Longer than three months	6
Total	101

Focus group participants were asked if they would like Social Security Scotland to contact them to tell them that a benefit award will be reviewed. Participants held mixed views on this. Many participants said that they would rather not be told that Social Security Scotland was reviewing their award because this would cause them to worry.

“I would really hate to get something in advance. Every brown envelope puts me in panic. To warn me I'm to be put under review will not let me sleep.”

Alternatively, some participants emphasised the importance of keeping the client informed about the review process, and that Social Security Scotland should state any review period clearly in the initial decision letter.

“When you get your award you should tell us when it will be reviewed and stick to that, it’s awful being reviewed out of the blue for no apparent reason”

These participants felt that the letter could be worded in a way which highlights that clients do not need to take any action, which might reduce the potential worry and stress.

“The letter should explain it’s time now for your review and let them know who they can contact. Make sure you tell them that they do not have to do anything and make this clear.”

A few participants felt that it was important that they be notified of a review, so that they too could review the evidence held by Social Security Scotland for its accuracy.

“Need sight of any evidence so there’s a right to reply before the decision made. It should say what evidence you’ve got and ask I agree with it.”

Survey respondents were told that after a light touch review, a client's benefit could change, for example, increase, decrease, or stop altogether. For example, if a client's circumstances change and they are no longer eligible for the benefit, their payment would stop. Respondents were asked how much notice Social Security Scotland should give to clients if a review found they were no longer eligible for a benefit, or the amount they were getting was going to change.

Just over one third of respondents said that Social Security Scotland should give about one month's notice (36 per cent) or about two months' notice (35 per cent). One quarter of respondents would like more than two months' notice (25 per cent). Only five per cent of respondents said that Social Security Scotland should give less than one month's notice (between one to three weeks).

**Table 5: If you were no longer eligible for a benefit, or the amount you were getting was going to change, how much notice should the agency give you? (n=218)**

	%
Between one to three weeks	5
About a month	36
About two months	35
More than two months	25
Total	101

Over eight in ten respondents said they would like to receive a notification that their benefit award is ending by post (83 per cent), whilst four in ten said they would like the notification by email (41 per cent). The least popular options for a notification that a benefit award is ending were text message (14 per cent) and phone call (10 per cent).

**Table 6: How would you like to receive notification that your benefit award is ending? (tick all that apply) (n=218)<sup>4</sup>**

	%
Post	83
Email	41
Text message (SMS)	14
Phone call	10

We also asked focus group participants how much of a notice period they would like, if the award amount was going to change following a light touch review. The most common response was a ‘couple of months.’ The longest notice period suggested was four months, and the minimum period was one month.

“6-8 weeks. Takes time to find what you can do, how you can manage financially.”

“Transition period to adjust.”

With an open text question, survey respondents were asked what information they would like Social Security Scotland to include when they communicate a change or end of award. Respondents provided similar answers to those they provided as to how Social Security Scotland can help clients understand the decision on an application form.

A majority of respondents said they would want a detailed explanation of why the benefit award is changing and the information used to make that decision.

“A detailed explanation on why and how the decision was arrived at.”

Some respondents said they would like Social Security Scotland to communicate next steps and timescales. This included information on the right to appeal, the appeals process and signposting to support and advocacy organisations that can help.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

“What is changing. When it is changing. What I can do about it.”

“The reason why the benefit is changing, and other agencies that can be contacted for help/advice if required.”

Other respondents noted Social Security Scotland should highlight alternative benefits or sources of the income the client may be entitled to.

“Alternative possible other benefits that may be claimed, also if benefit stopped or payments changed information on the knock on effect on other household income loss of housing costs, passport benefits etc.”

Many respondents mentioned a combination of these themes. Focus group participants provided the same suggestions as survey respondents.

## What's next?

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

You told us that choosing the best communication method for you at the outset of the process of applying for Disability Assistance is important.

We are addressing this in the following ways:

- Social Security Scotland recognise that clients will require options and choices for how they interact with the agency and it will offer a multi-channel approach to doing this. Clients will be able to state their preference for communication methods when applying.

You told us that the reason for a decision about an award needs to be transparent and easy to understand.

- Our intention is that clients will receive a decision letter telling them in plain English whether they are eligible for an award and what level that award will be. Additionally, they will receive a decision report that will detail the supporting information that was received and used by the Case Manager to make a decision.

You told us that a copy of a consultation (assessment) report would be useful to receive with the decision letter.

- If an individual has had a consultation (assessment) with a Practitioner in order to gather further information the report will be included in the decision notification as standard.

You told us that clear information about the details of the award, including the amount and timescales for payment and review and an individual's right to appeal and the appeal process should be included in the decision letter.

- We will set out the amount of the award, payment details and timescales for payment and review in a way that is straightforward, easy to understand and in plain English. Similarly, information about how to appeal and the process to appeal will be included with the decision letter.

## 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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