Social Security Scotland – Insights Research Findings to September 2019

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 September 2019, during which Carer's Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant / Best Start Foods, and Funeral Support Payment benefits were live.

Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Funeral Support Payment on 16 September 2019. This publication covers the first two weeks of Funeral Support Payment benefit being live. There were not enough data during this period to fully report on Funeral Support Payment.

2. Key Findings

- The insights research programme has had feedback from clients on their experiences of engaging with the organisation during the period September 2018 to September 2019.

- During this period Social Security Scotland received approximately 99,100 contacts by phone. Of these, approximately 56,000 were in relation to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, 29,800 were in relation to Carer's Allowance Supplement, 600 were in relation to Funeral Support Payment and 12,700 were general enquiries.

- Over 700 clients left ratings on their experience of engaging with the Social Security Scotland telephony service. Of those, 84% felt their call was answered quickly, 76% felt that they got what they needed from the call, and 83% were happy with the overall service they received.

- Over 1,900 clients left ratings following paper, online and telephony applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. Of paper applicants who left a rating, 91% rated the service as Very good or Good. For online applicants, 97% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony applicants, 100% 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. The majority of comments (78% for telephony applications and 77% for online applications) were positive.

- Positive comments 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. Commonly used words included: 'helpful', 'simple', 'good', 'quick', 'easy', 'great', 'clear' and 'straight forward'.

- A smaller proportion of open text comments were negative (1% of telephony and 6% of online open text responses). Negative responses fell into three broad categories – issues with the application form, applicants disagreeing with the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods policy and applicants feeling that the wait between applying and getting a response was too long.

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.](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 have the option of completing 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, a link to the questionnaire is available at the end of the application. For clients applying over the telephone, a client advisor offers to take the client through the questionnaire over the phone, or to post it out to them.

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. It is anticipated that this will improve response rates considerably. The next insights research publication in March 2020 will cover the period up to end December 2019 and will include two weeks of experience ratings/comments collected as part of the new integrated application process. The following publication in June 2020 will cover the period up to end March 2020 and will show the full impact of this change.

4.2. Staff Insights

Workforce statistics for Social Security Scotland are now being published as official statistics. The publication for the period up to end June 2019 can be found here. The latest workforce statistics for Social Security Scotland publication has been released on 17th of December 2019 and can be found here.
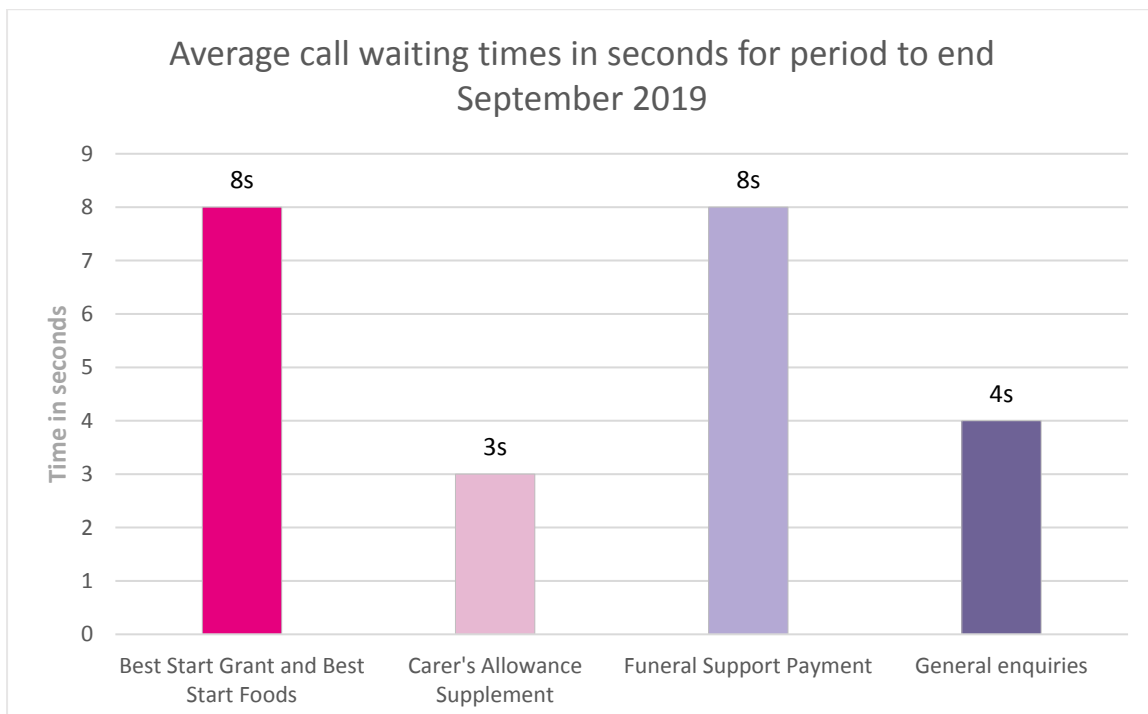
5. Findings

5.1 Client Insights – telephony contacts

From September 2018 to 30 September 2019 Social Security Scotland received approximately, 99,100 contacts by phone. The breakdown of the number of calls received about each benefit is provided in the table below.
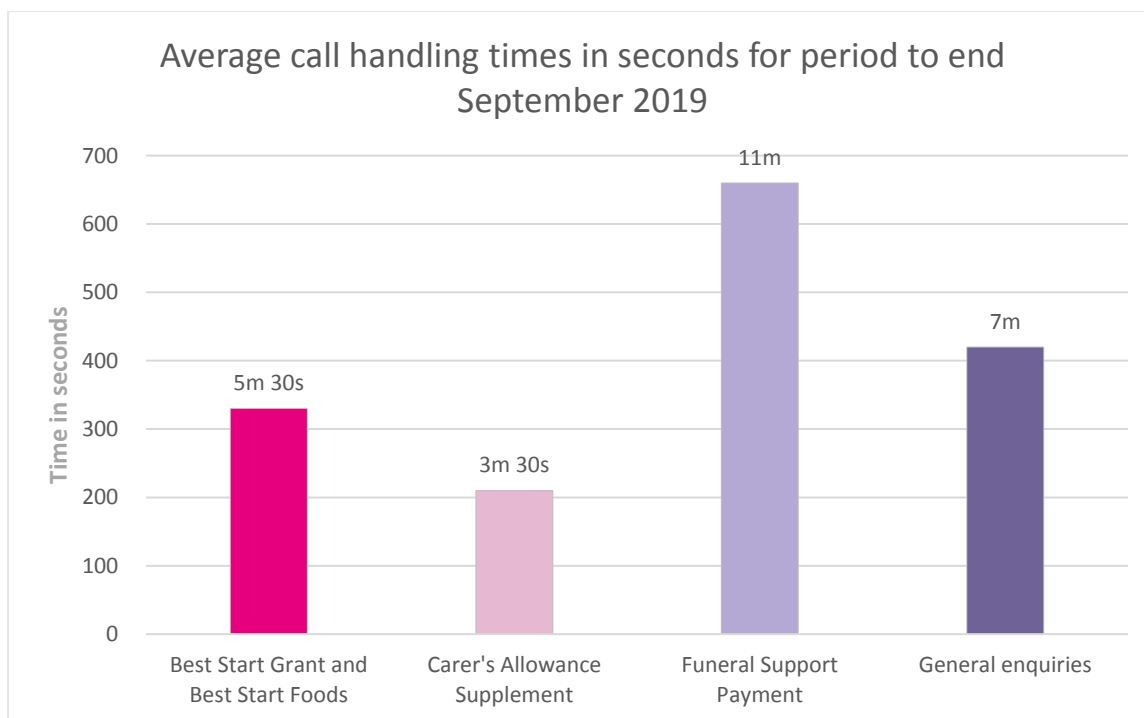
Phone calls received for period to end September 2019 by benefit					
	Total	Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods	Funeral Support Payment	Carer's Allowance Supplement	General enquiries
Calls received	99,100	56,000	600	29,800	12,700

Call volumes are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Call waiting times were on average 6 seconds. The breakdown of the average call waiting times by benefit can be seen below.

Call handling times were on average 5 minutes. The breakdown of the average call handling times by benefit can be seen below.

Average call handling times in seconds for period to end September 2019

5.2 Client Insights – application contacts

From 10 December 2018 to 30 September 2019, 96,535* 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 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 Sep 19		
Number of telephony/paper applications	Number of telephony/paper feedback ratings	Number of telephony[+] open text feedback responses
6,955*	523 (7.5%)	139 (2.0%)
Number of online applications	Number of online feedback ratings	Number of online open text feedback responses
89,435*	1,381 (1.5%)	328 (0.4%)

* 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 30 September 2019, 290 applications for Funeral Support Payment were received. More detail on Funeral Support Payment high level statistics have been published [here](#).

This publication does not present an analysis of client insights data collected following Funeral Support Payment applications, as the number of responses are too low.

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:
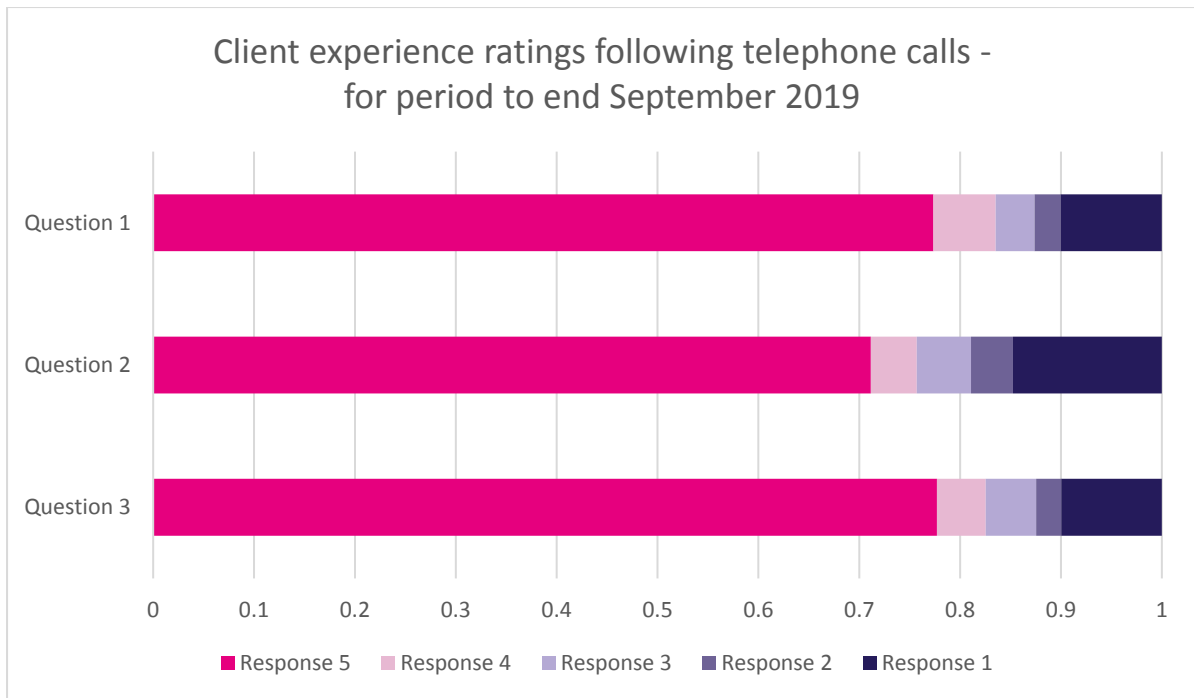

Question one: How quickly did we answer your call today? Press a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is not quickly at all and 5 is very quickly.

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.

Approximately 700 clients left a rating during the period September 2018 to end September 2019.

Of those who left a rating, 84% felt their call had been answered quickly [Question 1], 76% felt they got everything they needed from the call [Question 2], and 83% rated the service positively overall [Question 3].

Client experience ratings following telephone calls - for period to end September 2019

Total number of responses to Question 1: 777
Total number of responses to Question 2: 745
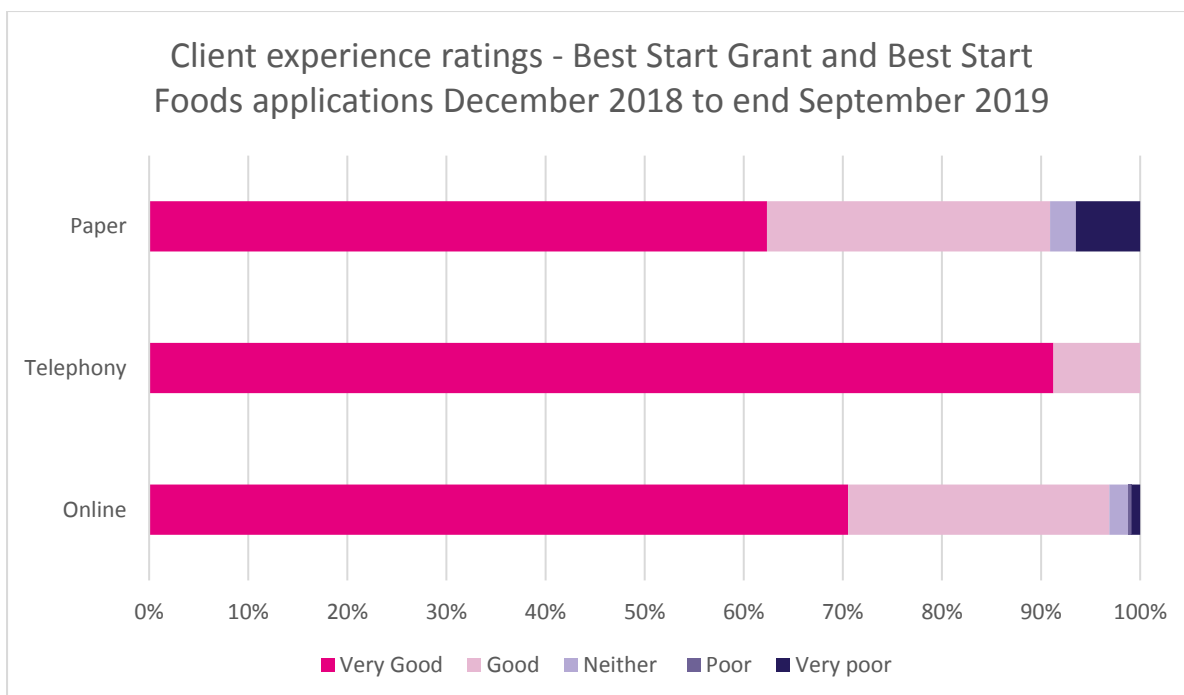*Total number of responses to Question 3: 722*

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

1,904 applicants left experience ratings following a Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods application between December 2018 and end September 2019.

Of paper Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants who left a rating during this period, 91% rated the service as Very good or Good. For online Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants, 97% of those who left a rating rated the service as Very good or Good. For telephony Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants, 100% 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 September 2019

Total number of ratings following a paper application: 77
Total number of ratings following a telephony application: 446
Total number of ratings following an online application: 1,381

5.4.2 Experience ratings following Funeral Support Payment applications

Funeral Support Payment became available from 16 September 2019. This publication covers the period up to the end of Septemeber, 2019. At this stage, there were too few experience ratings to present an analysis.

5.4.3 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 September 2019, 467 chose to answer the further feedback question. There were not enough open text responses from paper applications to present an equivalent analysis.

Each response was classed as negative, neutral, mixed or positive and was grouped into broad categories.

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Negative responses fell into three broad categories: issues with the application form, applicants disagreeing with the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods policy and eligibility rules and applicants feeling that the wait between applying and getting a response was too long.

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.

Most neutral responses expressed that applicants had no further comments or were unrelated to Social Security Scotland processes or policies.

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.

Responses provided after online and telephone applications were separated by application channel and analysed further for key phrases and recurring words.
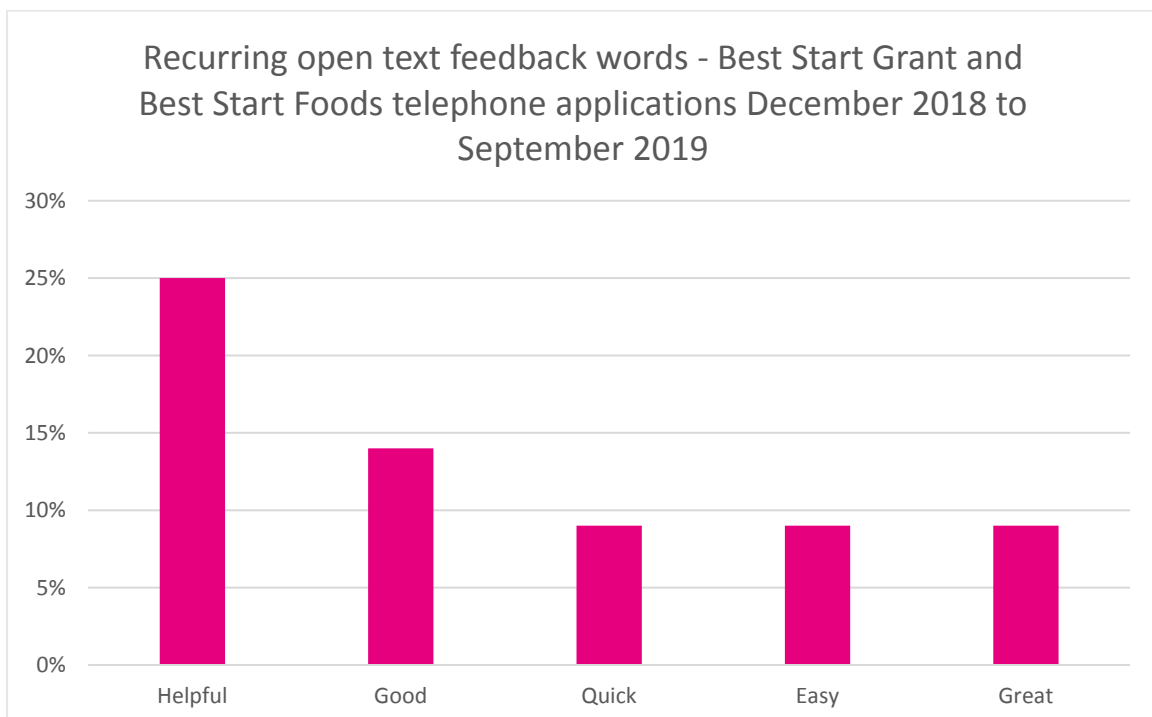
139 open text responses were received following telephone applications. The majority of these were positive (78%) with only 1% of responses negative. 4% of responses were mixed while 17% were neutral. Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"Could not apply through link on facebook, as did not work."
Neutral response	"No other feedback." "No that is all."
Mixed response	"I feel that you have been very helpful … over the phone. But I was confused with the online application …" "Information of these benefits should be more publicised so that people know that these benefits exist."

Positive response	"It was a lot easier than expected." "I would give Social Security Scotland a 10 out of 10." "Service is ran very well, is professional, I did not feel uncomfortable answering any questions." "Very good, given lots of information which was very informative and valuable."

The word "helpful" was mentioned by 25% of telephony applicants who provided a response to the open text feedback, while the word "good" was mentioned by 14% of clients, "quick" mentioned by 9% and "easy" mentioned by 9% of applicants.

The below chart shows the most commonly recurring words mentioned in the responses to the further feedback question after a Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods telephone application.

Recurring open text feedback words - Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods telephone applications December 2018 to September 2019

Word	Percentage
Helpful	25%
Good	14%
Quick	9%
Easy	9%
Great	9%

Of those who applied online for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods between December 2018 and September 2019, 328 chose to answer the further feedback question. 77% responses were positive and 6% of
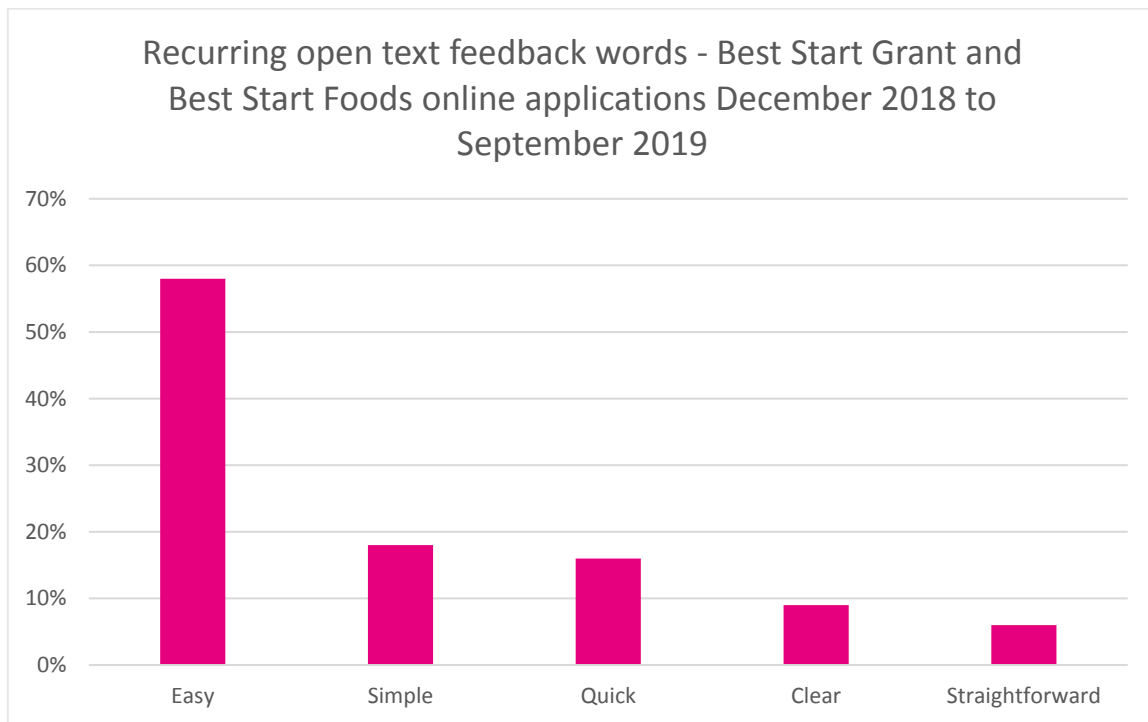
responses were negative. 8% of responses were mixed while 9% were neutral.

Some illustrative examples of each classification are provided below.

Category	Example
Negative response	"Not kept up to date with claim." "The pages kept freezing or taking me back a page."
Neutral response	"None." "No." "I just made application and don't have any answer."
Mixed response	"Very clear and easy form to fill in. I didn't know that we were eligible for this … so missed out on the initial payment for our first child." "Address finder did not work but overall very easy to apply."
Positive response	"Really pleased to be able to apply online as it can be hard finding the time to print and send off forms with a new baby and a young child." "I found the application very user friendly and easy to use." "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." "Any time I have contacted or applied for anything I have received prompt response with no problems at all." "Fast and efficient process, no complicated questions or misleading ones. The easiest method I have seen to date."

The word "easy" was mentioned by 58% of applicants, while the word "simple" was mentioned by 18%, "quick" mentioned by 16%, "clear" mentioned by 9% and "straightforward" mentioned by 6% of applicants.

The below chart shows the most commonly recurring words mentioned in the responses to further feedback question after a Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods online application.

Recurring open text feedback words - Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods online applications December 2018 to September 2019

5.4.4 Open text responses following Funeral Support Payment applications

There were not enough open text responses from Funeral Support Payment applications during the period of 16th September to end September 2019 to present an equivalent analysis.

6. Summary

This report summarises insights research programme findings for the period September 2018 to September 2019. 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 the vast 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

8. 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.

9. 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)