

Social Security Experience Panels: Cold Spell and Winter Fuel Payments

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming 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, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



Over 2,400 people from across Scotland joined the Experience Panels when they started in 2017. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.



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 gives the findings of people's experience of Winter Fuel Payment and Cold Weather Payment. It also gives information about what people think could be improved for the new benefits in Scotland.



358

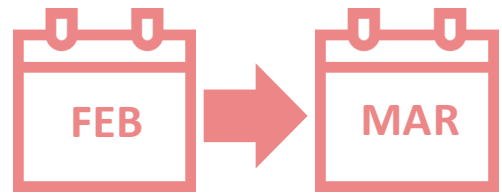
Invites



126

Survey responses

The research took place in



2020

The research explored:



Experiences of Cold Weather Payment and Winter Fuel Payment in the current system



Experiences of accessing information and support to heat your home



How these benefits could be improved

Participants were aged between

16 – 80+

years old



48%

Man or boy



52%

Woman or girl



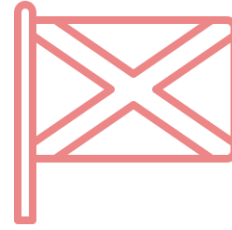
84%

lived in an urban location



16%

lived in a rural location



Respondents took part from **29** local authority areas

Most survey respondents had a disability or long term health condition (83 per cent), including:



chronic pain



severe hearing impairments



severe visual impairments



other kinds of long term health conditions

Almost two in five (39 per cent) of survey respondents were:



a carer due to **old age,**



a carer to a **child, or**



a carer to an **adult.**

Accessing support to heat your home

Most respondents were aware of the different support available to help meet the costs of heating in winter months.



The majority of respondents said that they had heard of **Winter Fuel Payments** (96 per cent)



Most had heard of **Cold Weather Payments** (89 per cent)



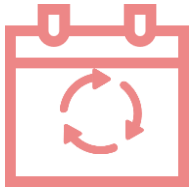
Most were also “confident” or “very confident” what these were (89 per cent and 77 per cent respectively).



More than three in five (62 per cent) respondents said that they know what the **Warm Home Discount** scheme is.



More than half (57 per cent) of respondents said that they were “confident” or “very confident” that **they knew the difference** between Winter Fuel Payment and Warm Home Discount.



More than one in five (21 per cent) respondents said that meeting the cost of fuel for heating caused them financial difficulty throughout the year.



One in six (55 per cent) said the cost of fuel for heating caused financial difficulty in the colder months.



Around half (51 per cent) said that they would know where to go for information on Cold Weather Payment and/or Winter Fuel Payment. This included Gov.uk, speaking to friends and family, or Citizens Advice.

Winter Fuel Payments



More than half (56 per cent) of respondents said that they had received a Winter Fuel Payment.

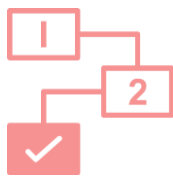


Four in five (77 per cent) said they had received the Winter Fuel Payment automatically.



One in six (16 per cent) had applied for the Winter Fuel Payment. Respondents who had used the application process to receive Winter Fuel Payment mostly had a positive experience.

They said that:



The process was quick and simple



They had received enough information



The payment was helpful

They said it could be improved by:



Advertising more widely



Increasing the payment amount



More than eight in ten (81 per cent) respondents who had received Winter Fuel Payment said they had received a letter telling them that they were going to receive the payment.

Almost all said that they understood why they they got the letter. Many said there was nothing they would change about it.

Some said it could be improved. They suggested:



Clearer information about the difference between the types of payments.



That the information could be sent in a more accessible way.



A small number of respondents who had received Winter Fuel Payment said that their energy supply was “off-grid”.



Some felt that it would be useful to receive payments earlier in the year so that they could buy fuel when it was cheaper.



Others felt it was helpful to get the payment when bills are higher.

Cold Weather Payments



More than half (58 per cent) of respondents said that they had received a Cold Weather Payment.



More than three in five of these (63 per cent) said that their experience of the payment was “good” or “very good”.



The fact that Cold Weather Payments are paid into their account automatically was highlighted as a positive.



Some respondents also said it eased the financial pressure of heating their home during cold spells.



Others felt that the requirement for seven consecutive days at or below freezing was too strict and made it difficult to plan.



It prevented some respondents from putting their heating on when it was needed.



Some respondents felt that the temperature cut off was too strict.



Many respondents will find it very cold when temperatures are slightly above freezing.

Some felt that individual circumstances should be taken into account. For example:



Health conditions



The insulation in a home



If the home is on or off-grid



Three quarters of respondents who had received a Cold Weather Payment said they received a letter. The letter told them that they were getting the payment.



Almost all (97 per cent) of these respondents said that they understood why they were getting the payment.



Almost three in five (59 per cent) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the timing of the payment was helpful. Many said they were able to put the payment towards their next bill.



But some also highlighted things that could be improved:



The timing of the payment was a problem for respondents with pre-paid meters.



One in six (16 per cent) respondents said they had expected a payment but not received one.



They felt the temperature where they live was different to the measurement point for their area. They felt that the criteria for the payment were too strict.

Next Steps



We will have a formal consultation on how Winter Heating Assistance and Cold Spell Heating Assistance will be delivered. This will build on feedback from this survey. It will also look at feedback from people who took part in the consultation on the Social Security Bill in 2016, and from stakeholders.



Most people were broadly supportive of the current eligibility criteria for both benefits. The consultation will therefore look at mirroring these for the new benefits in Scotland as well as where things could be improved.



The findings of this report will also influence the design and delivery of Cold Spell Heating Assistance and Winter Heating Assistance. The current difficulties and frustrations will be taken into consideration and used to identify where improvements in the delivery and design can be made.



The positive aspects highlighted of the current benefits will also be captured and used to support the development of the design and delivery of the new benefits.



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