

Social Security Experience Panels: Annual Report 2022



Equality, Poverty and Social Security

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Foreword

I am pleased to publish the Scottish Government's fifth annual report on the work of the Social Security Experience Panels.

2022 was an important year in the delivery of Social Security Scotland's new benefits, and research with the Social Security Experience Panels played an important role in supporting this work. The end of 2021 saw the launch of Child Disability Payment, and Adult Disability Payment launched in August 2022. This winter we will see the first Winter Heating Payments made to eligible people. The work of the Social Security Experience Panels has been pivotal in ensuring that these new benefits meet the needs of those who receive them.

During 2022, we worked with panel members to explore topics such as Scottish Carer's Assistance, Motability, Adult Disability Payment, redeterminations, appeals, fraud, and measures that have been in place due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We have also undertaken a comprehensive programme of user research, working with panel members to help test and refine processes and services such as the new Adult Disability Payment, online services, carer benefits and applications. Thank you to all who took part in these sessions. More user research will continue in 2023.

For the first time since the start of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we were able to offer some face-to-face research sessions. This enabled us to hear from people in-person on important topics, and was beneficial because we know that face-to-face research is the easiest way for some people to get involved. We are keen to build on this during the next year. But the pandemic also pushed us to be more creative about how we could engage with people remotely, and get the right infrastructure and processes in place to allow this. Being able to engage remotely (either by phone or online) has been a really positive development for some groups – in particular, those who live in remote or island communities and those who find travel or face-to-face interactions

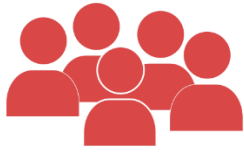
difficult. Utilising technology to engage remotely means that we can move forward with more options for how people can take part, and therefore hopefully more scope to hear from a greater diversity of people than ever before.

The Social Security Experience Panels will continue to be a crucial part of our work as we progress the review of Adult Disability Payment and work towards the delivery of the new Scottish Carer's Assistance. We are very grateful to our panel members for sharing their experiences and views. We know that this has sometimes involved opening up about difficult experiences, as well as contributing ideas and giving feedback on our proposals. Panel members' contributions are fundamental to building a better system for the people of Scotland. We look forward to continuing to work with them in 2023.

Ben Macpherson

Minister for Social Security and Local Government

2022 in Numbers



2108 Active Panel Members



11 surveys with **1772** responses



50 interviews in person, online or on the phone



5 Focus groups with **30** people



4 reports and **7** visual summaries



3 panel member newsletters

Introduction

The Scottish Government is now responsible for some of the benefits previously delivered by the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the work to prepare for this change, in summer 2017 the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

The Experience Panels are made up of people who have experience of at least one of the benefits that are coming to Scotland. The Scottish Government works with panel members to inform key decisions in the design of Social Security in Scotland. This is the fifth annual report for the Experience Panels programme of research. It aims to feed back to panel members and others interested in the work about what was achieved in 2022 and what is planned for 2023.

2022 was our fifth full year of running research with panel members. Since the start of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020 we have used surveys, video interviews and phone interviews to hear from panel members. This was to keep both participants and our staff safe. This year, we had our first face-to-face sessions since the start of the pandemic. We would like to thank all panel members for their understanding and flexibility over the last few years. We are committed to learning from what worked well about our remote research, and continuing to offer this as a way to take part. At the same time, we know that face-to-face research is incredibly valuable, and a preferred way of taking part for some panel members. Hearing panel members' views and experiences continues to play a critical role in the design of the social security system in Scotland. We want to make that as easy as possible for people to contribute to.

In 2022, we published more reports and visual summaries about our work with Experience Panel members, and how the research is informing decision making about the Scottish Government benefits system. As in 2021, we worked with our partner user researchers to undertake increasingly detailed research with panel members with

the aim of testing and refining how some of Social Security Scotland's systems and processes work in practice. This user testing is all about working with users from an early stage to test out how parts of the system should work, and where things need to be changed. Findings from this type of user research are fed directly into the design of these systems. This annual report will give you an overview of the work during 2022.

2022: How we worked

This section will give an update on how we approached our research in 2022. It will cover:

- Returning to face-to-face research
- How we will work in the future
- What we are asking about

Returning to face-to-face fieldwork

This year saw us return to running face-to-face research sessions for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic hit in early 2020 it immediately became apparent that we were going to have to work differently to make sure that Experience Panels members could safely take part in research to inform the development of Social Security Scotland and its benefits.

Panel members were invited to take part remotely, using phone or video, through online surveys, or by post. Strikingly, some panel members told us that taking part in this way was actually easier for them – easier to fit around other responsibilities, eliminating the need for travel, or easier to manage with their disability or health condition. For some in rural or island communities it was a much easier way of taking part than having to travel. Yet, we are also aware that for others having sufficient internet connectivity in these areas can be a barrier to taking part in this way.

Other panel members, however, felt that not having the option of face-to-face sessions was a barrier to participation. This was because they were unable to use online participation methods or found face-to-face sessions easier to manage with their disability or health condition. Some told us that they missed having the direct interaction with other panel members and research staff that face-to-face research had allowed.

With this feedback in mind, we aim to offer a range of participation options going forward. We are keen to re-establish some face-to-

face sessions in locations around Scotland, while also retaining the advantages of remote research.

How we will work in the future

We are conscious of the importance of being mindful of the health and wellbeing of participants, and for face-to-face events this is a particular consideration. We know that some panel members may have disabilities or health conditions which make them more at risk from COVID-19 or other transmittable infections. When we run future face-to-face events we will offer information about the measures in place at our events to keep people safe. Wherever possible, we will also offer a remote participation option as an alternative to a face-to-face event. This will allow panel members to make an informed decision about how they would like to take part.

We are grateful to panel members for their patience while we were working under restrictions, and for providing helpful feedback on how we can improve and learn from this experience going forward.

What we are asking about

As benefits have moved from DWP to Social Security Scotland, the work we do with Experience Panels members has changed over time. In 2017 and 2018 we tended to ask general questions about people's experiences and desires for the new system. Since then, our questions became more specific as the detail of the processes began to be developed. This continued during 2022 as we increasingly asked panel members to become involved with testing and refining how some of the systems and processes work in practice. This is to make these as simple and easy to use as possible for the people who will need them.

We are very grateful that so many panel members have shared with us their past experiences of the UK Government benefits system and gave up their time to help test ideas. It is an important time to reflect on what has been achieved since 2017 and how we have got here with their help.

Social Security Scotland are now delivering 13 benefits¹:

- Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment
- Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment
- Best Start Grant School Age Payment
- Best Start Foods
- Funeral Support Payment
- Young Carer Grant
- Carer's Allowance Supplement
- Job Start Payment
- Child Winter Heating Assistance
- Scottish Child Payment
- Child Disability Payment
- Adult Disability Payment
- Winter Heating Payment

Panel members and other citizens have been involved in shaping each of these benefits, as well as contributing to the design of Social Security Scotland's processes and systems for:

- Appointments
- Applications
- Social Security Scotland buildings, logo and branding, staff uniform and recruitment
- Redeterminations and appeals
- Complaints and feedback
- Advocacy and appointees
- Communication channels and materials
- Case transfer from DWP to Social Security Scotland
- Local delivery (services in your local area)

¹ For more information and to apply see <https://www.mygov.scot/benefits/> or call 0800 182 2222

2022: The research

This chapter will outline the wide range of topics covered by our research programme with panel members in 2022. It will also give some examples of our findings and how they are being used to make decisions.

Published reports

We report on our findings through full research reports and visual summaries, which are shorter and designed to be as accessible as possible. These are sent to panel members as soon as they are published so they can see what they have said and how we have used the findings.

In 2022 we published 4 full reports and 7 visual summaries. Full reports and accompanying visual summaries were published on:

- Scottish Carer's Assistance
- Motability
- Low Income Winter Heating Assistance (now known as Winter Heating Payment)
- Seldom Heard research programme: Mobile Populations

Having published the full reports in 2021, visual summaries were published on:

- Seldom Heard research programme: vulnerable groups
- Seldom Heard research programme: carers and care experienced people
- Seldom Heard research programme: end of life

We now have over 130 reports and visual summaries on the research we have done with Experience Panel members and

seldom heard communities. These can all be found on our [publications page](#).

An overview of the reports that we have published this year is provided below.

Scottish Carer's Assistance: findings overview

Scottish Carer's Assistance was one of our biggest research topics this year. Findings will feed into the design of the new Scottish Carer's Assistance when it is first introduced, and plans on how the benefit could be improved in the future. The research took place from March to July 2022. It involved a survey completed by 242 panel members and follow-up interviews with 16 participants.

The research was designed to understand panel members' views on a range of proposals related to how Scottish Carer's Assistance should work when it is first introduced, extra payments for carers in Scotland, and further changes to be made to Scottish Carer's Assistance in the future.

During the research, we explained to participants that some changes to how carer benefits work in Scotland could be made when Scottish Carer's Assistance is first introduced. However, to ensure the safe and secure transfer of people's benefits when moving from the DWP system to Social Security Scotland, some further changes would not be possible until later – once all existing clients have moved across to Social Security Scotland.

In response to the proposals on how Scottish Carer's Assistance should work when it's first introduced, participants told us that information about benefit entitlement and sources of support needs to be streamlined across agencies and services. Participants were also asked about proposals to set payment amounts at £0 in certain circumstances, rather than stopping an award completely – with the intention being that it would be easier for a payment to be restarted. Examples given were any week where a carer earns too much money to be entitled to the benefit, or if a cared for person's

disability benefit were stopped or suspended. Overall, there was support for these proposals – comments, concerns and suggestions given are detailed in the full report on our publications page.

Panel members were also asked about extra payments for carers – including when Carer's Allowance Supplement should be paid, and proposals for a new Carer's Additional Person Payment for carers who care for more than one disabled person. Participants were asked about the proposed eligibility criteria for these and were broadly supportive.

Participants were also asked about proposals for future changes to Scottish Carer's Assistance. Some key findings are:

- There was a positive consensus between interview participants on the proposal to remove education restrictions, to allow carers in full-time education to be eligible for Scottish Carer's Assistance.
- Just over four fifths of respondents (81 per cent) agreed with the change to allow carers to add together the hours spent caring for two people in order to reach the 35 hours per week requirement to get Scottish Carer's Assistance.
- The vast majority of survey respondents agreed with the proposal to pay Scottish Carer's Assistance for 12 weeks after the death of a cared for person (90 per cent) or when a cared for person goes into hospital or residential care (91 per cent). The majority of respondents (82 per cent) also agreed with the idea of making payments for some weeks after a carer earns over the earnings limit.
- 90 per cent agreed with the proposal to increase the earnings limit for Scottish Carer's Assistance to a level linked to the formula of 16 hours times the hourly rate for the Real Living Wage.
- 89 per cent of survey respondents said that a potential future payment for long-term carers should be considered further.

We will be continuing with research on this topic in 2023, with user research to help design and test elements of the new system, and research with seldom heard carers.

Motability: findings overview

This report sets out the future development of Social Security Scotland's Accessible Vehicles and Equipment (AVE) scheme. The AVE scheme is better known as "Motability". This is the name of the charity that runs the service for Social Security Scotland and DWP. The goal of the research was to identify panel members with experience of the current scheme and to hear about their overall experiences of using this service.

Respondents were asked about their experiences of the AVE scheme. Almost nine in ten (89 per cent) described their experience as "very good" or "good". Many respondents described their communications with the service very positively, finding it quick and easy to access the help and support needed.

Many respondents felt that there was a good range of vehicles and equipment on offer. However, some felt that once their specific requirements were taken into consideration, the options available to them were much more limited and not always affordable for them. Many also raised the associated costs of accessing the scheme, specifically the advanced payments required for some vehicles and the cost of adaptations. The findings are available in full on our publications page.

Low Income Winter Heating Assistance: findings overview

From February to March 2022, Experience Panel members took part in research on Low Income Winter Heating Assistance (now known as Winter Heating Payment), the Scottish Government's replacement for the DWP's Cold Weather Payment for clients living in Scotland. We asked panel members their views on the key policy options for this new benefit. In total, 288 members chose to complete a survey exploring this topic.

87 per cent agreed that a new benefit replacing Cold Weather Payment is a good way to help towards winter heating costs for people on low incomes. 90 per cent agreed with the plan to remove the need for a 'cold spell', a component of the eligibility for Cold Weather Payment, in order for people to receive the new benefit.

55 per cent agreed the new benefit should be a one-off, annual payment each winter. 81 per cent said they thought the eligibility criteria for the new benefit is clear.

Research with Seldom Heard Groups

The Social Security Experience Panels are made up of a highly diverse group of volunteers. This is incredibly valuable for gathering a wide range of perspectives, both in terms of people's different experiences of the UK government system, and for understanding a range of needs in relation to the design of the Scottish government system. However, we are aware that there are some experiences and communities which are not well represented on the Experience Panels. We have sought to address these gaps through a supplementary programme of research: the Seldom Heard Voices project.

Our programme of seldom heard research has four strands:

- **Mobile populations:** Gypsy/Traveller populations, temporary EU migrants, refugees.
- **Care Experienced and Carers:** Care experienced people, foster and kinship carers, young parents, single parents.
- **Vulnerable groups:** people who have offended, people with experience of homelessness, veterans.
- **End of life:** people with terminal illnesses, bereaved families

Reports detailing the findings from research with these groups are available on our [publications page](#).

Spotlight On: Mobile populations

This report shares the findings from the research with Mobile Populations strand of our Seldom Heard project. The group is divided into the following sub-groups: Gypsy/Travellers, refugees and seasonal migrant workers. The research found that mobile populations faced some common barriers when engaging with the benefit system.

These included finding the system difficult to understand, prescriptive application forms, and long waiting times during benefit application processes. They also reported feeling stigmatised and discriminated against by staff. Participants stressed that the benefit system needs to be compassionate, and highlighted how third sector organisations contributed to positive experiences with the benefit system. They also noted that they need various communication methods to suit their individual circumstances. Many said that they preferred to access support face-to-face as it will ensure they are given the correct information and means that they would receive help to complete forms.

In 2023 we will complete the final analysis of research with these groups. This will focus on the second phase of the research which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the pandemic there were additional challenges to engaging with participants, and much of the second wave of this research had to be carried out remotely.

Research conducted in 2022 but due for publication in 2023

In 2022 panel members were also asked about their views on a number of topics relating to how Social Security Scotland can work better. This research was part of the work feeding into the consultation on “Enhanced Administration and Compensation Recovery” and covered topics relating to redeterminations, appeals, COVID-19 special measures and measures relating to low-value fraud.

This research asked panel members about proposals relating to some of the choices available to clients during the redeterminations and appeals processes. For example, whether a client should have the option to withdraw a redetermination request once it has been submitted. We also asked panel members about whether it was the right time to end some of the special measures that had been in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also held interviews and focus groups with panel members as part of the groundwork the Scottish Government is doing to prepare for an independent review of Adult Disability Payment next year – one year after the benefit was launched. The purpose of the independent review is to consider how the eligibility criteria for Adult Disability Payment is being applied, including what works well and what could potentially be improved. We spoke to panel members to gather views and ideas on things that the independent review should look at. This work will continue in 2023.

User Research and testing

User Research is a particular type of research designed to engage with people who will use the Scottish government benefits system, to help design and test how it works. The idea is that by engaging with users throughout the design process, the new system will be designed in such a way that people will find it easy to use and it will meet their needs.

Our user researchers work hard to ensure that they are hearing from a wide range of perspectives throughout this work. They seek

out opportunities to hear from people who may face particular barriers within the benefits system or whose experience might be a bit different to others using the system. The Experience Panels is usually the first group that they look to for this research, but they also speak to others, for example people that they have contacted through charities or community groups. This year we have arranged over 150 sessions between Experience Panels members and user researchers.

This year, our user research teams covered a wide range of topics relating to the design of new benefits, systems and processes for Social Security Scotland. Topics included:

- Motability
- Case Transfer from DWP to Social Security Scotland
- Online applications
- Bereavement services
- Support for applications
- The review process
- Scottish Carer's Assistance
- Adult Disability Payment
- Letters to clients
- Online information for clients
- Phone services
- Storing client's personal information
- Life-long health conditions

With User Research, their learning from each session is immediately built into the design process. This keeps the design of the Scottish government benefits system and processes constantly moving forwards. However, it means that the findings are analysed differently from the rest of the Experience Panels research, and we therefore don't usually publish the findings from these sessions as we would for other research. We do, however, try to include an overview of some of the things that we have learnt in the Experience Panels newsletters.

More user research sessions will take place over 2023.

Research with Social Security Scotland clients

About the Client Panels

In previous Annual Reports we have shared information about Social Security Scotland's Client Panels, and how they work together with the Experience Panels to create an improved Social Security system in Scotland.

The Social Security Experience Panels are made up of people with experience of the DWP benefits that are moving to Social Security Scotland. Some of those people are now clients of Social Security Scotland, and others will become clients over the coming years.

As more benefits are launched by Social Security Scotland, it is important that the way the agency continues to improve is informed by its clients. That is why Social Security Scotland runs the Client Panels. The Client Panels run in a similar way to the Social Security Experience Panels and are a crucial part of the agency's ongoing improvement and development. The Client Survey is sent to everyone who applies for or receives a Social Security Scotland Payment. As part of the survey, people are asked if they would like to join the Client Panels.

We work closely with the Client Panels team to ensure that research engages with the most appropriate panel members – for example either Client Panel members who are clients of live benefits in Social Security Scotland, or Experience Panels members who are likely to be clients of future benefits.

Research with Client Panels members is published on the [Social Security Scotland social research publications page](#). In 2022 reports were published on:

- [Social Security Scotland's main buildings in Dundee and Glasgow](#)

- [Experiences of using Social Security Scotland's web chat service](#)
- [Views on the working location of staff](#)
- Views on [Social Security Scotland's opening hours](#)
- Feedback from panel members on [taking part](#).

Spotlight On: Staff working locations research

From November to December 2021, Client Panel and Experience Panel members took part in a survey to explore views about the working location of Social Security Scotland staff. Our research examined panel members' opinions on where staff worked and how they felt this relates to confidentiality and data privacy. We also asked for their thoughts on why working location does or doesn't matter.

Most respondents said that they didn't mind where staff were working, although this varied depending on the reason for contacting Social Security Scotland and by demographics. For all of the proposed reasons for getting in touch, a clear majority of respondents said they do not mind where the staff they speak with are working. However, a substantial proportion of respondents did express a preference to speak with staff based in an office in each case. This ranged from one in ten preferring this when seeking general advice or information (11%), to one in three when challenging a decision (32%) or making a complaint (33%). Older respondents and those with a disability or long-term health condition were more likely to prefer or strongly prefer to talk to staff working in an office

Most respondents said they would feel confident discussing their personal information with staff in an office or at home. However, people were relatively less confident about doing this with staff working at home. Respondents were also relatively less confident that their information would be kept private when staff were working at home.

Respondents often stated working location shouldn't matter, as long as client service and data security can be maintained. Some felt that office environments were better suited for this. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of staff being professional and helpful, regardless of working location.

The Charter Measurement Framework

One of the key roles played by the Client Panels is to help measure Social Security Scotland's performance against [Our Charter](#). The Charter Measurement Framework is published annually to show how Social Security Scotland is living up to the commitments made in Our Charter, and to provide information and insights to help the organisation to keep improving.

The [Charter Measurement Framework](#) is informed by research with clients, staff and partner organisations. The framework uses findings from the Client Survey, and also involves interviews with Client Panel members. Surveys and sometimes interviews are also conducted with staff and partner organisations. The 2021-22 and previous reports can be found on the [Social Security Scotland social research publications page](#).

Plans for 2023

Experience Panels research will continue in 2023. Research will cover:

- Possible future changes to Adult Disability Payment in line with the review of this benefit
- Support for people with experience of industrial injuries
- Support for pension age disabled people
- A review of Social Security Scotland’s “Our Charter” and the “Charter Measurement Framework”
- More user research to help with the development and testing of Social Security Scotland’s services and benefits, including Scottish Carer’s Assistance

We also plan to carry out research with seldom heard carers – by which we mean carers who may not be well represented on the Experience Panels. This is to further support work to develop Scottish Carer’s Assistance, following research to inform the development of this benefit with Experience Panel members in 2022.

Conclusion

We would like to thank all Experience Panels members who contributed to our research during 2022. The contributions of panel members continue to be crucial in creating a social security system in Scotland that is grounded in fairness, dignity and respect. We look forward to continuing this work during 2023 and making sure that the design and development of the new system is centered around the needs of the people who will use it.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this research publication:

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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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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