Social Security Scotland email signature

We need an email signature that is informative whilst also being accessible to everyone

Social Security Scotland aims to be a leader in inclusive communication. We want as many people as possible to understand what we do and be able to communicate with us and access our service in the way they want to.

Social Security Scotland's previous email signature was not fully accessible. Additionally, we had feedback that our people would like the opportunity to include logos or lines for other things that are important to them (Scottish Government or Social Security Scotland internal networks they are members of, for example) and pronouns, stakeholder newsletter link and photos.

As Social Security Scotland is growing, we also noticed that the previous corporate email signature was not being used by all, so an updated agreed corporate email signature, with accessibility as a focus, is needed.

We conducted a review of the current signature with Social Security Scotland colleagues who use screen readers to get their feedback on how the signature reads aloud and also liaised with Visibility Scotland on key things to consider when redesigning the signature. Their main recommendation was to make sure that the signature contains no unnecessary information – it should only show the key information we want people to know. Desktop research into how to make email signatures as accessible and functional as possible was also carried out. Requests from colleagues for additional content were also considered and how each change made to the signature reflects and contributes to the culture we want to create with accessibility as a priority.

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The previous signature

Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland
Ground Floor
220 High Street
Glasgow
G4 0QW

Add in working pattern here if required

First Name Surname
Job Title
Social Security Scotland

T: 000 000 0000
M: 00000000000

firstname.surname@socialsecurity.gov.scot
www.socialsecurity.gov.scot

Accessibility issues with previous email signature

- The table format used in the email signature doesn't read well when put through a screen reader for people with visual impairments.
- This format also doesn't scale well on SCOTS mobile devices, resulting in text being cut off when viewed through the Blackberry Work app.
- When this signature is displayed on a device that does not support the rich text format, the table is automatically removed and the order in which the information is displayed becomes jumbled and confusing.
- The many images and icons do not use alt text to explain what they signify, which doesn't read well when viewed via screen reader.
- The use of acronyms, such as 'T' and 'M' for 'telephone' and 'mobile phone' respectively, is not plain English and not accessible.

Considerations for new email signature

- It has to be accessible to stakeholders and colleagues who use screen reader technology.
- It needs to be scalable for viewing on a mobile phone.
- It needs to be in plain English.
- It needs to allow the inclusion of pronouns. See Annex A for more detail on the importance of displaying this information.
- The inclusion of additional logos or information on groups should be considered.
- The file size of the current signature has been identified as being quite large, due to the number of graphical elements it contains. We should try to reduce the file size in order to reduce the environmental impact of our emails.

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Updated email signature

Full name (pronouns [if desired])
Job title
Team
Social Security Scotland

Phone: 00000 000000
Email: firstname.surname@socialsecurity.gov.scot
Website: www.socialsecurity.gov.scot

[Insert working pattern here if required]

What we have done

People's pronouns can be added after their name if they wish to share them. This is in line with the guidance drawn up by the Internal Equalities Network. The guidance is included in this document as Annex A.

The table format has been removed from the current signature and the information contained within the signature now flows top to bottom, with a new line taken for each new piece of information displayed. This means accessibility is greatly improved, as those who use screen readers and those with visual impairments can read the information more easily. Removing the table format also means it will display better when read on mobile devices and when displayed in plain text format.

All acronyms have also been removed and replaced with full words, further improving accessibility.

Space has been added for people to include what team they are a part of. This helps others to understand what part of Social Security Scotland everyone is from. We propose that this is limited to just each person's team, rather than their team, branch and unit, as this higher level information is less useful and unnecessarily lengthens the signature.

The Social Security Scotland logo has been moved to the bottom of the signature so as to not interrupt the flow of the information. Alt text has been added to the Social Security Scotland logo saying 'Social Security Scotland logo'. This helps to explain what the image is when the signature is read aloud.

Screen reader users questioned the need for logos in the signature. When read aloud, logos without alt text simply interrupt and break up the flow of the information being read. However, multiple logos or icons, each with a title and description as part of alt text, would in turn make the signature overly long and complex. Knowing this, it has been decided that no additional logos should be added to the email signature. The Social Security Scotland

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logo remains in order to strengthen our brand, but has been moved to the bottom of the signature. Adding other logos underneath this will dilute the strength of our brand and make the signature unnecessarily long. There is also the potential for more accessibility issues if colleagues did include additional logos but did not remember to add alt text.

Colleagues also requested the inclusion of space to mention internal groups that they are a part of. This type of information isn't really essential and can often only mean something to those who are already part of the group. To reduce the possibility for confusion, we recommend that people do not use their email signature to highlight internal groups they are a part of.

Our signature is about sharing key useful information and strengthening our brand, which should be applied consistently across Social Security Scotland. We understand that people wish to express themselves through things like logos, mottos or the mention of internal groups that they are a part of, but would recommend that they do this on their staff profiles on platforms like Saltire and Yammer.

The address has been removed as it was fed back that this information was unnecessary and just made the signature longer. Also, if an address is required, this can be found on our website, which is linked to in the signature, or can be requested and provided in-email. There is also the potential for confusion because of the multiple addresses our organisation has. Furthermore, the fact that our postal and geographic addresses are different could cause yet more confusion. As such, we feel it is best that location information is shared upon request. That way, we can be sure that we provide people with exactly the right information.

The social media and Google Maps icons and their links have been removed. The icons were removed as these added unnecessary complexity to the signature and, if included, they would each require alt text, adding considerable length to the signature when read aloud. Web addresses to the sites hyperlinked in these icons (Facebook, Twitter and Google Maps) have also not been included, as all of this information, including our social media and office address, is linked to from our website, meaning we can keep our signature accessible whilst displaying key information.

Additionally, the previous email signature had quite a large file size at around 53KB and Chief Digital Office pointed out the importance of considering our carbon footprint when designing the updated email signature. By removing graphical elements like the table and limiting the number of logos and icons, the updated signature has a much smaller file size of 19KB.

Annex A – Pronouns signature guidance

The Scottish Government's [Trans Equality and Inclusion Policy](#) sets out that: 'We will foster an inclusive workforce culture which values the contribution of employees from all backgrounds because we know a more inclusive workplace culture is more productive and innovative.'

Use of the correct pronouns and names can help create a sense of belonging and inclusion, and ensures everyone treats their colleagues with dignity and respect. This guidance aims to explain some of the reasons behind adding your pronouns in your email signature. There are some excellent resources at the end of this guidance if you need more information before making a decision or if you wish to find out what other actions you can take to be a trans ally.

Pronouns are words that we use to refer to people instead of their name. These most commonly include she/her, he/him, or they/them, although there are others that people may prefer. When we communicate with others we often make assumptions about their gender based on their name or voice and we may get their pronouns wrong. Misgendering can be especially hurtful for trans, non-binary, and genderqueer people.

Cisgender* people adding their pronouns into their signature can have a powerful and positive impact on individuals – and by extension – on teams and organisation:

- It allows others to share how they would like to be addressed and making it 'business as usual' makes this an inclusive practice.

  "Having come out as non-binary at Scottish Government, I have found the pronouns in email signatures very useful – mine helps people gender me correctly, and other people having their pronouns in their signatures as a matter of course makes mine look like 'business as usual' rather than marking me out as different."

- Having your pronouns in your email signature can help signal you are an LGBTQIA+ ally.

You can read more about why some people include pronouns in their signature in this [blog](#).

There may be reasons why people do not feel comfortable with putting their pronouns in their email signature. Some may still be trying to find a pronoun that is a good fit. Or they may still be exploring their identity and may not be comfortable with the one assigned to them, but are not yet ready – or may never be – to announce this.

Whatever the reason, this does not mean that a person who does not include their pronoun in the signature is not an ally or supportive of the trans/non-binary/genderqueer community. The aim is to create an environment that gives people an opportunity to share if they feel comfortable. There are other ways that to signal that you are an ally or to make the work environment more inclusive, including being aware of using inclusive language in communications. You can find some useful guides at the end of this guidance.

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Further resources

- About pronouns and inclusion.
- [Pronouns: little things that can make a big difference](#) – a blog by Tash (They/them) from personal experience.
- [FAQ about pronouns & Trans People](#) By Lal Zimman.
- Helpful [article](#) explaining some of the gender pronouns with a [pronouns practice](#) app.

Being an ally

[Your Pocket Guide to Trans/Nonbinary Inclusion](#) by Madalyn Williams
[How to be an Ally](#) – A workbook that is most effective when used in conjunction with workshops, conversation and reflection

[TRANSWHAT? A guide towards Allyship](#)

[Stonewall: come out for LGBT: Becoming an active LGBT Ally](#)

*cisgender: individuals whose gender aligns with the one assigned at birth.

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Annex B – Email signature guidance

All Social Security Scotland staff should apply the corporate signature to their emails. Below are step-by-step instructions on how to tailor the email signature with your own details and then add to your emails in Outlook.

1. Highlight the entire example signature on the following page, right click and copy it.
2. Open a new email message.
3. Select 'Signature' > 'Signatures' from the message menu.
4. Under 'Select signature to edit', choose 'New', and in the 'New Signature' dialog box, type a name for the signature.
5. In the 'Edit signature' box, place your cursor and paste (using the 'Keep source formatting' option – the clipboard with the paintbrush icon).
6. Update the copied example signature with your own personal information. To amend your email details, right click on the email address and select 'Edit hyperlink', ensure you put your own email address in both the 'Text to display box' and also in the 'E-mail address' section (mailto:firstname.surname@socialsecurity.gov.scot). When editing the template, please do not change the font or colour, as these are set to standards that ensure accessibility.
7. Click 'Save'.
8. Under 'Choose default signature', choose the email account to associate with the signature.
9. In the 'New messages' drop down box select your signature.
10. In the 'Replies/forwards' drop-down, select your signature, so that it is added to your replies and forwards too.
11. Choose 'OK' to save your new signature and return to your message. Outlook doesn't add your new signature to the message you opened in Step 2, even if you chose to apply the signature to all new messages. You'll have to add the signature manually to this one message. All future messages will have the signature added automatically. To add the signature manually, select 'Signature' from the message menu and then pick the signature you just created.

Things to note:
- Please include all numbers you wish to be contacted on and differentiate them clearly and simply. For example, 'Mobile' and 'Office', if appropriate.
- If you are including a working pattern, please ensure it is written clearly. For example, do not write 'I do not work every other Friday' and instead write 'I do not work the first and third Friday of the month'.

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Email signature template

Full name (pronouns [if desired])
Job title
Team
Social Security Scotland

Phone: 00000 000000
Email: firstname.surname@socialsecurity.gov.scot
Website: www.socialsecurity.gov.scot

[Insert working pattern here if required]

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