



## Social Security Scotland statistics

# Social Security Scotland feedback statistics to 30 September 2020

### Frequency of publications

The next publication will be bi-annual rather than quarterly. It will cover up to end March 2021 and will be released in June 2021.

Under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>1</sup> we publish a timetable of statistical releases for the twelve months ahead<sup>2</sup>.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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 30 September 2020. It includes statistics for specific benefits (Carer's Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant and Job Start Payment), as well as feedback that was not benefit specific. It does not yet cover statistics for feedback on Scottish Child Payment.

The statistics span the time period when Social Security Scotland had a reduced workforce and implemented some service changes in March in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including staff working from home, but continued to process applications, make payments and process feedback.

All tables and charts relating to this publication can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-scotland-stats-publications/#socialsecurityscotlandfeedbackstatistics>

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 Statistics<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on experimental statistics please see:

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

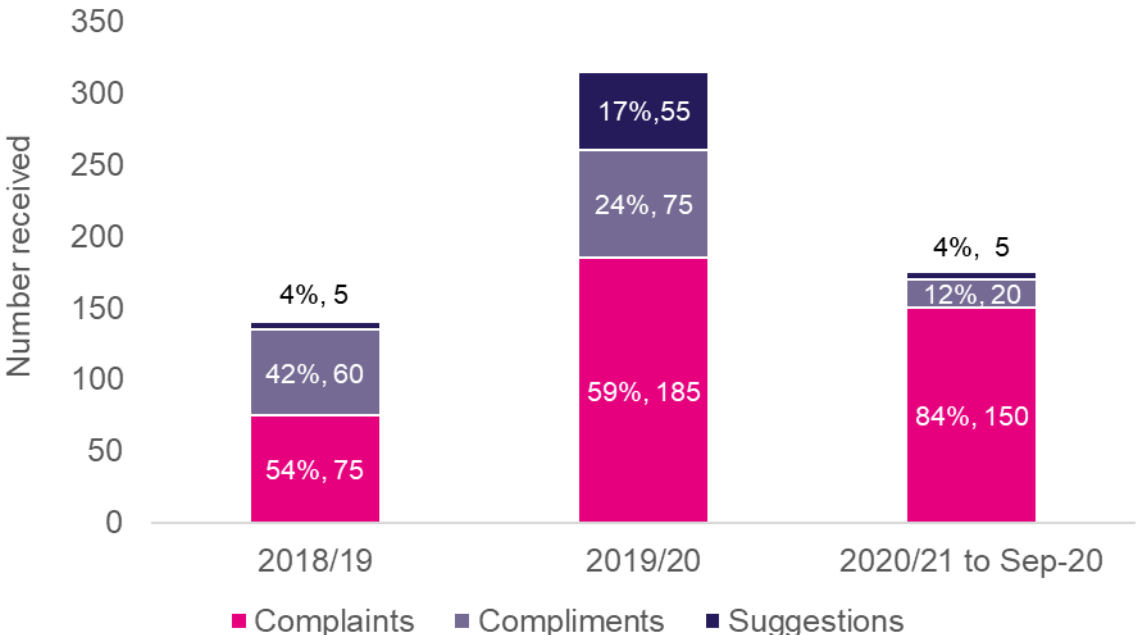
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# Main findings

Chart 1: Feedback by financial year



Complaints includes all stage 1 complaints, plus complaints received at stage 2. Figures for individual years do not sum to all time figures in other tables/charts due to rounding.

In total 415 complaints, 160 compliments and 70 suggestions were received by 30 September 2020. The most common type of feedback received in all years has been 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 30 September 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]**.

During the first half of 2020/21, Social Security Scotland received 150 complaints, which is over 80% of the complaints received in the whole of 2019/20. This may be due to the impact of COVID-19 on application processing, and delays in payments of Best Start Foods that have since been resolved. At the same time, the number of compliments and suggestions were both less than would be expected in six months compared to 2019/20. As a result, the proportion of all feedback that was complaints increased to 84% **[Chart 1]**.

## Complaints

### Complaints received

In total 415 complaints were received by 30 September 2020, including 95 for Carer's Allowance Supplement, 295 for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods, 15 for Funeral Support Payment and 10 that were not benefit specific **[Table 1]**. There were no complaints received for Young Carer Grant, which was introduced in October 2019, or Job Start Payment, which was introduced in August 2020.

This compares to at least 105,795 carers receiving Carer's Allowance Supplement payments<sup>4</sup>, 204,130 Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications<sup>5</sup>, 8,120 Funeral Support Payment applications<sup>6</sup>, 2,445 Young Carer Grant applications<sup>7</sup> and 1,340 Job Start Payment applications<sup>8</sup> made by 30 September 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.

During the first half of 2020/21, Social Security Scotland received 150 complaints, which is over 80% of the complaints received in the whole of 2019/20 **[Chart 1]**. As in the previous year, relatively more complaints related to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods (81%) and fewer related to Carer's Allowance Supplement (15%) and the other smaller benefits. The relatively high number of complaints may be due to the impact of COVID-19 on application processing, and delays in payments of Best Start Foods that have since been resolved. **[Table 1]**.

### Complaints reaching stage 2

Overall, 17% 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 (29%) than for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods (14%) **[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

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<sup>4</sup> Summary statistics for Carer's Allowance at February 2020 and Carer's Allowance Supplement, April eligibility date 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/carers-allowance-at-february-2020-and-carers-allowance-supplement-to-april-eligibility-date-2020-statistics/>

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

<sup>6</sup> Funeral Support Payment: high level statistics to 30 September 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/funeral-support-payment-high-level-statistics-to-30-september-2020/>

<sup>7</sup> Young Carer Grant: high level statistics to 31 July 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/young-carer-grant-high-level-statistics-to-31-july-2020/>

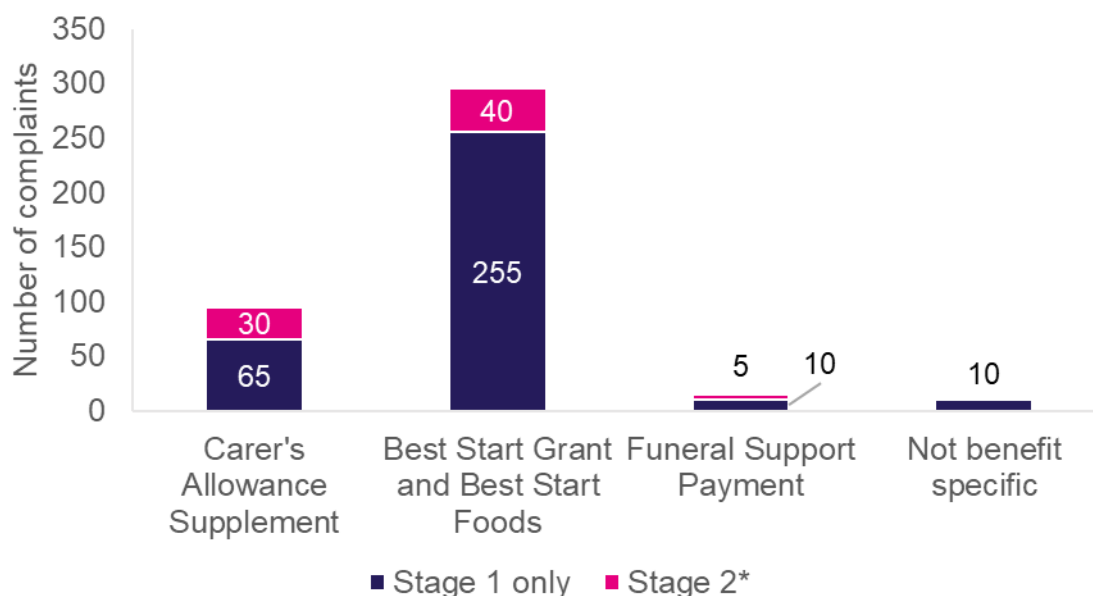
<sup>8</sup> Job Start Payment: high level statistics to 30 September 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/job-start-payment-high-level-statistics-to-30-september-2020/>

clients to make complaints about Carer's Allowance Supplement as a way of having their cases looked at again.

Although the proportion of stage complaints reaching stage 2 decreased from 2018/19 (20%) to 2019/20 (13%), it has increased in the first half of 2020/21 (21%). This may relate to increased processing times for complaints during this period.

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

**Chart 2: Complaints by benefit and stage to 30 September 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 or Job Start Payment.

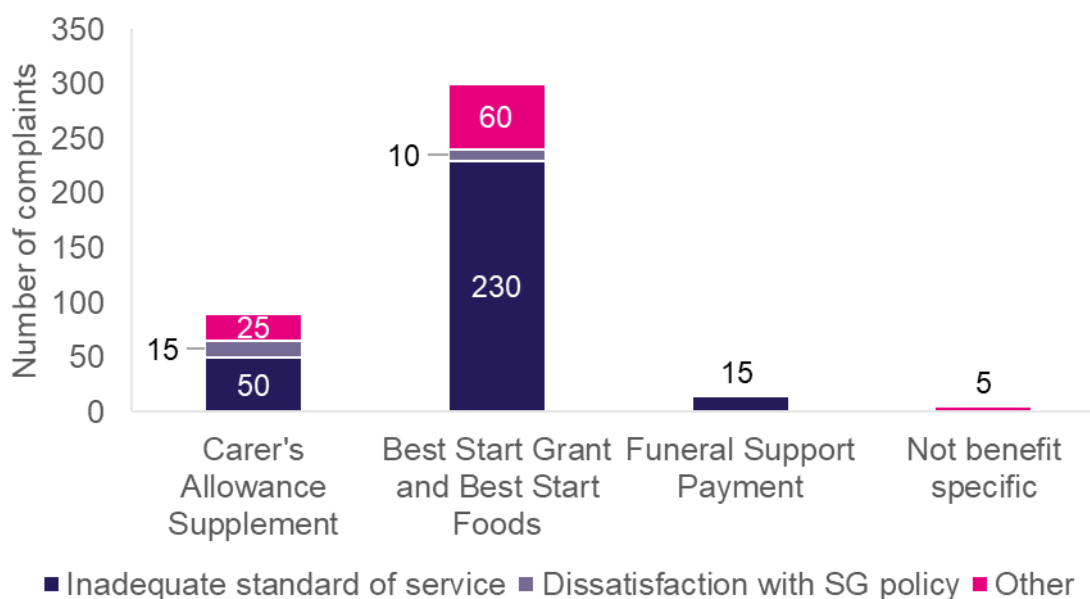
### Reasons for complaints

The most common reason for complaints was 'Inadequate standard of service' (295, 71%), followed by 'Failure to provide a service' (55, 14%) and 'Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy' (25, 6%) [Table 2, Chart 3]. The [background section](#) gives definitions for the different reasons.

Around three quarters of complaints about Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods related to 'Inadequate standard of service' (230, 77%). For Carer's Allowance Supplement there were relatively fewer complaints about 'Inadequate standard of service' (50, 55%) and more relating to 'Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government policy' (15, 17%) or 'Disagreement with a decision' (10, 11%).

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. In the first half of 2020/21, this proportion has remained at 75%.

**Chart 3: Complaints by reason to 30 September 2020**



No complaints were received for Young Carer Grant.

### Complaints processing

By 30 September 2020, 405 complaints had been closed, leaving a small number outstanding [Table 3]. Overall, median processing times have been three working days for stage 1 complaints, and 19 days for stage 2 complaints, with 96% stage 1 complaints closed within the initial five working day timescale, and 95% stage 2 complaints closed within the initial 20 working day timescale. However, over time processing times have been increasing, and the proportion closed within initial timescales has decreased.

For stage 1, the median average processing time in the first half of 2020/21 was four working days), an increase of two working days since 2019/20, and three working days compared to 2018/19. Increasing processing times may be related to the increasing volumes of complaints received, the impact of COVID-19 on staff workloads and reduced capacity of clients to send evidence to Social Security Scotland, and delays in payments of Best Start Foods. In the first half of 2020/21, 89% stage 1 complaints were closed within their initial five working day timescale. Of the remaining complaints which went over their initial timescale, nearly all were the processed within an extension, with a small number not processed within an extension [Table 3].

For stage 2, the median average processing time was 19 working days in the first half of 2020/21, an increase of one working day since 2019/20, and two working days since 2018/19. In the first half of 2020/21, 88% stage 2 complaints were closed within their initial 20 working day timescale, compared to 100% in the previous two years. Of the remaining complaints which went over their initial timescale, all were processed within an extension [Table 3].

## Complaints outcomes

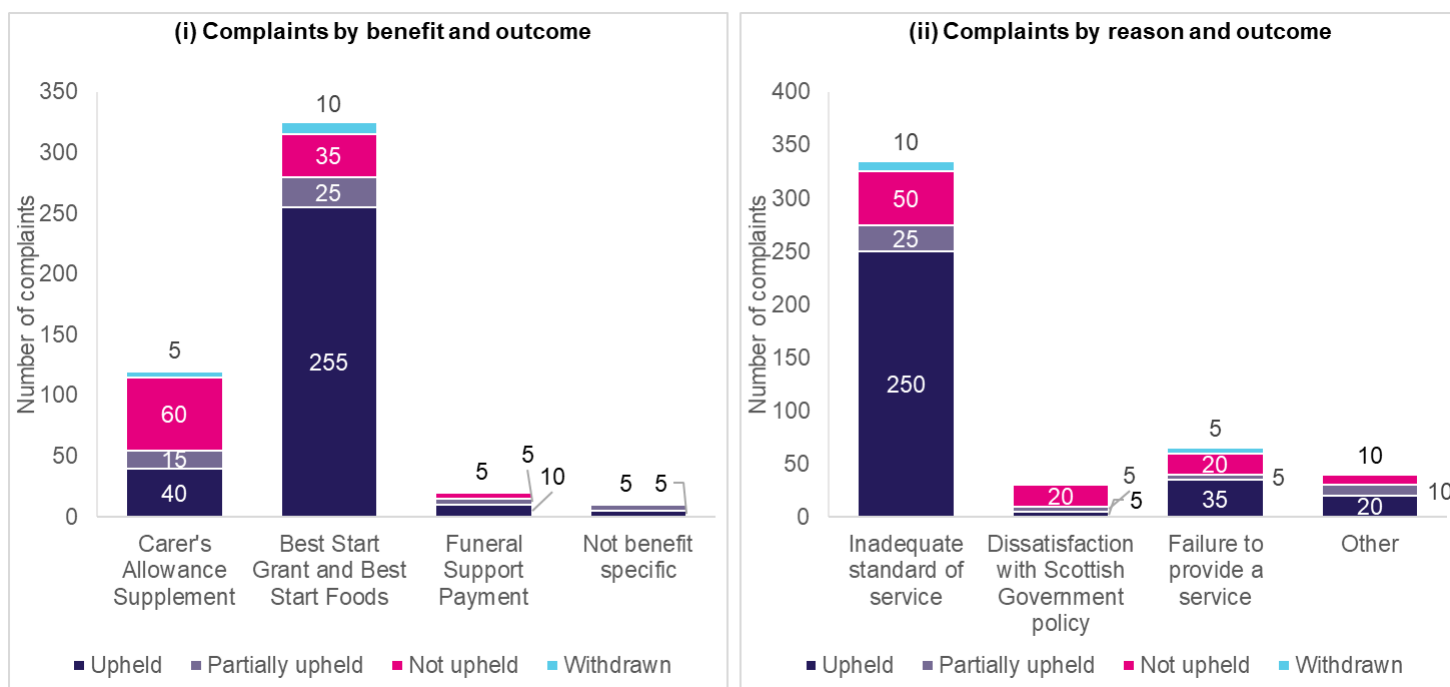
Complaint outcomes are counted separately for stage 1 and 2 – a complaint that progressed from stage 1 to stage 2 will have two outcomes. In total, over all benefits and both stages, 310 complaints were upheld (66%), 100 were not upheld (21%), 45 were partially upheld (10%), and 15 were withdrawn (3%) [Table 4].

For Carer’s Allowance Supplement, the majority of complaints were not upheld (60, 52%), while for Best Start Grant the majority were upheld (255, 78%) and for Funeral Support Payment the majority were also upheld (10, 62%) [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].

Over time, the proportion of complaints being upheld has increased. In 2018/19 the majority of complaints were not upheld (51%), whereas in 2019/20 and the first half of 2020/21 the majority were upheld (74% and 67%). This will also relate to the increasing proportion of complaints relating to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.

**Chart 4: Complaints by outcome to 30 September 2020**



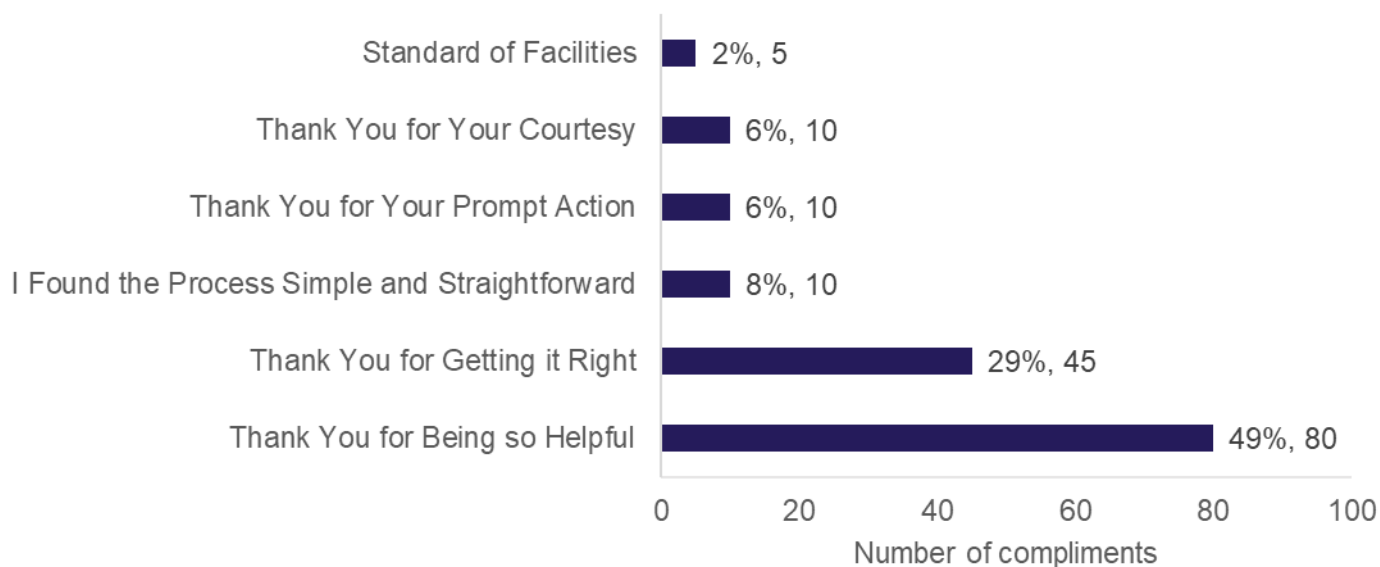
Outcomes for stage 1 and stage 2 are counted separately, therefore the number of outcomes exceeds the number of complaints received. A small number of complaints changed reason between Stage 1 and Stage 2. No complaints were outstanding as of 30 September 2020. Figures do not sum due to rounding.



## Compliments

- A total of 160 compliments were received by 30 September 2020, including 65 (42%) for Carer's Allowance Supplement, 60 (38%) for Best Start Grant, 30 (18%) for Funeral Support Payment and five that were not benefit specific [Table 5]. There were no compliments relating to Young Carer Grant or Job Start Payment. In the first half of 2020/21, 20 compliments were received, which is less than a third of the compliments received in 2019/20 as a whole [Table 5]. This may have resulted from fewer compliments being recorded, due to the impact of COVID-19.
- The proportion of compliments received by benefit remained similar in the first half of 2020/21 compared to the previous year, with around half of compliments relating to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods (10, 52%), and a third relating to Funeral Support Payment (5, 33%) [Table 5].
- Overall, the most common reason for compliments has been 'Thank you for being so helpful' (80, 49%), followed by 'Thank you for getting it right (45, 29%) [Table 6, Chart 5]. In the first half of 2020/21, a similar number of compliments were received for these two reasons.

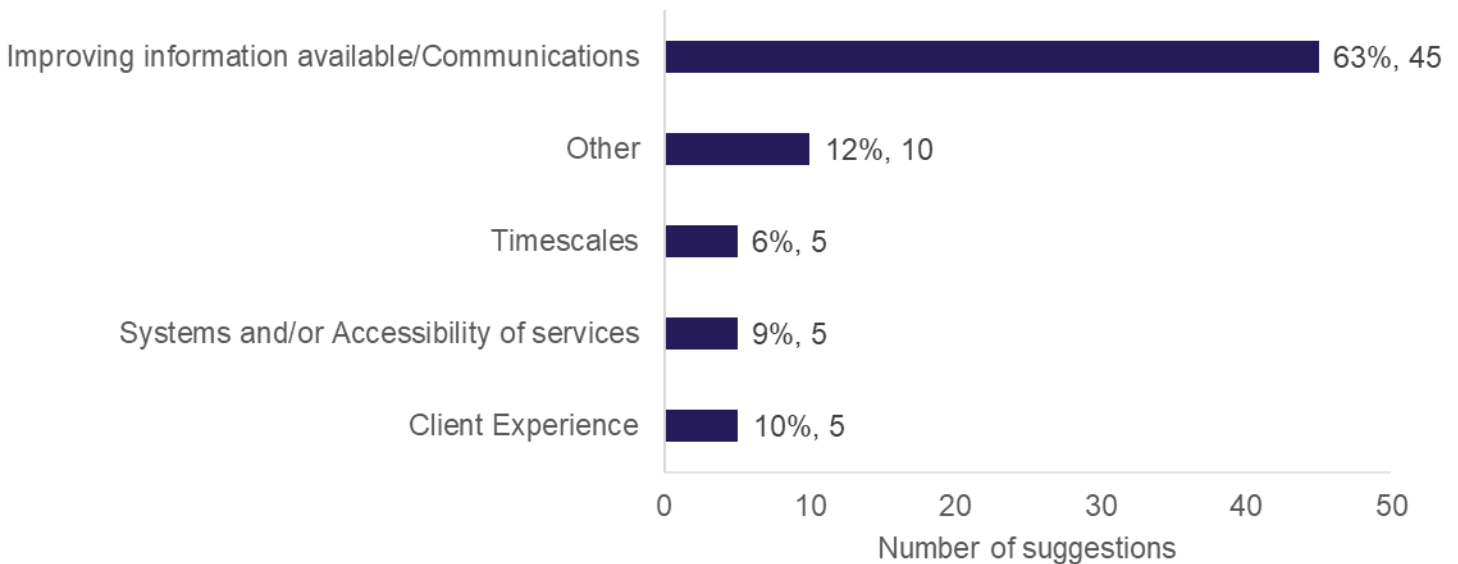
Chart 5: Compliments by reason to 30 September 2020



## Suggestions

- A total of 70 suggestions were received by 30 September 2020, mostly on 'Improving information available' (45 suggestions, 63%) **[Table 8]**.
- Over half of suggestions have been about Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods (35, 53%), with a smaller proportion relating to Funeral Support Payment (10, 16%), Carer's Allowance Supplement (10, 15%), or not specific to a benefit (10) **[Table 7]**. A small number of suggestions also related to Young Carer Grant, but no suggestions relating to Job Start Payment.
- In the first half of 2020/21, five suggestions were received, much less than half of the suggestions received in 2019/20 as a whole (55) **[Chart 1]**. This may have resulted from fewer suggestions being recorded, due to the impact of COVID-19.

**Chart 6: Suggestions by reason to 30 September 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, link to latest statistics and date of first payments (CAS, CWHA) or applications (BSG, FSP, YCG, JSP, SCP)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 to date
<a href="#">Carer's Allowance Supplement</a> (CAS, Sep 2018)	86,565 carers in receipt	89,005 carers in receipt	80,185 at April 2020 eligibility date
<a href="#">Best Start Grant/Best Start Foods (BSG)</a> : - 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	128,040 applications	56,610 applications to Aug-2020
<a href="#">Funeral Support Payment</a> (FSP, Sep 2019)	n/a	3,975 applications	4,145 applications to Sep-2020
<a href="#">Young Carer Grant</a> (YCG, Oct 2019)	n/a	1,750 applications	695 applications to Jul-2020
<a href="#">Job Start Payment</a> (JSP, Aug 2020)	n/a	n/a	1,340 applications to Sep-2020
Scottish Child Payment (SCP, Nov 2020)	n/a	n/a	No published figures
Child Winter Heating Assistance (CWHA, Nov 2020)	n/a	n/a	No published figures

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. From January 2020, an extension of five working days can be

added to this initial timescale by Social Security Scotland where it will be beneficial to the client. Prior to this, extensions had to be agreed with the client. For stage 1 complaints it may be more appropriate to escalate the complaint to stage 2 rather than applying 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. Again, since January 2020 an extension of five working days can be added to this timescale by Social Security Scotland if required, whereas prior to this extensions were agreed with the client. 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 categories will be changing in late 2020, with some names being updated, and some larger categories being split into smaller groupings. We will report on these changed categories in the next version of this publication.

## **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 November 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].

#### *Compliments and suggestions recording*

Compliments and suggestions are passed on to the Client Experience team to be recorded. When Social Security Scotland staff have high work volumes it is possible that fewer compliments and suggestions will be passed on. This may be the reason for lower volumes of compliments and suggestions received during the April to September 2020 reporting period, as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

### **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 'Publications' webpage at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications>.



## **An Official Statistics publication for Scotland**

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

e-mail: [statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto: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](http://statistics.gov.scot)

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

<https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-scotland-stats-publications/#socialsecurityscotlandfeedbackstatistics>

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot](mailto: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](http://www.gov.scot/statistics)

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