

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Experience Panels: Legacy report visual summary

Background



In anticipation of the devolution of additional social security powers in 2018, the Scottish Government set out some guiding principles for social security in Scotland. These included putting user experience first and following a human rights-based approach.



The Experience Panels were established in 2017 to support the development of decision making about social security in Scotland and ensure it involved the people who know the system best – those who access and rely on services.



The aim of the Experience Panels was to design the new social security system with direct input from people with lived experience of the previous UK system.



By March 2024 the original purpose of the panels to help design and deliver the devolved benefits was achieved. The Experience Panels formally closed at the end of March 2024.

About the research



This visual summary is based on the Experience Panels legacy report. The aim of the report was to document and understand what impact the research conducted by the Experience Panels had across the different areas of policy, Social Security Scotland, and social research within the Scottish Government.



Research was conducted by the Experience Panels team between November 2023 and March 2024.



Findings are based on interviews with social researchers and policy teams in the Scottish Government, and Social Security Scotland staff.



A feedback survey was also sent to all Experience Panel members to understand their overall experiences and opinions, and an evidence review was conducted of relevant literature.



In total, 25 interviews were conducted and the feedback survey was completed by 206 Experience Panels members.

Panel members



Over the six years that the Experience Panels ran, more than 2,400 people joined as panel members.



Most joined the panel in 2017 after being invited through a random sample of existing claimants for the devolved benefits, delivered at that point by the UK-Government Department for Work and Pensions. Other panel members were recruited through an open invitation in the press and on social media.



A second wave of recruitment was undertaken from summer 2019 to spring 2020, to replace inactive members and to target groups that were underrepresented on the panels.

Demographic information about panel members can be found in the visual summary [Social Security Experience Panels: who is in the panels](#)

Impact from Experience Panels Research



The impact of research conducted by the Experience Panels was assessed across three areas: policy, Social Security Scotland, and social research within the Scottish Government.

Policy



The most common way policy teams used Experience Panels research was to develop a primary policy position and to provide advice directly to Scottish Ministers, principally to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice.



It was also useful when policy teams were considering changes to an already developed position, or when findings from research challenged viewpoints from other sources such as stakeholder organisations or public consultations.



Several policy teams used existing Experience Panels publications as part of an evidence base to develop future work, or plan further research.

Social Security Scotland



Experience Panels research was a fundamental part of the work to develop Social Security Scotland.



Experience Panel members feedback instigated an important change in the language used throughout Social Security Scotland and in interactions with clients.



The change in language reflects that social security in Scotland is built on trust with clients and aims to treat clients with dignity, fairness and respect.



Experience Panels research was integral to the development of the brand and appearance of Social Security Scotland. This included brand guidelines, setting out elements such as the colours, font, and tone of voice to be used.



Panel members were also involved in building design and the development of the Local Delivery service, which supports clients to access support at home or other accessible locations.



Based on the Experience Panels model, the Client Panels were launched in 2020 in recognition of the need for engaging people with lived experience for ongoing development and improvement of the agency. Client Panels members are recruited from current clients of Social Security Scotland.



The Client Panels are a significant legacy of the Experience Panels and will ensure people with lived experience remain at the heart of the delivery of social security in Scotland.

Research



The Experience Panels developed the knowledge and expertise of research team members. This expertise was specialised around planning and conducting panel research with participants who could be vulnerable or have specific accessibility needs.



In interviews with social researchers, many recalled speaking to Experience Panels team members and drawing on their expertise as they were preparing or carrying out other research, some of which also involved panels.



Other researchers said that they had drawn on materials and processes developed by the Experience Panels team to use as a template for their own work.

Impact beyond government



There has also been interest in the Experience Panels' work beyond the Scottish Government from academia and other bodies, and other governments.



This demonstrates a broad recognition that including people with lived experience in social security research and service design is important, and that the Scottish Government has taken a leading role in developing this approach.

Feedback survey

Why people joined the panel



The feedback survey asked panel members what had motivated them to join the Experience Panels. The most common responses were to 'Design

Scotland's social security system' and to 'Share my experience', with 80 per cent and 79 per cent respectively.



25 per cent of respondents said that they were motivated to join to 'Meet other people'.

Accessibility of participation



The feedback survey included several questions about accessibility relating to in-person research, phone/video research and surveys.



For interviews, 94 per cent and 93 per cent of in-person and phone/video participants, respectively, reported that they had enough choice about how they took part.



For surveys, 97 per cent of respondents said that they had enough time to complete the survey. 72 per cent said that they were able to access support to complete surveys if they needed it.

Communication with panel members



88 per cent of respondents said that the communications from the Experience Panels team had kept them up to date with the research.



96 per cent said that the reports and newsletters were in a format that was accessible to them. 93 per cent found both the reports and newsletters clear and easy to understand.

Panel members' impact on decision making



82 per cent of respondents said that it was clear how Experience Panels research was used to inform the design of the new social security system in Scotland.



81 per cent said that they felt being part of the Experience Panels had allowed them to shape the new social security system.



87 per cent said that the Experience Panels were a good way to ensure people with lived experience helped to design the new social security system.

What worked well?



Panel members were asked what was good about the research activities. Respondents thought it was important that they were involved and felt their lived experience was valued.



Sharing experiences was described as cathartic and respondents said that they felt listened to.



Respondents also said that they liked hearing from other people and hearing similar experiences made them feel less alone.



Respondents also spoke positively about the researchers and felt that the organisation of the research worked well overall.

What could have been better?



When panel members were asked what could have been better, the survey responses generally related to accessibility of certain research locations, a desire for more in-person research and improved diversity of the panel.



Some respondents noted that they would have liked to have heard more about what happened to their contributions after the research was complete.

Impact on panel members



The survey asked panel members if they felt that their participation had achieved what they had hoped. Most respondents were very positive and expressed hope that they had helped to create a positive social security system for Scotland.



A few expressed disappointment that particular topics had not been covered, or that their suggestions were not implemented.

Overall experience of being on the panel



The vast majority (91 per cent) of respondents said that they had enjoyed taking part in the Experience Panels research, with more than half (55 per cent) strongly agreeing.



More than four-fifths (81 per cent) of respondents said that they had felt listened to.



93 per cent of respondents said that they would take part in research organised by the Scottish Government again.

Reflections and Learnings

- ▲ → ? Across the evidence review, interviews and feedback
- → ? survey, several learnings have been identified.
- → ?

Reflections on sampling of panel members



As the Experience Panels required voluntary input from panel members, it was by necessity a self-selecting group of research participants.



Some people involved in the legacy research regarded this as a positive because it meant panel members were taking part because they wanted to voluntarily share their experiences.



Others appreciated that having a ready resource of people willing to participate allowed them to shorten the recruitment phase for their research.



However, some highlighted that panel members could volunteer repeatedly for different research activities, which could lead to a few individuals having disproportionate input to research and their views being overrepresented.

Importance of building trust



The Experience Panels team felt that it was important to take the time to build trust with panel members.



Sensitive personal data was collected gradually so that panel members felt comfortable with the researchers. Many panel members reported that they felt comfortable with the researchers and felt they could be open.

Offering multiple ways to participate



Some feedback survey respondents said that being able to participate by phone or video meant they were able to take part more easily, whereas others said that in-person research was important to them.

Managing expectations of panel members



Some panel members expressed disappointment that some of their suggestions had not been implemented. It is important to carefully manage the expectations of panel members, and to make clear that there are other factors involved in decision making, alongside research.

Feeding back to panel members



A recurring challenge throughout the research for the report was identifying how the data produced from the Experience Panels had fed into the decision-making process.



This was also a factor identified by panel members in the feedback survey. Many respondents commented that they wanted to know more about how the research was used and what the impact had been.



For future research, establishing clear steps to document how research findings are being used and their role within decision-making processes would be advisable. This would also allow more transparency when communicating with research participants about how their contributions have been used.

Importance of culture around social security



Findings repeatedly highlighted that an important impact of the Experience Panels was the creation of a culture that embodies dignity, fairness and respect, and that the Experience Panels set a high standard

for how participatory research and service development should be done.

Conclusion



The legacy report has found that the Experience Panels have had a meaningful impact across the areas of policy, Social Security Scotland, and Scottish Government research. This includes in key areas of policy design and service delivery.



Most importantly, the Experience Panels successfully demonstrated that participatory research has an important role to play in government research overall, and service design specifically.



Collectively, the findings of the legacy report indicate that the panels have successfully fulfilled their original aim: involving people with lived experience of the benefits system in the design and development of the new Scottish social security system.

What's Next?



Following the closure of the Experience Panels, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland will continue to improve the social security system by listening to and working with thousands of people who have experience of it. Social Security Scotland's Client Survey, Client Panels and User Research are key ways that this will be achieved.



In addition, evaluation work is continually being carried out by Scottish Government researchers to explore the impact of the benefit system in achieving the government's objectives: that social security is an investment in people, reduces poverty, and delivers value for money.



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