Social Security Scotland – Insights Research Findings to March 2020

1. Introduction

An insights research programme has been established in Social Security Scotland. To date, it has involved the collection of both routine monitoring and experience information. The results from this research programme will be used to continuously improve services.

This publication covers the period September 2018 to March 2020, during which Carer's Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant benefits were live.

2. Key Findings

- The insights programme has had feedback from clients on their experiences of engaging with the organisation during the period September 2018 to March 2020.

- During this period Social Security Scotland received approximately 173,100 contacts by phone. Of these, approximately 95,800 were in relation to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, 36,400 were in relation to Carer's Allowance Supplement, 10,300 were in relation to Funeral Support Payment, 2,300 were in relation to Young Carer Grant and 28,300 were general enquiries.

- Over 1,000 clients left ratings on their experience of engaging with the Social Security Scotland telephony service. Of those, 71% felt their call was answered quickly, 63% felt that they got what they needed from the call, and 70% were happy with the overall service they received.

- Over 30,000 clients left ratings following paper, online and telephony applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. Of paper applicants who left a rating, 86% rated the service as Very good or Good. For online applicants, 95% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony applicants, 99% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good.

- Over 1,900 clients left ratings following paper, online and telephony applications for Funeral Support Payment. Of paper applicants who left a rating, 88% rated the service as Very good or Good. For online Funeral Support Payment applicants, 90% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony Funeral Support Payment applicants, 98% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good.

- Over 860 clients left ratings following online applications for Young Carer Grant. For online Young Carer Grant applicants, 95% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good.

- A subset of clients left feedback in the form of open text comments following applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant. The majority of comments (76% for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods telephony applications, 70% for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods online applications, 89% for Funeral Support Payment telephony applications, 63% for Funeral Support Payment online applications and 68% for Young Carer Grant online applications) were positive.

3. Background

An analytical team within Social Security Scotland are responsible for collecting, analysing and publishing management information, research and statistics that relate to the delivery and performance of Social Security Scotland. Within this, a programme of insights research has been established, to gather the experiences, needs and priorities of those who use and deliver social security in Scotland. This information, in turn, will be fed back into the organisation's processes, policy and practice, to facilitate continuous improvement. This work will be co-designed with people who have lived experience of social security, building on the work undertaken as part of the Social Security Experience Panels[1] and the development of the Social Security Charter[2].

Further detail on the background of the insights research programme and future plans can be found here.

4. Methodology

Insights research to date has involved the collection of routine management information, and directly asking clients and staff about their experiences. The following section outlines the methods used to collect insights data during the current reporting period.

4.1. Client Insights

To capture client interactions and experiences with Social Security Scotland processes and services at point of contact, research methods have been included in both telephony and online channels using embedded surveys.

4.1.1. Telephony – call data and general call experience

Management information is taken from the organisation's telephony reporting system.

An automated survey mechanism is in place to gain insights from clients about how well telephony services are being received. Clients have the option of completing the survey following any telephone interaction (e.g. from general enquiry to benefit-specific contact). The focus for this survey is experience of the call.

Full telephony experience questions and response options are detailed in Annex A.

4.1.2. Applications

Clients' immediate views and feelings on the process of applying for benefits, across telephone, online and paper applications have also been gathered.

For the current reporting period, this has taken the form of two client satisfaction questions embedded within a questionnaire, which clients complete at the end of applications. For clients applying via paper application, the questionnaire is included in their application pack, with a freepost envelope for returning both forms. For clients applying online, the questionnaire is available prior to submitting the application. For clients applying over the telephone, a client advisor takes the client through the questionnaire over the phone.

Full application experience questions and response options are detailed in Annex B.

During December 2019, work has been undertaken to integrate these client satisfaction questions into the application process, so that they are completed prior to submission. This publication covers the period up to end March 2020 and covers three and a half months of experience ratings/comments collected as part of the new integrated application process. This publication shows improved response rates to client satisfaction questions.

4.2. Staff Insights

Workforce statistics for Social Security Scotland are now being published as official statistics. The latest workforce statistics for Social Security Scotland publication for the period up to end March 2020 has been released 16th of June 2020 and can be found here.

5. Findings

### 5.1 Client Insights – telephony contacts

From September 2018 to 23rd of March 2020 Social Security Scotland received approximately, 173,100 contacts by phone. Social Security Scotland stopped receiving inbound phone calls after 23rd of March due

to COVID-19 lockdown, the impact of this will be reported on in the next release of this publication series. The breakdown of the number of calls received about each benefit is provided in the table below.

Phone calls received for period to March 23rd 2020 by benefit						
	Total	Best Start Grant and Best Start Food	Funeral Support Payment	Carer's Allowance Supplement	Young Carer Grant	General enquiries
Calls received	173,100	95,800	10,300	36,400	2,300	28,300

Call volumes are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Call waiting times were on average 16 seconds. The breakdown of the average call waiting times by benefit can be seen below.
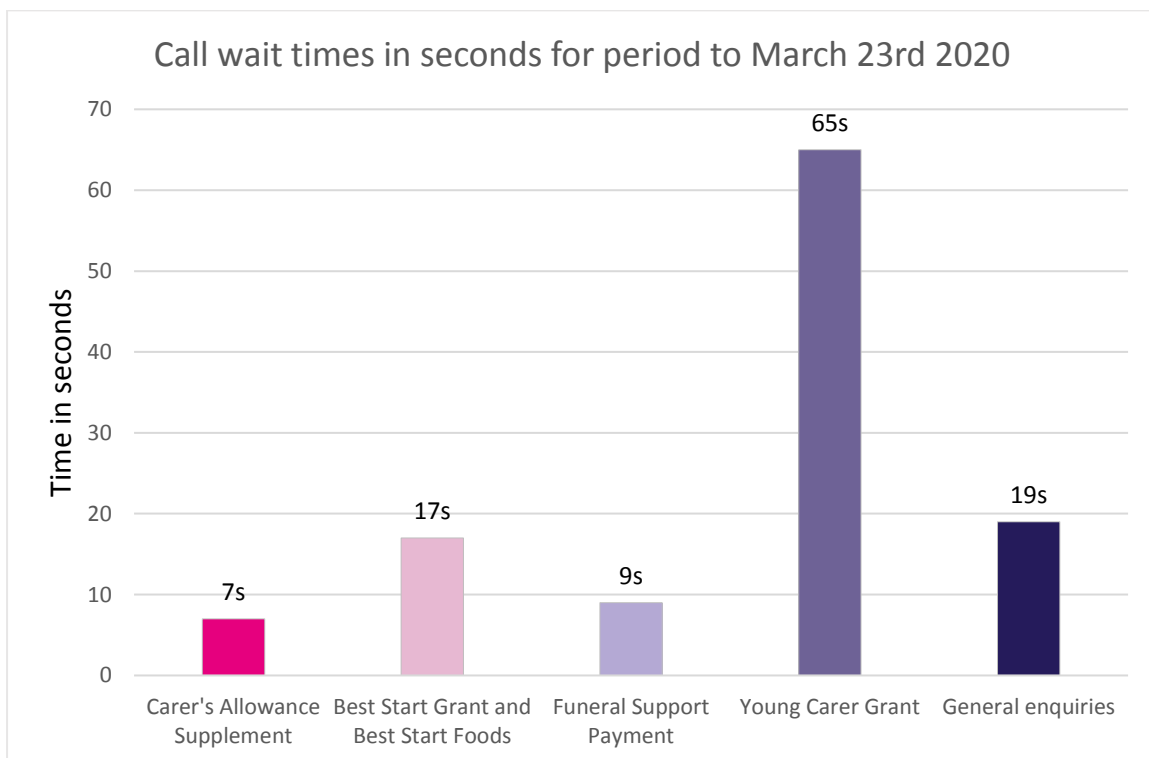
Call lengths were on average 5 minutes 30 seconds. The breakdown of the average call lengths by benefit can be seen below.

Call lengths in seconds for period to March 23rd 2020
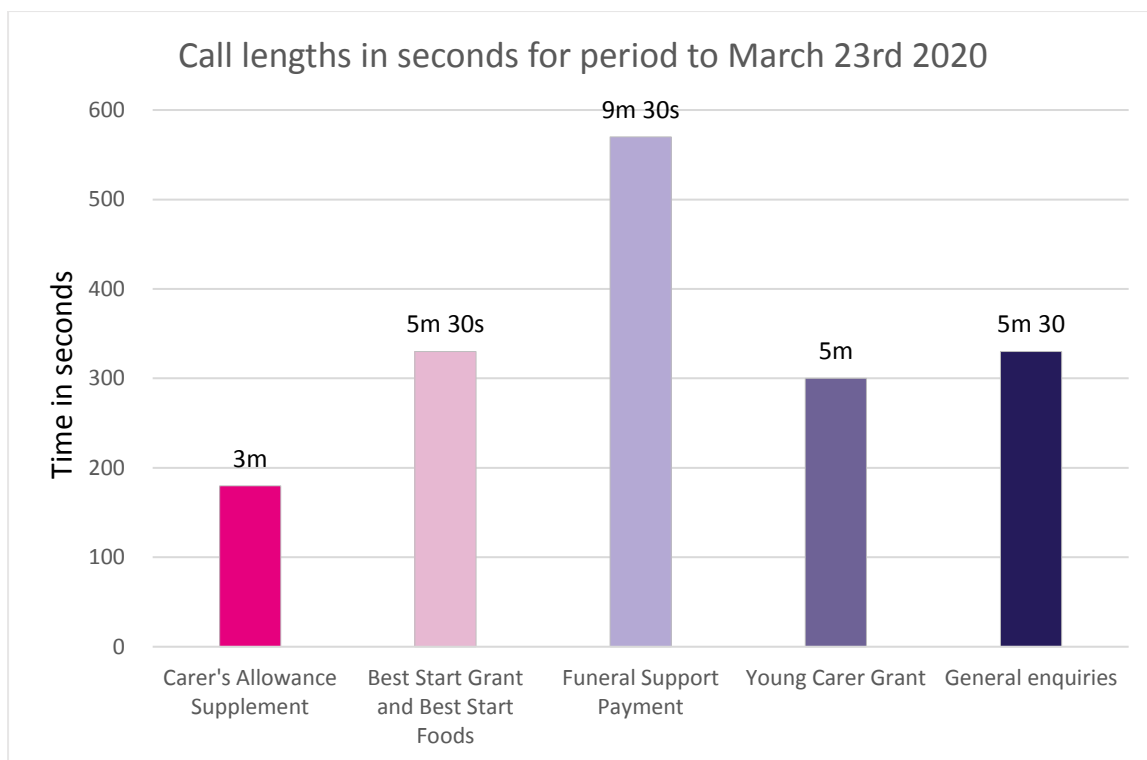
5.2 Client Insights – application contacts

From 10 December 2018 to end March 2020, 147,420* applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods were received. More detail on Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods high level statistics have been published here.

A comparison of the number of Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods application contacts against the volume of insights data is provided in the table below.

Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods – Application contacts vs insights data Dec 18 to Mar 20		
Number of telephony/paper applications	Number of telephony/paper feedback ratings	Number of telephony[+] open text feedback responses
12,080*	2,879 (23.8%)	490 (4.1%)
Number of online applications	Number of online feedback ratings	Number of online open text feedback responses
135,100*	27,972 (20.7%)	1,211 (0.9%)

* a small number of applications are categorised as unknown channel. For more information refer to statistics published here.

[+] There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to analyse.

From 16th September to end March 2020, 3,970 applications for Funeral Support Payment were received. More detail on Funeral Support Payment high level statistics have been published here.

A comparison of the number of Funeral Support Payment application contacts against the volume of insights data is provided in the table below.

Funeral Support Payment – Application contacts vs insights data Sep 19 to Mar 20		
Number of telephony/paper applications	Number of telephony/paper feedback ratings	Number of telephony+ open text feedback responses
2,420	991 (41%)	226 (9.3%)
Number of online applications	Number of online feedback ratings	Number of online open text feedback responses
1,550	954 (61.5%)	62 (4%)

+ There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to analyse.

From 21st of October to end February 2020, 1,600 applications for Young Carer Grant were received. Currently, published data does not provide information about the number of applications received up to end March 2020. More detail on Young Carer Grant high level statistics have been published here.

5.3 Client Insights - satisfaction following general telephony contact

After any phone call with a client advisor, clients can stay on the line and answer a series of three questions about their experience with Social Security Scotland. The automated survey asks:

Question 1: How quickly did we answer your call today? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is not quickly at all and 5 is very quickly.

Question 2: Did you get what you needed from this call? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all, and 5 is you got everything you needed.

Question 3: How would you rate our service today? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent.

More than 1,000 clients left a rating for the period up to March 23rd 2020.

Of those who left a rating, 71% felt their call had been answered quickly [Question 1], 63% felt they got everything they needed from the call [Question 2], and 70% rated the service positively overall [Question 3].

Client experience ratings following telephone calls - for period to March 23rd 2020
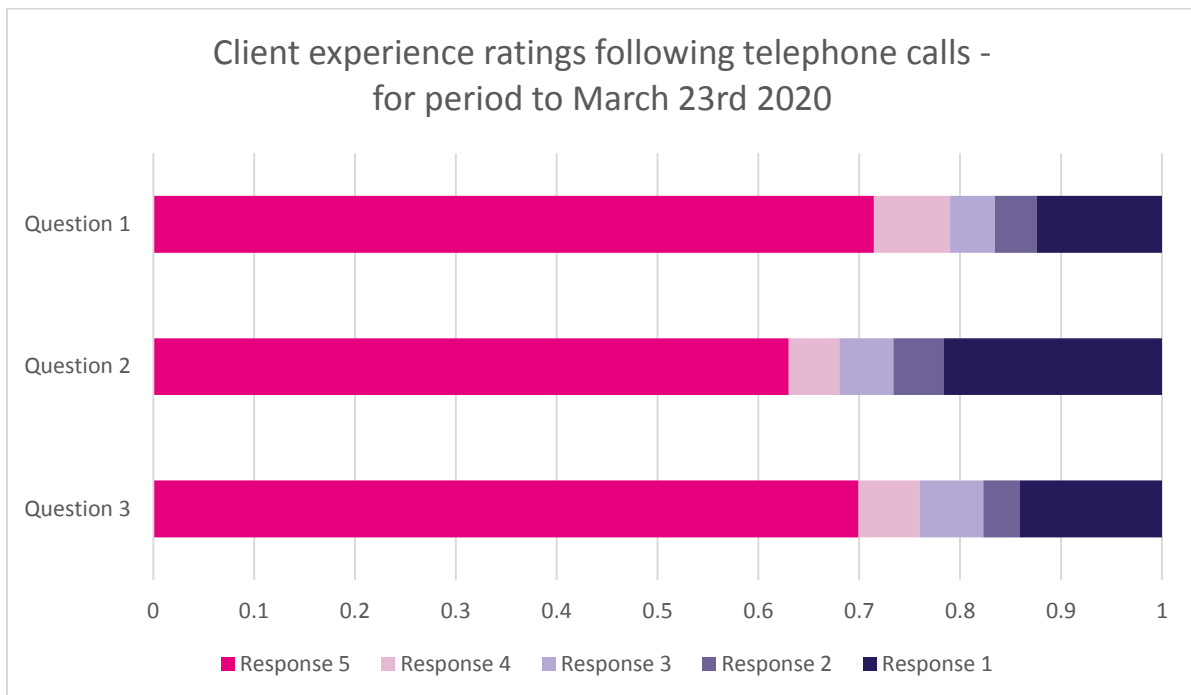
Total number of responses to Question 1: 1,195
Total number of responses to Question 2: 1,135
Total number of responses to Question 3: 1,091

5.4 Client insights - satisfaction following applications

5.4.1 Experience ratings following Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications
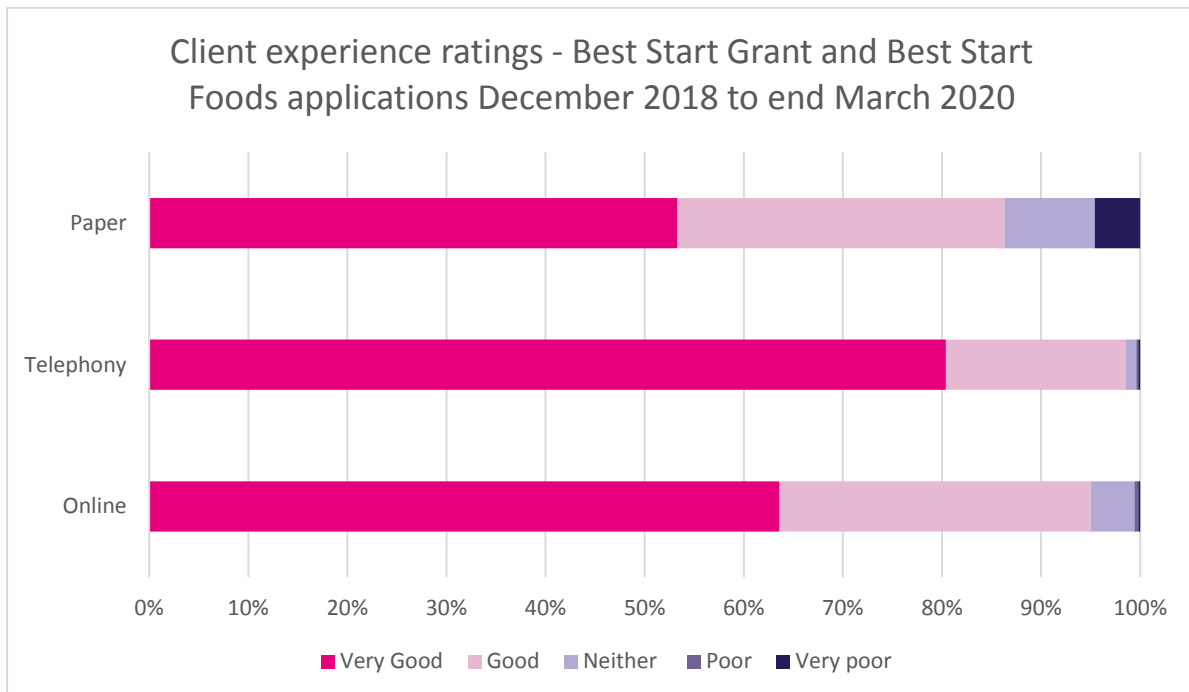
Following paper, online and telephony applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, a questionnaire offers applicants the opportunity to make ratings on how the experience has been for them.

30,851 applicants left experience ratings following a Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods application between December 2018 and end March 2020.

Of paper Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants who left a rating during this period, 86% rated the service as Very good or Good.

For online Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants, 95% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants, 99% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good.

Client experience ratings - Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications December 2018 to end March 2020

Total number of ratings following a paper application: 197
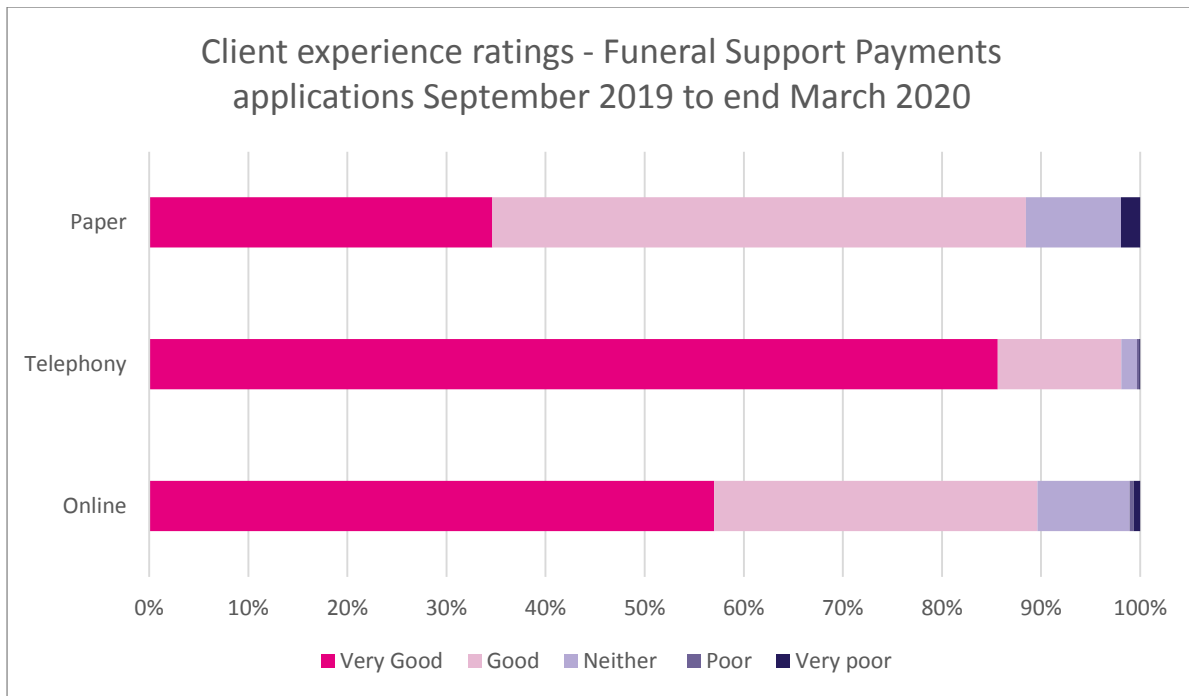*Total number of ratings following a telephony application: 2,682*
Total number of ratings following an online application: 27,972

5.4.2 Experience ratings following Funeral Support Payment applications

Following paper, online and telephony applications for Funeral Support Payment, a questionnaire offers applicants the opportunity to make ratings on how the experience has been for them.

1,945 applicants left experience ratings following a Funeral Support Payment application between September 2019 and end March 2020.

Of paper Funeral Support Payment applicants who left a rating during this period, 88% rated the service as Very good or Good. For online Funeral Support Payment applicants, 90% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony Funeral Support Payment applicants, 98% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good.

Client experience ratings - Funeral Support Payments applications September 2019 to end March 2020

Total number of ratings following a paper application: 52
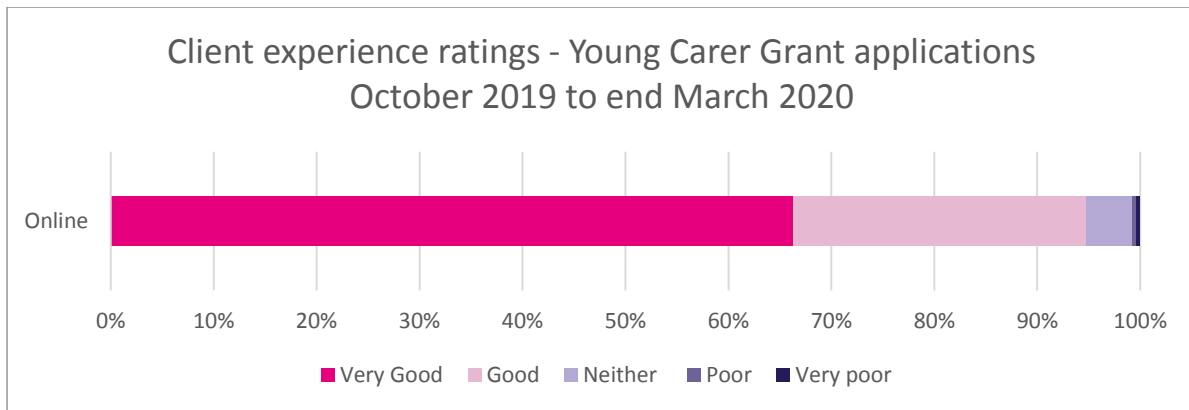*Total number of ratings following a telephony application: 939*
Total number of ratings following an online application: 954

5.4.3 Experience ratings following Young Carer Grant applications

Following paper, online and telephony applications for Young Carer Grant, a questionnaire offers applicants the opportunity to make ratings on how the experience has been for them.

864 applicants left experience ratings following a Young Carer Grant application between October 2019 and end March 2020.

For online Young Carer Grant applicants, 95% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. There were not enough ratings for paper and phone Young Carer Grant applications to provide an equivalent breakdown.

Client experience ratings - Young Carer Grant applications
October 2019 to end March 2020

Total number of ratings following an online application: 864

5.4.4 Open text responses following Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications

In addition to making a rating, clients have the opportunity to leave an open text comment about their application experience in response to the question "Is there any further feedback you would like to provide?". Of those who applied for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods online or over the phone between December 2018 and March 2020, 1,701 chose to answer the further feedback question. There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

Negative responses fell into three broad categories: issues with the application form, applicants disagreeing with the inclusion of equalities survey at the end of the application and applicants not receiving a decision after applying.

Most neutral responses expressed that applicants had no further comments or commented on matters not related to Best Start Grant and Best Start Food application.

Mixed responses focused on issues with and suggested improvements for the application form, and applicants feeling that Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods should be better publicised.

Positive responses left by clients fell into three broad categories: applicants finding the form easy to fill in, applicants agreeing with Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods policy and applicants being happy with the service they received.

490 open text responses were received following telephone applications.

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The majority of these were positive (76%) with 7% of responses negative. 6% of responses were mixed while 11% were neutral. Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"I made an application a few weeks ago online but for some reason it didn't submit properly and I only found out when I called to enquire."
Neutral response	"Nothing to add." "No that is all."
Mixed response	"Everything perfect over the telephone, had issues submitting online." "Lack of information regarding grants. Would be a good idea to put information in with the Baby Box."
Positive response	"Very good, professional service." "I would give Social Security Scotland a 10 out of 10." "I'm really happy with the service I have had this morning, it has put my mind to ease." "It's a great service and really helpful. Thank you."

Of those who applied online for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods between December 2018 and March 2020, 1,211 chose to answer the further feedback question. 70% responses were positive and 13% of responses were negative. 9% of responses were mixed while 8% were neutral.

Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"This is the second time I've had to apply because I still haven't heard back from the first application."

13	"Don't understand questions about gender … [What] it's got anything to do with the outcome of this benefit for a child" "Having to send [paper] copies should not be required … should be all digital."
Neutral response	"No comments." "Haven't used this service before [but] decided to go to the website to check if I was entitled."
Mixed response	"Think this is a fab idea … Only thing would be to make sure people like myself know about this … but [application] easy to fill out." "I received my first payment before I was notified of it and there was no bank reference … A bank reference would be useful to put peoples mind at ease."
Positive response	"The website is very easy to use, [it] would benefit even those who struggle to use the internet or have minor learning difficulties. Well done." "Very simple and easy to apply which is a relief as many online applications have far too many questions." "Brilliant, I'm not great with the internet but this was simple and not stressful. Thank you." "The application was straight forward and took less than 10 minutes to fill in." "I am blown away by the fact this was the most straightforward benefits application I have ever done. If this is the future of devolved benefits in Scotland then I feel a great sense of hope. Well done."

There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

5.4.5 Open text responses following Funeral Support Payment applications

In addition to making a rating, clients have the opportunity to leave an open text comment about their application experience in response to the question "Is there any further feedback you would like to provide?". Of those who applied for Funeral Support Payment over the phone and online between September 2019 and March 20120, 288 chose to answer the further feedback question. There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

Negative responses fell into two broad categories, clients expressing dissatisfaction with being asked equalities questions at the end of the application and clients having issues with application form.

Most neutral responses expressed that applicants had no further comments.

Mixed responses focused on issues with and suggested improvements for the application form, and applicants feeling that Funeral Support Payment should be better publicised.

Positive responses left by clients fell into two broad categories: applicants finding the form easy to fill in and applicants being happy with the service they received.

226 open text responses were received following telephone applications. The majority of these were positive (89%) with 7% of responses negative and 4% of responses mixed. Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"I don't understand why [equalities] questions are asked."
Mixed response	"If I had known about the benefit earlier it would have saved a lot of stress."
Positive response	"Excellent and helpful service."

	"Thanks very much for helping me get through the application. You have been very helpful and empathetic."

62 open text responses were received following online applications. The majority of these were positive (63%) with 16% of responses negative, 11% neutral and 10% of responses mixed. Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"Unable to type any numbers into the boxes for values." "Found the [equalities] survey slightly intrusive."
Neutral response	"This is the first time I am using your service."
Mixed response	"When a change is required to the check list it would be easier if you could return directly to the check list after the change is made. Otherwise excellent clear forms." "I think this is a great service but I think applying online should be advertised a bit more."
Positive response	"Very easy to use this service for people who are grieving." "I have severe anxiety issues about speaking with people so this format is great. Thanks."

There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

5.4.6 Open text responses following Young Carer Grant applications

In addition to making a rating, clients have the opportunity to leave an open text comment about their application experience in response to the question "Is there any further feedback you would like to provide?". Of those who applied for Young Carer Grant online between October 2019 and March 2020, 50 chose to answer the further feedback question.

There were not enough open text responses from phone and paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

Negative responses focused on applicants not receiving a decision after applying and issues with and suggested improvements for the application form.

Most neutral responses expressed that applicants had no further comments.

Mixed responses focused on applicants feeling that Young Carer Grant should be better publicised.

Most positive responses left by clients were about applicants finding the form easy to fill in.

50 open text responses were received following online applications. The majority of these were positive (68%) with 16% of responses negative. 8% of responses were mixed while 8% were neutral. Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"I applied more than once because I did not receive any letters." "I would rather email you paperwork than print it out and post it."
Neutral response	"Can't think of any [thing]."
Mixed response	"I found out about the grant a while after it had been introduced. Grants like these should be more widely known and … more accessible to a wider range of people."
Positive response	"Straightforward [and] quick. I'm really happy this benefit is available, it makes me feel valued as a young carer." "Each question was explained clearly and form was simple to fill out."

There were not enough open text responses from paper and phone applications to present an equivalent analysis.

6. Summary

This report summarises insights research programme findings for the period September 2018 to March 2020. As the organisation grows, clients and staff will continue to have opportunities to feed their views back into the system.

To date, findings reveal that majority of clients who have left a rating or comment in relation to a telephone or application-based interaction with the organisation have been positive about the experience.

7. References

1) https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/engagement-on-social-security/

2) https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/about-us/our-charter

9. Annex A – Telephony experience survey content

Thanks for staying on the line. You're about to hear 3 short questions about your call today.

Question one: How quickly did we answer your call today? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is not quickly at all and 5 is very quickly.

Question 2: Did you get what you needed from this call? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all, and 5 is you got everything you needed.

Question 3: How would you rate our service today? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent.

Thanks for taking part. We'll use your answers to improve our service.

10. Annex B – Application experience survey content

About your experience with Social Security Scotland

10 Overall, how would you rate the service provided by Social Security Scotland e.g. in making your application?

1 ☐ 1 – Very poor   2 ☐ 2 – Poor   3 ☐ 3 – Neither poor nor good

4 ☐ 4 – good   5 ☐ 5 – Very good

11 Is there any further feedback you would like provide?

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