



Social Security Scotland statistics

Social Security Scotland feedback statistics to 31 March 2020

Frequency of publications

The next publication will be bi-annual rather than quarterly. It will cover up to end September 2020 and will be released in December 2020.

Under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹ we publish a timetable of statistical releases for the twelve months ahead².

¹ The Code of Practice is found online at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

² The forthcoming publication timetable is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/official-statistics-forthcoming-publications/>

Introduction

This report covers feedback (complaints, compliments, and suggestions) received by Social Security Scotland since it was introduced on 4 September 2018 until 31 March 2020. It includes statistics for specific benefits (Carer's Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant), as well as feedback that was not benefit specific.

All tables and charts relating to this publication can be found at:

<http://gov.scot/publications/social-security-feedback-stats-mar-2020>

These statistics are being published as experimental statistics. Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Statistics as "*new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.*" These statistics have not yet been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. They have not been designated as National Statistics³.

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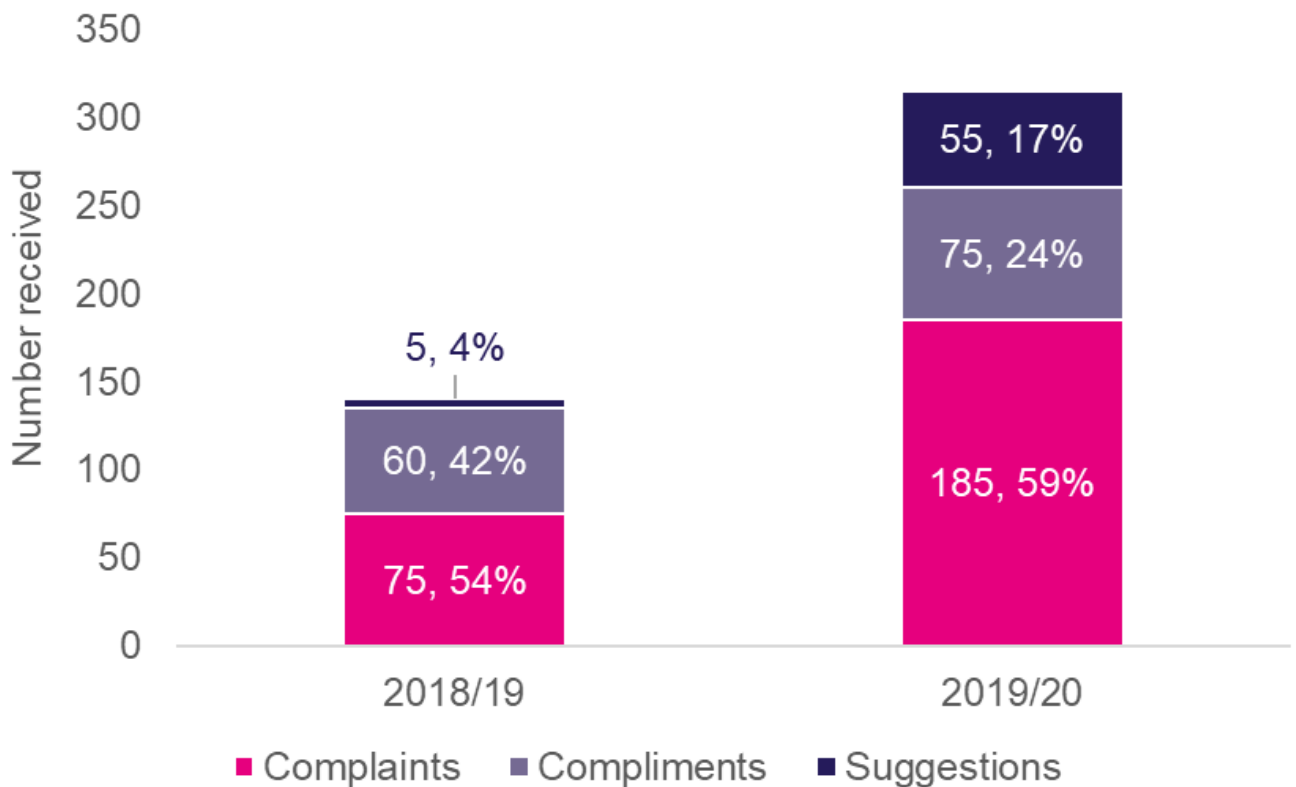
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³ For more information on experimental statistics please see:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/experimental-statistics-official-statistics-in-development/>

Main findings

Chart 1: Feedback by financial year



Complaints includes all stage 1 complaints, plus complaint received at stage 2

In total 265 complaints, 135 compliments and 60 suggestions were received by 31 March 2020. The most common type of feedback received in both 2018/19 and 2019/20 was complaints **[Chart 1]**.

The amount of feedback received increased from 2018/19 to 2019/20 **[Chart 1]**. This is as expected given that 2019/20 was the first full year for Social Security Scotland, and due to the ongoing launch of new payments during 2019/20. Social Security Scotland was introduced part way through 2018/19, and by 31 March 2019, there were two live payments (Carer's Allowance Supplement and Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment). By the end of 2019/20 there were an additional five live payments - the [background section](#) gives the launch dates for each and shows the number of carers receiving payments slightly increased in 2019/20, while the number of applications received for other benefits increased around seven fold in total.

The relative proportions of different types of feedback also changed in 2019/20, with the number of complaints relative to other feedback slightly increasing, the proportion of suggestions increasing, and the proportion of compliments decreasing **[Chart 1]**.

Complaints

Complaints received

In total 265 complaints were received by 31 March 2020, including 75 for Carer's Allowance Supplement, 175 for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods, ten for Funeral Support Payment and five that were not benefit specific **[Table 1]**. There were no complaints received for Young Carer Grant, which was introduced on 21 October 2019.

This compares to 98,275 carers receiving Carer's Allowance Supplement payments⁴, 147,420 Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications⁵, 3,970 Funeral Support Payment applications⁶ and 1,750 Young Carer Grant applications⁷ made by 31 March 2020. Complaints can be from people who did not receive Carer's Allowance Supplement and did not apply for one of the other benefits – therefore it is not possible to calculate a rate of complaints per applications or payments.

More complaints were received in 2019/20 (185) than in 2018/19 (75) **[Chart 1]**, and in 2019/20 relatively more related to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods (76%) and fewer related to Carer's Allowance Supplement (14%) than in 2018/19 **[Table 1]**. This is expected given Social Security Scotland was only introduced midway through 2018/19, and two new Best Start Grant payments, and Best Start Foods, launched in 2019/20 (dates are given in the [background section](#)).

Complaints reaching stage 2

Overall, 15% of complaints reached stage 2 (either progressing from stage 1 to stage 2, or being received at stage 2 – the [background section](#) explains the difference between stage 1 and 2 complaints) **[Table 1]**.

A higher proportion of Carer's Allowance Supplement complaints reached stage 2 (23%) than for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods (12%) **[Chart 2]**. This difference may be due to clients using complaints in different ways for the two benefits. While Best Start Grant has a redeterminations and appeals process, for Carer's Allowance Supplement there is no statutory right to appeal. This could lead clients to make complaints about Carer's Allowance Supplement as a way of having their cases looked at again.

⁴ Summary statistics for Carer's Allowance at August 2019 and Carer's Allowance Supplement, October eligibility date 2019 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-carers-allowance-at-august-2019-and-carers-allowance-supplement-october-eligibility-date-2019/>

⁵ Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods: high level statistics to 31 March 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-grant-and-best-start-foods-high-level-statistics-to-31-march-2020/>

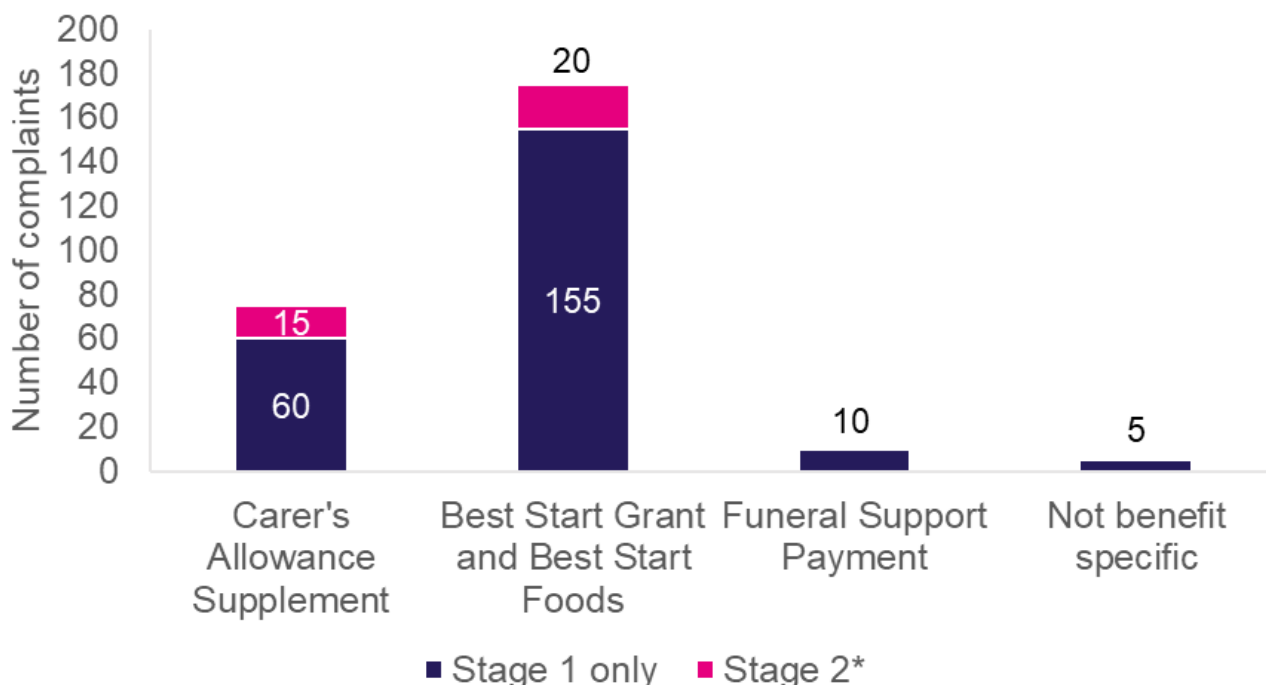
⁶ Funeral Support Payment: high level statistics to 31 March 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/funeral-support-payment-high-level-statistics-to-31-march-2020/>

⁷ Young Carer Grant: high level statistics to 30 April 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/young-carer-grant-high-level-statistics-to-30-april-2020/>

The proportion reaching stage 2 was higher in 2018/19 (20%) than 2019/20 (13%), which could relate to more complaints in 2018/19 being about Carer’s Allowance Supplement.

No cases were referred to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Chart 2: Complaints by benefit and stage to 31 March 2020



*stage 2 figures include a small number of complaints that went straight to stage 2, as well as complaints progressing from stage 1 to stage 2. Figures may not sum to those in Table 1 due to rounding. No complaints were received for Young Carer Grant.

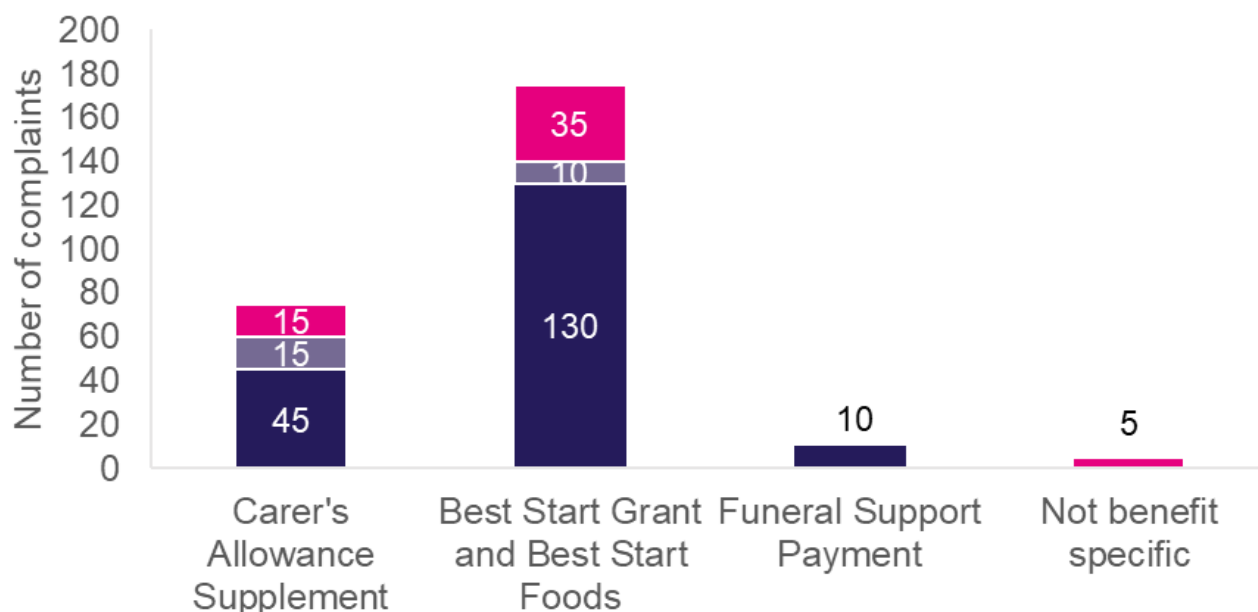
Reasons for complaints

The most common reason for complaints was ‘Inadequate standard of service’ (180, 69%), followed by ‘Failure to provide a service’ (30, 11%) and ‘Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy’ (25, 9%) [Table 2, Chart 3]. The [background section](#) gives definitions for the different reasons.

Nearly three quarters of complaints about Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods related to ‘Inadequate standard of service’ (130, 74%). For Carer’s Allowance Supplement there were relatively fewer complaints about ‘Inadequate standard of service’ (45, 60%) and more relating to ‘Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy’ (15, 21%).

The proportion of complaints relating to ‘Inadequate standard of service’ increased from 2018/19 (54%) to 2019/20 (75%), however this will relate to the increasing proportion of complaints relating to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.

Chart 3: Complaints by reason to 31 March 2020



■ Inadequate standard of service ■ Dissatisfaction with SG policy ■ Other

No complaints were received for Young Carer Grant.

Complaints processing

By 31 March 2020, all complaints received had been closed, leaving no outstanding complaints [Table 3].

For stage 1, the median average processing time in 2018/19 was one working day (meaning on average that complaints were closed on the day they were received), and in 2019/20 average processing time was two working days (meaning complaints were closed on the next working day on average) [Table 3]. A small number of stage 1 complaints were not dealt with within the initial five working day timescale, in which case an extension was agreed with the client as explained in the [background section](#). Taking into account these extensions, all stage 1 complaints were dealt within agreed timescales.

For stage 2, the median average processing time was 17 working days in 2018/19 and 18 working days in 2019/20. All stage 2 complaints were dealt with within the appropriate timescales as explained in the [background section](#).

Complaints outcomes

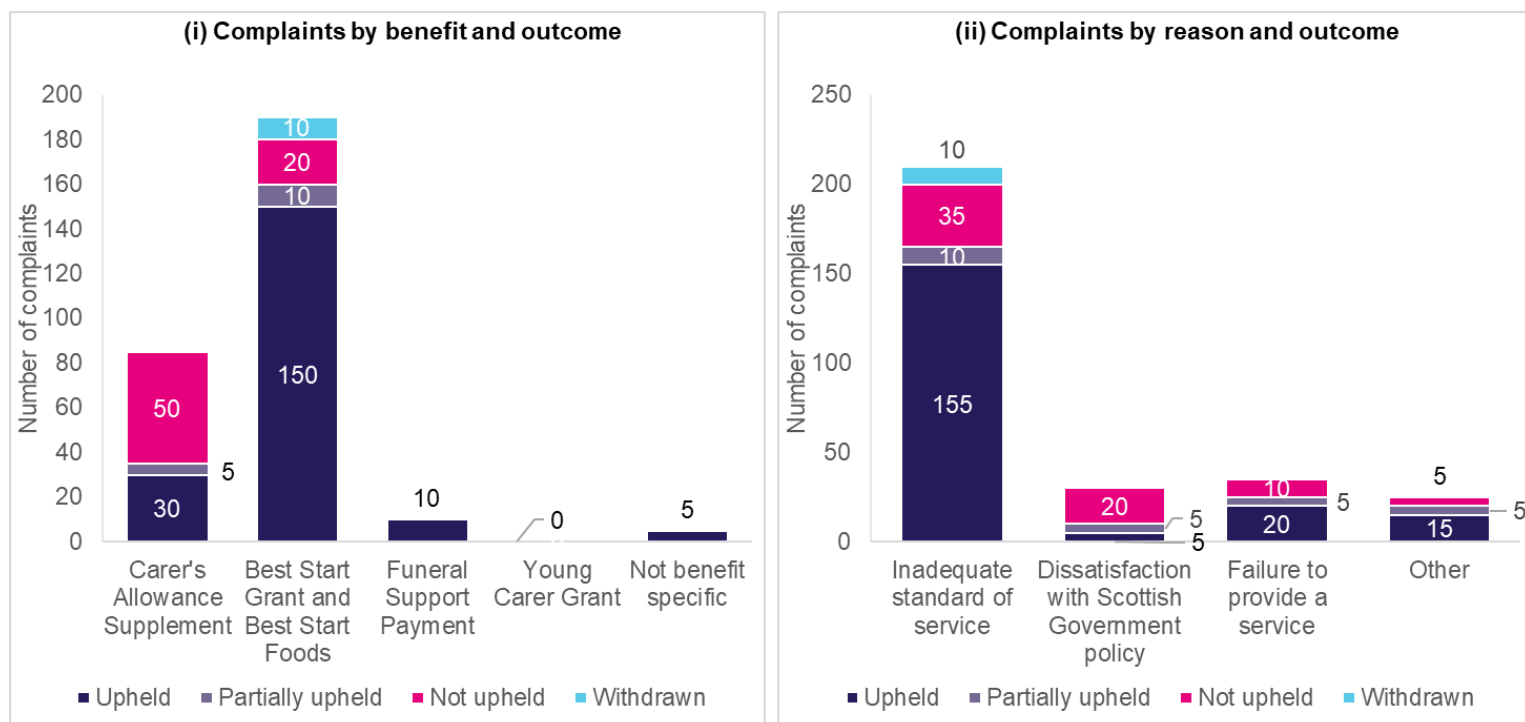
Complaint outcomes are counted separately for stage 1 and 2 – a complaint that progressed from stage 1 to stage 2 will have two outcomes. In total, over all benefits and both stages, 195 complaints were upheld (65%), 70 were not upheld (24%), 20 were partially upheld (7%), and 10 were withdrawn (3%) [Table 4].

For Carer's Allowance Supplement, the majority of complaints were not upheld (50, 54%), while for Best Start Grant the majority were upheld (150, 78%) [Chart 4(i)]. The majority of complaints about 'Inadequate standard of service' and 'Failure to provide a service' were upheld, whereas the majority of complaints about 'Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy' were not upheld [Chart 4(ii)].

One of the reasons for more Best Start Grant complaints being upheld than for Carer’s Allowance Supplement could be the different types of reasons that clients complain about each of these benefits – relatively more clients complained about ‘Inadequate standard of service’ for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods [Table 2], and these complaints were relatively more likely to be upheld [Table 4]. Similarly, in 2018/19 the majority of complaints were not upheld (51%), whereas in 2019/20 the majority were upheld (74%). This will also relate to the increasing proportion of complaints relating to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.

Figures for Funeral Support Payment have been suppressed for disclosure control but will be available by outcome when numbers are sufficiently high.

Chart 4: Complaints by outcome to 31 March 2020

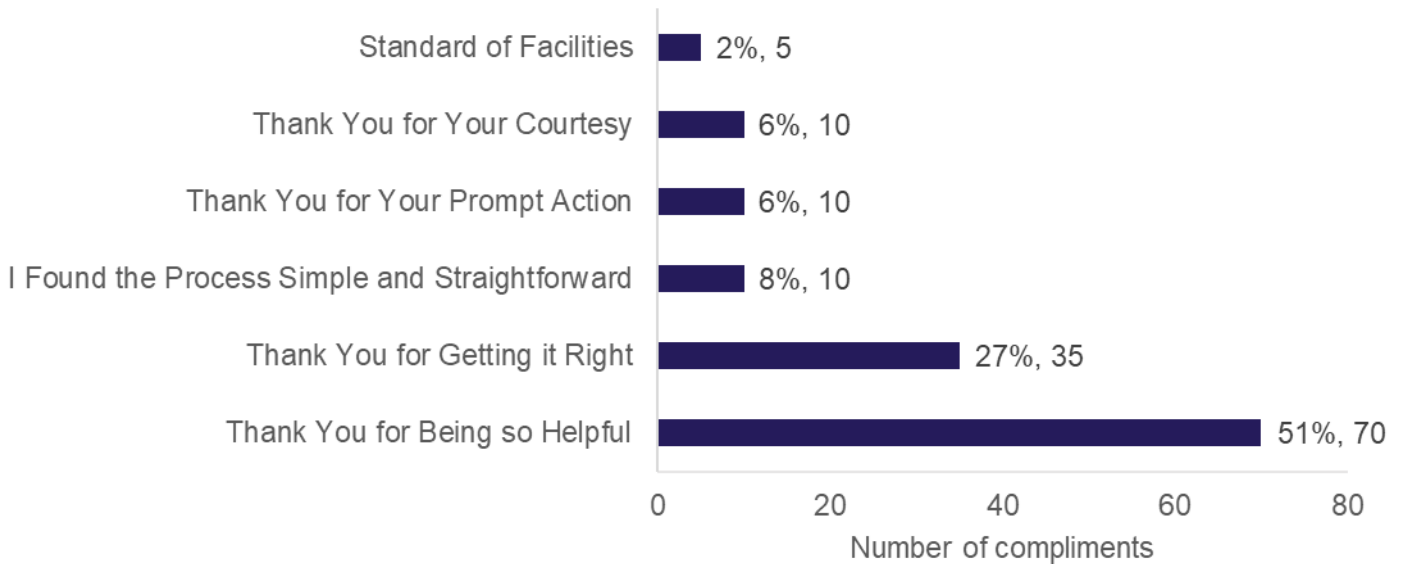


Outcomes for stage 1 and stage 2 are counted separately, therefore the number of outcomes exceeds the number of complaints received. A small number of complaints changed reason between Stage 1 and Stage 2. No complaints were outstanding as of 31 March 2020. Figures do not sum due to rounding.

Compliments

- A total of 135 compliments were received by 31 March 2020, including 65 (47%) for Carer’s Allowance Supplement, 50 (36%) for Best Start Grant, and 20 for Funeral Support Payment **[Table 5]**.
- More compliments were received in 2019/20 overall (75) than in 2018/19 (60) **[Table 5]**. However, within this, fewer Carer’s Allowance Supplement compliments were received in 2019/20 (20 compared to 45 the previous year), while the number of compliments about Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods increased (from 15 to 35), and there were 20 compliments about Funeral Support Payment, which launched in 2019/20.
- The most common reason for compliments was ‘Thank you for being so helpful’ (70, 51%), followed by ‘Thank you for getting it right (35, 27%) **[Table 6, Chart 5]**.

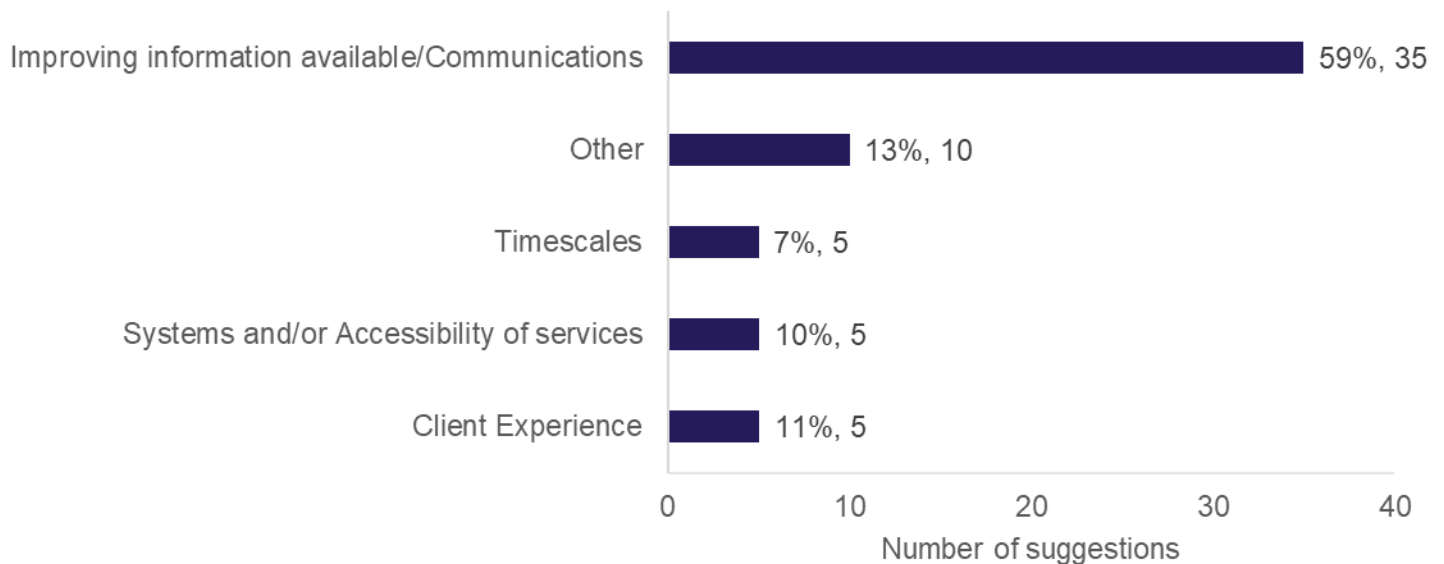
Chart 5: Compliments by reason to 31 March 2020



Suggestions

- A total of 60 suggestions were received by 31 March 2020, mostly on 'Improving information available' (35 suggestions, 59%) [Table 8].
- There were 30 suggestions about Best Start Grant (49%), ten about Carer's Allowance Supplement (16%), ten about Funeral Support Payment and ten that were not specific to a benefit [Table 7]. A small number of suggestions also related to Young Carer Grant.
- The number of suggestions increased from five in 2018/19 to 55 in 2019/20, a bigger relative increase than in complaints or compliments [Chart 1]. The client experience team have suggested this may have been due to increasing communications activity and website content in 2019/20, relating to the launches of new payments.

Chart 6: Suggestions by reason to 31 March 2020



Background to Feedback

Social Security Scotland is the executive agency of Scottish Government which is responsible for delivering social security benefits for Scotland. Social Security Scotland was introduced on 4 September 2018. Feedback (complaints, compliments, and suggestions) has been received by Social Security Scotland since it was introduced in September 2018. Feedback can be about a particular benefit or not specific to a benefit. The volume of feedback received will be related to the number of live benefits and clients. New benefits have launched over time, potentially bringing more people in touch with Social Security Scotland:

Benefit	2018/19	2019/20
Carer's Allowance Supplement (Sep 2018)	86,505 carers in receipt	85,805 carers in receipt
Best Start Grant/Best Start Foods: - Pregnancy and Baby Payment (Dec 2019) - Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment (Apr 2019) - Best Start Grant School Age Payment (Jun 2019) - Best Start Foods (Aug 2019)	19,480 applications	127,940 applications
Funeral Support Payment (Sep 2019)	n/a	3,970 applications
Young Carer Grant (Oct 2019)	n/a	1,750 applications

Note: Annual figures are based on the latest Official Statistics publications, but may be revised when the statistics are updated.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints

Complaints fall under the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and their complaints handling procedure. This sets out a two stage internal complaints process. Frontline resolution – stage 1, allows 5 working days to respond to the client's complaint unless an extension is agreed. Extensions are requested by Social Security Scotland's client experience team only in exceptional circumstances, and only when an extension will make it more likely that the complaint will be resolved (for example, if staff are unavailable). For stage 1 complaints it may be more appropriate to escalate the complaint to stage 2 rather than agreeing an extension. Where a client remains unhappy with the response to a stage 1 complaint, they can proceed to investigation – stage 2, which allows 20 working days to investigate and provide a response unless an extension is agreed. If the client still remains unhappy then they can choose to take their complaint to the SPSO.

A small number of complaints went straight to investigation – stage 2. Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at that stage. Complaints handled at the investigation stage

of the complaints handling procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination. Examples of this include:

- the client/appointee refuses to take part in frontline resolution
- the issues raised are complex and require detailed investigation
- the complaint relates to serious, high-risk, or high-profile issues

Complaint reasons

Complaint reasons are categorised by Social Security Scotland staff based on the information received from clients. These categories are:

- Failure to provide a service - where a service was not delivered, for example, where an application was not processed or an online application form was unavailable.
- Inadequate standard of service – where a client has been provided with a service that is below standard.
- Failure to follow process – where published timescales were not met.
- Disagreement with a decision.
- Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy.
- Treatment by or attitude of a member of staff.

Complaint outcomes

Possible outcomes for complaints are:

- Upheld – the client’s complaint has been upheld, as it meets the terms in the definition of a complaint.
- Not upheld – the client’s complaint was not upheld because it did not meet the terms in the definition of a complaint.
- Partially upheld – if the client makes a complaint raising more than one issue, one part (or parts) of the complaint may meet the terms in the definition of a complaint, and other(s) do not. In this case the complaint would be partially upheld.

In this publication complaint outcomes are counted separately for stage 1 and stage 2. A complaint that progressed from stage 1 to stage 2 will have two outcomes.

Compliments and suggestions

Compliments and suggestions should be recorded within five working days. Suggestions are investigated and the outcome is provided directly to the client.

About the data

How the data is collected

The data in this publication is primarily sourced from Social Security Scotland's case management system. The system holds information on all feedback received, and includes type of feedback (complaint, compliment, suggestion), date received, channel by which feedback was received (e-mail, telephone, letter), benefit (or no specific benefit), reason for feedback (chosen from defined lists of possible categories), and where applicable, the date that feedback was actioned and the outcome of any decisions (again selected from a defined list of possible outcomes).

The information is held across multiple tables within the system. 100% extracts of administrative data are taken from this system every month for internal reporting purposes. Data cuts combine information from the different tables in the system into one monthly extract which includes details of all feedback made since September 2018. The data cut used to produce statistics for this publication was taken on 1 February 2020.

Quality assurance

The data used to produce the figures has been checked on a case by case basis with clerical records used for internal reporting within Social Security Scotland, and discrepancies investigated.

Additional quality assurance and cleaning has been carried out on specific variables:

- The dataset has been checked for duplicate records based on Case ID number.
- Variables have been checked for missing information.
- Feedback received dates and decisions dates have been checked to see whether they fall within expected ranges (e.g. after September 2018) and are consistent with those produced by clerical records.
- For complaints, the benefit that a complaint refers to and reason for the complaint have been checked for consistency between stage 1 and stage 2.

Once the data is aggregated and copied into the publication and supporting Excel tables, the final statistics are quality assured by a different member of the statistics team. The final documents are checked by the lead statistician.

Data Quality

Comparison to clerical data

Data from the case management system has been compared to clerical records. Discrepancies have been investigated with the Client Experience team, and errors in case management system data have been manually fixed to match the clerical record where necessary. Discrepancies included:

- A small number of items of feedback received had a date before September 2018, or had the date of feedback being recorded rather than date received. There were also errors in date feedback was received and decisions were made on the case management system due to migration of feedback information onto the case management system during the first months following the launch of Carer's Allowance Supplement. Dates have been amended back to the original dates received and decided with reference to the clerical records.
- Some feedback on the case management system is recorded as being not benefit specific. While this is true in some cases, in others this occurs where benefit information is missing. Missing benefit information has been completed with reference to clerical records.
- In a small number of cases the stage 1 and stage 2 of one complaint have been recorded as two separate complaints on the case management system. These have been merged back into one complaint where necessary.
- The case management system includes a small number of complaints where the outcome is recorded as 'Deleted'. In some cases these are complaints that have been created in error, and these have been removed from the dataset used to produce the figures in this publication. In others cases the outcome of the complaint has been amended from 'Deleted' to the correct outcome of the complaint.

Rounding and disclosure control

Feedback numbers have been rounded to the nearest five for disclosure control. Figures may not sum due to rounding. Percentages are based on actual figures and rounded to the nearest percent. Some percentages have been suppressed to prevent back-calculation of small numbers.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints

For complaint benefit and reason, we have used the first recorded benefit or reason with a complaint. For complaint outcomes, if an application had both a stage 1 and stage 2 complaint outcome, we have counted this as two separate outcomes – a complaint that progressed from stage 1 to stage 2 will have two outcomes.

Complaints that went straight to stage 2 are included in total complaints and stage 2 complaints figures, and used to calculate the percentage of complaints reaching stage 2.

Processing time

Processing time is the number of days from the application being received to a decision being made. It is calculated in working days. Weekends and public holidays are excluded. The time of day that an application was received or processed is not taken into account. Processing times are calculated separately for each complaint stage.

In this version of the publication we have made several changes to the processing time calculation, to be consistent with how processing times are calculated for internal reporting within Social Security Scotland:

- The day the application was received is now counted as 'day one' of processing, regardless of the time of day an application was received. For example, an application received and processed on the same day would have a processing time of one working day. An application received on one day and processed on the next working day would have a processing time of two working days. This has increased the processing time of all complaints previously reported on from earlier quarters by one working day. This has also increased the median average processing times for both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints by one day compared to the previous publication.
- Withdrawn applications have not been included in processing times statistics, including numbers processed within timescales, and average processing time. Numbers of withdrawn complaints are relatively small [Table 3], therefore this has had little impact on average processing times.
- Where an extension has been agreed on a stage 1 or stage 2 complaint, complaints will be classed as having been processed 'within agreed timescales' if they were processed within these extensions [Table 4].

Comparisons with DWP complaints statistics

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a different feedback process to Social Security Scotland, and as such, DWP complaints, compliments and suggestions statistics are not directly comparable to these statistics.

Further information about complaints at DWP and links to their latest statistics are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/complaints-about-the-department-for-work-and-pensions>.

Related Social Security Scotland publications

Future research and statistics publications will be available through the Social Security Scotland 'Reporting' webpage at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/what-we-do/reporting>.

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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Correspondence and enquiries

For enquiries about this publication please contact:

Amelia Brereton

Social Security Statistics

Telephone: 0131 244 5464

e-mail: MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot

For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician, Telephone: 0131 244 0442,

e-mail: statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot

are available via an alternative route. Summary tables are available at:

<http://gov.scot/publications/social-security-feedback-stats-mar-2020>

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot for further information.

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

Complaints and suggestions

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Details of forthcoming publications can be found at www.gov.scot/statistics

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