

Social Security Experience Panels: Website Use - Visual Summary of Research Findings

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of work to prepare for this change, Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels. There are more than 2,400 people on the panels who have experience of these benefits.

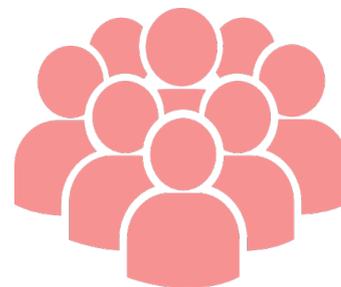
**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



The Experience Panels are made up of over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits being 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 website research that took place in June 2018. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part.



2,456
invites



95
survey responses
(online, paper and phone)



3
interviews

The research explored:



How people used the internet to find information on benefits



How easy it was to find contact information online



What people did if they couldn't find the information they needed online

Who took part in the survey?



38%

Man or boy



62%

Woman or girl

Participants were between

25 – 79

years old

Most survey participants had a **disability** or **long term health condition**, including:



chronic pain



severe hearing
impairments



severe visual
impairments



other kinds of long
term health
condition

More than half of survey participants were



a carer due
to **old age**,



a carer to a
child, or



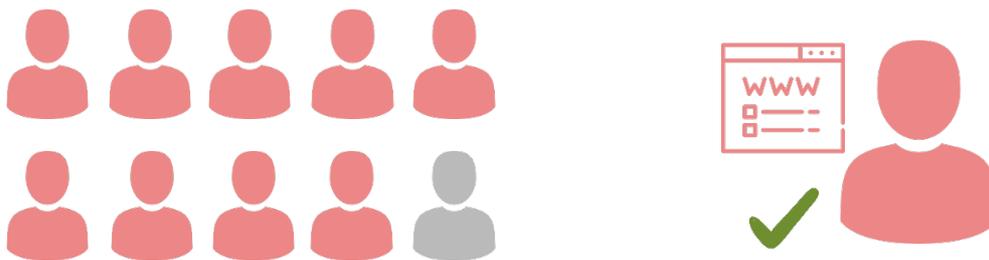
a carer to
an **adult**.

Using websites

In the future, when benefits are transferred to Social Security Scotland, we want to make sure that clients can find the information they need online quickly and easily.

To inform our decisions on sharing information in regards to Social Security Scotland online, we asked Experience Panel members about their past use of the internet and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) website.

 We asked participants whether they had used the DWP website in the past.

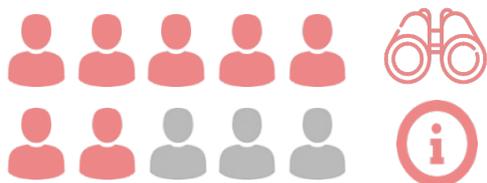


Just under nine in ten (88 per cent) of survey participants had used the DWP website (gov.uk).

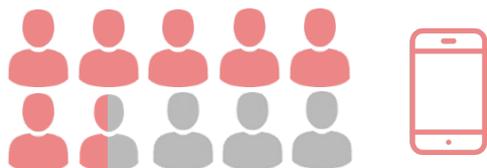
Less than one in ten (5 per cent) had not used the website and six per cent could not remember.

In order to understand Experience Panel member's expectations and needs for Social Security Scotland's online information, we asked them what they used DWP's website for.

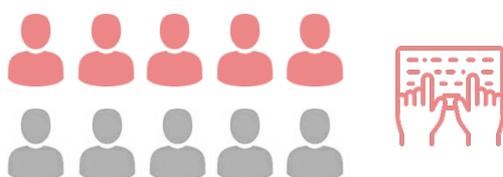
We found from survey participants that:



Around seven in ten looked for information on what benefits they were entitled to (68 per cent) and looked at information for a benefit they wanted to apply for (73 per cent).



Two thirds (66 per cent) looked for contact information for DWP.



Around half went online to apply for a benefit (52 per cent) and to find information after applying (48 per cent).

Other reasons given by participants included:



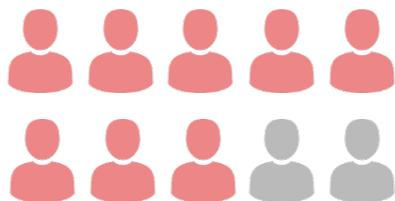
- wanting to report a change in circumstances;



- looking for information on what work was permitted for their benefits; and

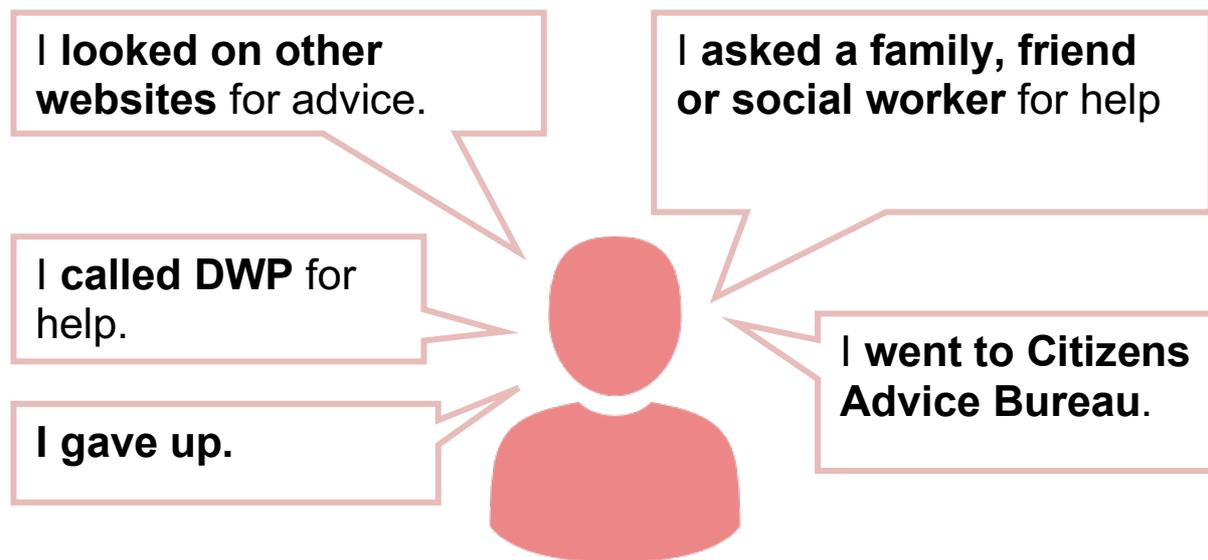


- looking for information on the appeals process.



Eight in ten survey participants (80 per cent) said **they found what they were looking for on the DWP website.**

Participants who could not find what they were looking for online were asked what they did next:

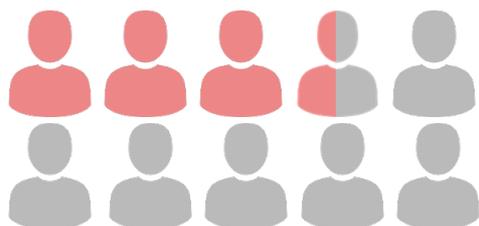


Understanding Information Online

Next, we asked participants to think about the information they looked at online.

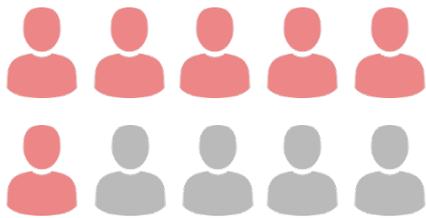
? Participants were asked **how easy it was to understand the information they looked at online.**

Over a third of survey participants (36 per cent) said it was **very easy** or **easy** to understand online information.



Just over a third (34 per cent) said it was **neither easy nor difficult**. **Three in ten** (30 per cent) said it was difficult or **very difficult**.

We also asked survey participants **how accurate they thought the online information was**. **Six in ten** (60 per cent) thought the information was **very accurate** or **accurate**.



Sixteen per cent thought it was **neither accurate or inaccurate**, and just under two in ten (19 per cent) thought it was **inaccurate**.

No one thought it was **very inaccurate**.



Some focus group participants were concerned about the accuracy of the information. They said verifying the information was a **'nightmare'** and it wasn't immediately obvious if the information applied to both Scotland and England.

Issues with using the websites

We wanted to understand what issues people had when looking for information online. A number of themes emerged from the survey and focus groups.

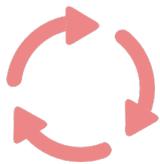
Participants typically talked about their experiences with the DWP website, as that tended to be their most common destination when looking for benefit related information.

Too little information



Some people felt that the DWP website had **too little information**, or **lacked important information** they would have found helpful:

“There is little guidance on filling in forms, e.g. there is no real guidance on the information required to fill in PIP or ESA to allow you to be fairly assessed.”



Others thought the information was **‘very basic’** or was **‘scattered’** across different web pages. Some described the website as **‘circular’**:

“...if you wanted more [information] you were directed to another page, and then another, and then back to the first page...”

Navigating the website can be difficult



Navigating the website was a common issue amongst participants. Participants described the process of finding the information they needed as too complex and too much work, using words such as **‘convoluted’** and **‘tedious’**.

“It’s too busy and difficult to navigate, poor signposting and too much text.”

Some participants did not like the layout:

“Not very well laid out and if elderly or not computer savvy then it’s difficult to find correct information”

Others said the website was ‘**not designed to be user friendly**’.

The search function doesn’t work as well as it could



Participants commented on the search function not being very effective:

“It is terribly designed. It takes several ‘searches’ to finally source a proper source of contact...”

Participants who could not find what they needed using the search function often resorted to calling DWP or using an alternative search engine, such as Google:

“Search was not good. Used Google to search for stuff that was on the website using the ‘Site’ search string.”

The language used on the website is sometimes confusing, unclear or not in plain English



Difficult language and the use of jargon was described by some participants as a barrier to their understanding of the information.

“Was not very clear to understand certain wording...”

Some believed the language used was more suitable for professionals:

“Wording can be difficult to understand and confusing wither [sic] or not it is correct to apply for the benefits available.”

“...some of the language used was difficult to understand unless you had a background in health and social care...”

Others believed the wording was ‘**intimidating**’ or ‘**too technical**’.

It can be hard to find contact details on the website



Many participants said it was hard to find contact information for DWP online.

“You cannot contact them via the website.”

“Often contact addresses difficult to find.”

Participants commented that phone, postal and online contact details were not immediately obvious, however they would like them to be.

Next Steps

We understand the important of making sure information that we provide online is easy to find, use and understand. The findings in our research are being used when considering how to design and maintain Social Security Scotland's online

ongoing decisions around the format and design of our online content.

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

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through 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.



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