

Social Security Experience Panels: Award Duration and Automatic Entitlement - Visual Summary

Background

The Scottish Government will become 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, Scottish Government have set up the Social Security Experience Panels. There are more than 2,400 people on the panels who have experience of these benefits.

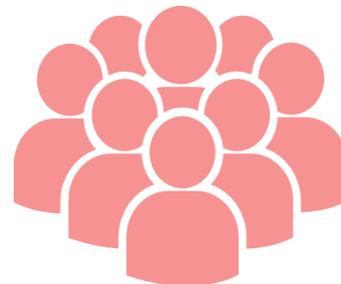
**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



The Experience Panels are made up over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits that will be devolved.



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

**2,400+
Experience Panel
members**

About the research

This report summarises the automatic entitlement and award duration research which took place in July and August 2018. Experience Panel members with experience of claiming or receiving disability benefits were invited to take part.



1,425
invites



241
survey responses



13
focus group
participants

The research explored:



- Whether some people should be automatically entitled to disability benefits



- How long benefit awards should be for people whose health condition probably won't change or get better in the future



- What people think light touch reviews should be like

Automatic Entitlement

Automatic Entitlement is where people who have certain disabilities are given a benefit award without needing to have a face-to-face health assessment. They only need to show that they have been diagnosed with a particular condition.

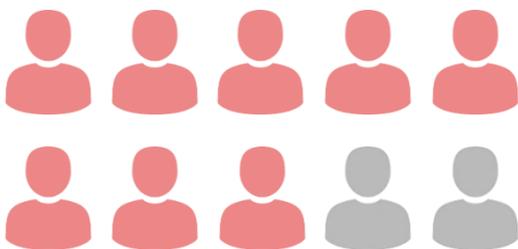
This is different than what happens just now, where people need to provide evidence to show how their disability impacts on their day to day life.

Automatic entitlement could make it easier for people with severe health conditions to receive benefits.

Should people be automatically entitled?



We asked participants if they thought people with certain health conditions should be automatically entitled to disability benefits.



Eight in ten participants (80 per cent) agreed that people with certain health conditions should be automatically entitled to disability benefits.

Participants told us that people whose health condition would not change or get better should not have to have repeated health assessments:

“...life is hard enough without having to sit in front of strangers answering questions...”

- Survey participant

Some participants told us that finding evidence for a benefit application could be difficult, especially if you had a long term condition.

This was because many participants no longer regularly saw their GP or consultant, and were now at the stage of 'managing' their condition, rather than needing to seek regular treatment for it. These participants did not want to waste their doctor's time by making an appointment just to ask for evidence.

What health conditions should mean someone is automatically entitled to disability benefits?



We asked participants what health conditions they thought should mean someone would be automatically entitled.

Participants usually talked about:



- Terminal conditions
- Learning disabilities
- Conditions that wouldn't change over time
- Conditions that would get worse over time

Participants told us that assessing people with these conditions was hard to justify:

“People who are coming to terms with life limiting conditions should not have to jump through hoops to get financial assistance.”

- Survey participant

Some participants felt that mental illnesses should not mean someone is automatically entitled, as they affect people in different ways. Other people felt that severe, long-term mental illnesses should mean you are automatically entitled.

Who should decide who is automatically entitled?



We asked survey participants who they thought should decide what health conditions give someone automatic entitlement¹.



84%
doctors



39%
**independent
group**



38%
**Social Security
Scotland**

Participants were also asked if they had any other ideas as to who should decide. They said:

- A panel of disabled people
- Disability organisations
- A panel of healthcare professionals and disability organisations

Identifying people who are automatically entitled



We asked participants if they had any ideas about how we could identify someone who might be automatically entitled before they applied.

¹ Survey participants were asked to select all options they would be comfortable with. Focus group participants were prompted with the 3 options above and allowed to suggest additional ideas.

Participants suggested three things:



Sharing data
between
organisations



Questions on
the application
form



Referrals from
others (e.g.
doctors)

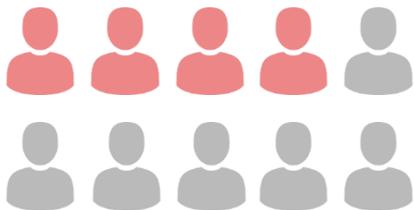
Award Duration

Award duration is how long someone is given a benefit for before they need to be reassessed or re-apply. The Scottish Government is committed to giving people longer benefit awards if their health condition is unlikely to change or get better.

This means they will need to be assessed less often.



We asked participants if they thought five years was a good length of award for people whose health condition might not change or get better.



Around **four in ten** (43 per cent) believed that an award duration of five years was **very appropriate** or **appropriate**.

Almost **six in ten** (57 per cent) felt it was **not that appropriate** or **not appropriate at all**.

Participants told us that they would prefer an indefinite award if their health condition wasn't likely to change or improve.

Light Touch Reviews

A light touch review is a potential alternative to a re-assessment. Light touch reviews would mostly be paper-based, and clients would only need to have a face-to-face assessment if Social Security Scotland couldn't make a decision.

What evidence should be used?

In the future, Social Security Scotland may use evidence from past DWP health assessments (such as a report from a PIP health assessment).

 We asked participants if they would like Social Security Scotland to look at evidence from previous DWP health assessments as part of a light touch review.



39%

would like
evidence from past
health
assessments used



22%

would not like
evidence from
past health
assessments used



30%

would like to be
able to choose

Some participants were worried that the health assessment from previous benefit applications would be out of date. Because of this, they didn't want the agency to look at it.



Other participants felt that their previous assessments had been unfair, that they had not been able to say what they wanted to say, and that the assessor had written untrue things in the report.

What should a light touch review be like?



We asked participants what they thought light touch reviews should be like – for example, would they like to hear from Social Security Scotland at each stage of the review, or just at the start and end.

Some participants wanted as little communication as possible through the review process as they found receiving letters stressful. Others wanted to be kept up to date with regular updates.

If participants had to have a face-to-face review, participants told us that the review should be tailored to their condition.

Other suggestions included:



- The review should take place in a private space



- Reviews should be at convenient times for clients, with the option to reschedule if needed



- The review should last as long as necessary to allow the client to explain how their condition affects them



- Clients should be told they can bring carers, friends or helpers

Who should carry out the review?

Participants suggested nurses and agency staff as potential options. Most participants felt that having a medical background was not strictly necessary – having a good understanding of disabilities and how a person’s condition affects them was seen as much more important.

If the review had to be face-to-face, participants felt that:



- The person carrying out the review should speak in plain English and avoid jargon



- Staff should be friendly, and treat clients with dignity and respect



- Staff should listen and be patient, allowing clients to speak

What's Next

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

This will include further research on individual benefits in addition to wider research to assist in the development of Social Security Scotland.

We will consider the findings from this report alongside the advice from the Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group on both award duration and automatic entitlement. The advice and feedback from Experience Panels will inform our design of disability benefits in Scotland.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact SocialSecurityExperience@gov.scot for further information**
- cannot be made available by the Scottish Government for further analysis as the Scottish Government is not the data controller



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