



Social Security Scotland Statistics

Funeral Support Payment: high level statistics to 31 December 2020

Frequency of publications

The next publication, covering up to end of March 2021, will be released in May 2021.

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: <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

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

Introduction

Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Funeral Support Payment on 16 September 2019. This publication provides information on applications and payments for Funeral Support Payment from this date to 31 December 2020. It therefore includes figures for approximately 15 months of applications. The [Background](#) section has further detail about the payment.

As this publication reports on applications and decisions to the end of December 2020, it spans the time period when the Covid-19 pandemic began in Scotland, as the first case was confirmed on 1 March 2020. Social Security Scotland implemented some service changes in March in response to the Covid-19 pandemic but has continued to process applications and make payments.

You can find all tables and charts relating to this publication at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/>.

These statistics are 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.*" The UK Statistics Authority has not yet assessed these statistics. They have not been designated as National Statistics³.

Main findings

Key figures

- From 16 September 2019 to 31 December 2020, 10,215 applications for Funeral Support Payment were received **[Table 1]**.
- Overall, 9,685 applications had been processed by 31 December 2020. Of these, 77% were authorised, 14% were denied and 10% were withdrawn. **[Table 1]**.
- The value of Funeral Support Payments issued up until 31 December 2020 was £11.3 million **[Table 5]**.

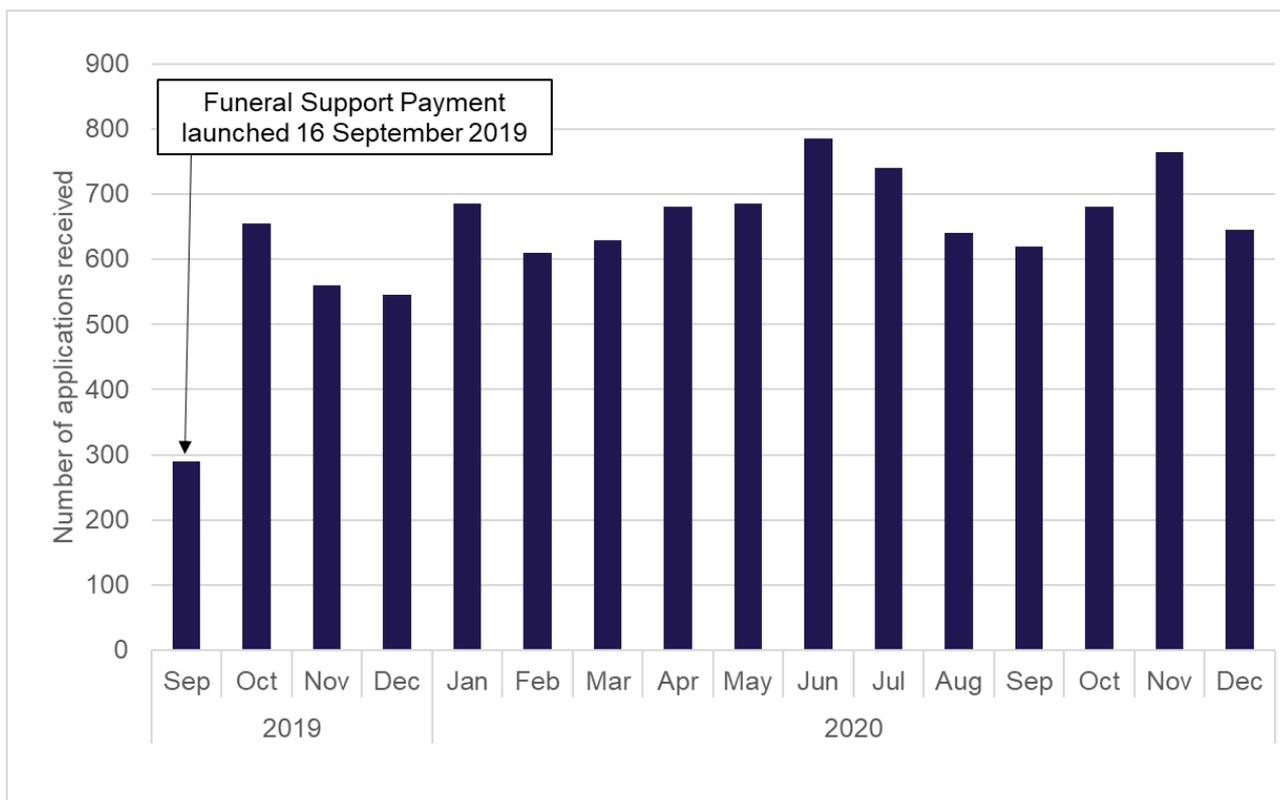
³ For more information on experimental statistics please see:

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

Applications received and processed

- In total, 10,215 applications were received up until 31 December 2020. The highest monthly number of applications received to date remains June 2020, at 785 applications. In the latest quarter, the number of applications received increased from 680 in October to 765 in November then decreased to 645 in December **[Table 1, Chart 1]**.
- Overall, 9,685 applications were processed up until 31 December 2020. Of these, 77% were authorised, 14% were denied and the remaining 10% were withdrawn **[Table 1]**.
- The number of applications processed per month was highest in June 2020, at 955 applications processed. Figures for the last quarter show 640 applications processed in October, 675 in November and 625 in December **[Table 1]**.

Chart 1: Funeral Support Payment applications received, by month



Application channel (method of application)

- Around 54% of applications received by 31 December were made online and 39% were made through a telephone application. The remaining 7% were made through paper application **[Table 2]**.
- Changes were made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that meant the full telephony service was not available from 24 March 2020 onwards. In the months of April to June, there was a substantial fall in the number of applications received by telephone and a consequent rise in the proportion of applications made online. Following the re-introduction of a limited inbound telephony service in July 2020, there was a rise in the proportion of telephone applications, from 30% in July to 43% in September and October respectively **[Table 2]**.
- A full telephony service was restored from 2 November 2020. Following this, 42% of applications received in November and 50% in December 2020 were telephone applications **[Table 2]**.
- The [About the data](#) section has further information about the application channel data.

Local authority and non-Scottish postcodes

- Applications were received from people living in all local authorities. The highest number of applications were 2,165 from Glasgow City, which accounts for 21% of all applications received to the end of December 2020. The next highest was 970 from North Lanarkshire, and 740 from South Lanarkshire **[Table 3]**.
- Of all applications received, 1% were made by people living at non-Scottish postcodes **[Table 3]**.

Processing times

- Between 16 September 2019 and 31 December 2020, 57% of applications were processed within 10 working days. Around 77% of applications were processed within 15 working days, whilst 23% took 21 days or more to be processed **[Table 4]**.
- Around 59% of all applications awarded a decision in October 2020 were processed within 10 working days. This proportion increased to 63% in November and decreased to 58% in December **[Table 4]**.
- This processing time includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents or evidence requested from clients, but does not include additional time to make payments.

- Median average⁴ processing time for applications processed between 16 September 2019 and 31 December 2020 was 10 days **[Table 4]**.

Payments

- The value of Funeral Support Payments issued up until 31 December 2020 was £11.3 million **[Table 5]**.
- The average⁵ value of payment issued in the current financial year⁶ was £1,778. This is higher than the average⁵ value of £1,505 in the previous financial year⁷, following an increase to the standard flat rate paid to clients from £700 to £1,000 on all applications received on or after 1 April 2020 **[Table 5]**.
- The average⁵ value of payment is calculated using the date that payments were issued to clients. Some payments issued in the current financial year⁶ relate to applications received prior to the 1 April 2020 and therefore have not received the increased rate of payment. Average payments values based on the date of application can be found in Table 5.
- Of the total 6,710 payments issued, around 98% were paid in instances when a person had died at the age of 18 or over. The mean average amount paid out in these cases, in the current financial year⁶, was £1,791. Around 2% of payments were issued when a person had died aged 17 years or younger. In these cases, the mean average amount paid, in the current financial year⁶, was £1,077 **[Table 5]**.
- To date, June 2020 remains the month with the highest number of payments issued, at 645. The number of payments issued in October and November were 465 and 540 respectively, with December seeing a lower amount of 455 payments issued **[Table 6, Chart 2]**.
- Of the payments issued in this current financial year, 67% were paid to funeral directors at the request of clients. The remaining 33% were paid directly to clients **[Table 6, Chart 2]**.
- At local authority level, the highest total value of payments were £2.6 million made to people in Glasgow City, £1.2 million to people in North Lanarkshire and £0.8 million to people in South Lanarkshire **[Table 7]**.

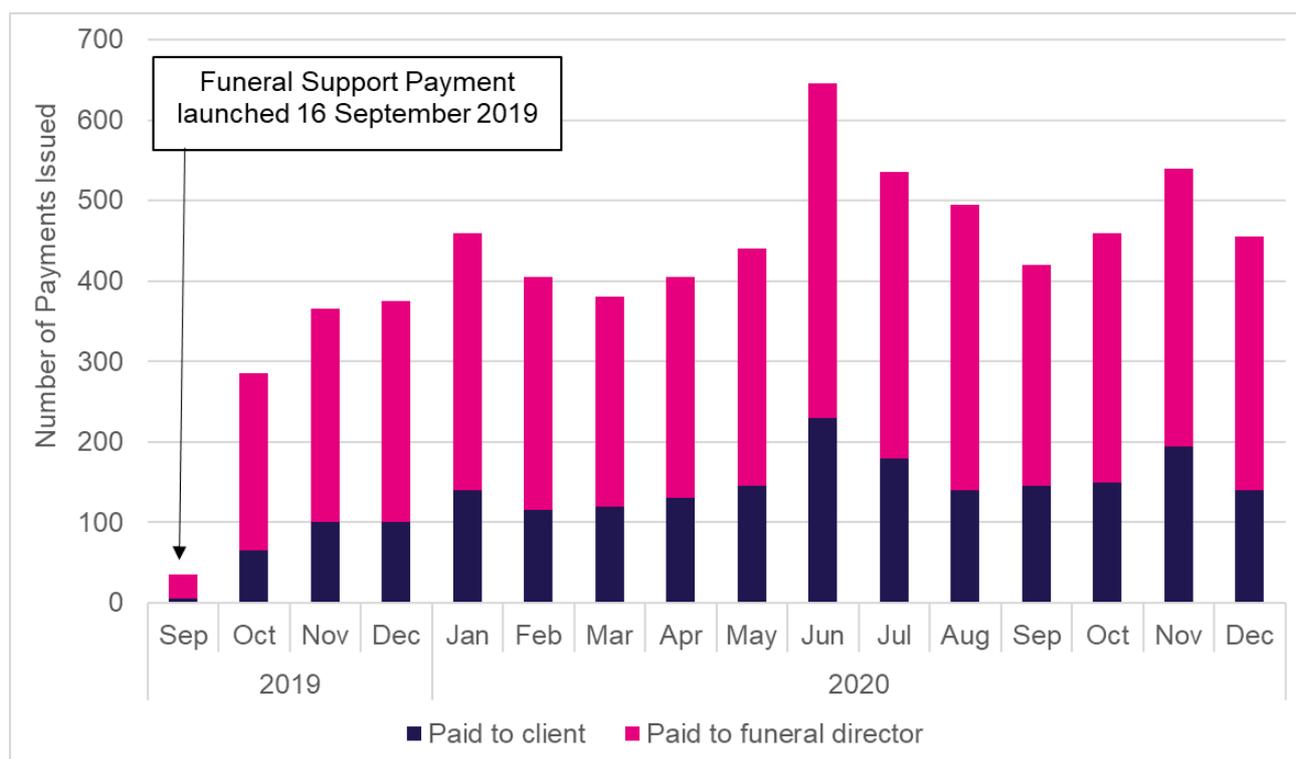
⁴ The median average is the middle value of an ordered dataset, or the point at which half of the values are higher and half of the values are lower.

⁵ Averages are calculated using the mean value of payments.

⁶ The current financial year 2020/21 includes data for the months April 2020 to December 2020 at the time of publication.

⁷ The previous financial year 2019/2020 includes data for the months September 2019 to March 2020.

Chart 2: Funeral Support Payment payments issued, by recipient



Redeterminations and appeals

- Management information collected manually by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland indicates that 330 redeterminations were requested by 31 December 2020. This represents 3.4% of the total number of applications processed during this period [Table 8].
- By 31 December 2020, 325 redetermination requests had been decided. Of these, 140 were allowed or partially allowed, while 150 were disallowed and 30 were withdrawn [Table 8].
- The median average⁸ response time for redeterminations that were closed up to 31 December 2020 was 13 working days [Table 8].
- A total of 20 appeals were received between 16 September 2019 and 31 December 2020. Of these, 15 have been completed, of which 5 were upheld and 10 were not upheld [Table 8].

⁸ The median average is the middle value of an ordered dataset, or the point at which half of the values are higher and half of the values are lower.

Background to Funeral Support Payment

The Scotland Act 2016⁹ gives Scottish Parliament powers over a number of social security benefits which had been administered to Scottish claimants by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Social Security Scotland – the executive agency of Scottish Government responsible for delivering social security benefits for Scotland – began taking applications for Funeral Support Payment on Monday 16 September 2019. This replaced the Funeral Expense Payment, which the Department for Work and Pensions ceased to deliver in Scotland on the same day.

Further details about the Funeral Support Payment can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/funeral-support-payment/>.

Funeral Support Payment

The Funeral Support Payment is a cash payment to help towards the costs of a funeral. The payment will be made to an individual responsible for paying for the funeral or directly to a funeral director if the client requests this. The payment usually will not cover the full cost of the funeral but it will help pay some costs. For example, burial or cremation costs, applicant's travel costs, transport costs to move the person who died, document costs and medical costs and a set amount for 'other funeral costs' such as funeral director fees or a coffin.

Eligibility

To be eligible to qualify for Funeral Support Payment the applicant must meet all of the eight eligibility statements below. If any one of the following statements is not met then the client will not be eligible:

1. I live in Scotland.
2. I have not already had help with funeral costs from the government for this funeral.
3. I (or my partner) am getting at least one qualifying benefit. These are:
 - Income Support
 - Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit
 - Disability or severe disability element of Working Tax Credit
 - Universal Credit
 - Housing Benefit

⁹ The Scotland Act 2016 webpage at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/scotland.html>

4. I am applying after the person died, but less than six months¹⁰ after their funeral.
5. The funeral is for someone who lived in the UK.
6. I (or my partner) am responsible for paying for the funeral.
7. It is reasonable* for me (or my partner) to accept responsibility for the funeral costs.
8. The funeral is being held either in the UK, or in some circumstances in the European Union, or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland.

*Usually, it is reasonable for the nearest relative of the person who died to accept responsibility for the funeral costs. A nearest relative could be a partner, child, parent or sibling. If you or your partner are not the nearest relative, you will need to explain to us when you apply, why it is reasonable to have accepted responsibility.

The Funeral Support Payment can help towards funeral costs of an adult aged 18 or older or a young person (aged 17 or under) including a child, a baby, or a stillborn baby. If a baby died before the end of 24 completed weeks of pregnancy, Funeral Support Payment cannot help towards these costs.

Further details about eligibility for Funeral Support Payment can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/funeral-support-payment/who-can-apply-and-when/>.

Payment Amount

The average payment issued by Social Security Scotland is referenced in both Table 5 and the Payments section of this publication. However, the actual amount a client will be paid is dependent on a number of factors, as outlined below.

Deceased person's assets

The amount paid will depend on the amount of money left behind by the person that died which is accessible and available to be used towards the funeral costs. This can come in the form of any assets in the deceased's estate such as money, savings, other funds, insurance policies, funeral plans or money due from pensions or burial clubs. Any such money from the person that died, if available, will need to be used to pay for the funeral expenses. As a result, Social Security Scotland will calculate the Funeral Support Payment amount to be paid, less any deductions from assets that are accessible in the deceased's estate. This only applies if the person who died is aged 18 year old or over. No deductions will be made if the person who died is aged 17 years old or under.

¹⁰ If the client is relying on a backdated award of qualifying benefit that relates to at least one day in the 6 month period, then they can apply within 20 working days after the end of the 6 month period (provided they are applying within 3 months of their being informed of the backdated award). Also, clients can now apply after the original 6 months following the funeral if the reason for the delay in applying is linked to Covid-19.

Burial or cremation costs

The amount paid will depend on the cost of burial or cremation in the local council area, where the person who died, had lived immediately prior to their death. The exact burial or cremation costs are known for different local council areas. This gives an indication of the likely costs that will be paid. More information on burial and cremation costs can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/burial-cremation-costs-scotland/>.

As it usually does not cost anything to bury or cremate a baby, child or young person aged 17 or under in Scotland, payments might be lower in these instances.

Funeral Costs

Under the new Social Security (Uprating and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, we have uprated the 'relevant figures' for Funeral Support Payment in line with inflation for applications made on and after 1 April 2020. We also have increased the standard flat rate from £700 to £1,000 for applications received from 1 April 2020 that can be used to meet other funeral costs, such as the funeral car or funeral service. If the person who died had a funeral plan this amount will be reduced to £122.05.

Travel costs

The Funeral Support Payment can help towards cost of one return journey to the place where you are arranging the funeral (such as a funeral director's premises), or to and from the location of where the funeral is being held. This includes travel by bus or train and can include travel by taxi, boat and plane in certain circumstances. It can include travel in your own car but does not include travel in a funeral car.

Transport costs to move the person who has died

The Funeral Support Payment can help with transport costs if the person who died needs to be moved more than 50 miles. Social Security Scotland can only help pay for the travel over 50 miles, including return travel. This amount is calculated from the funeral director or taken from the funeral bill.

Document costs

The Funeral Support Payment can contribute towards the cost of death certificates for releasing money belonging to the person who died; and medical certificates needed to bury or cremate the person that died such as a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (only needed for deaths outside Scotland).

Medical costs

The Funeral Support Payment can contribute towards the cost of certain medical procedures needed before the funeral can go ahead. For example, the removal of a pacemaker from the person who died before they can be cremated.

Recovering payments

Social Security Scotland can recover any Funeral Support Payment award made either in part or in full if money becomes available from the deceased person's estate.

An example of an amount paid out

The person who died was over 18 and lived in the Glasgow City Council area. They had £250 in personal savings which is available to be used towards the funeral costs, but no funeral plan.

The person who is responsible for the funeral lives in Aberdeenshire and needed to travel from Aberdeenshire to Glasgow for the funeral. They would be able to get a total payment of £1,498.35:

Cremation cost in Glasgow City = £670; Funeral costs = £1,000; Travel costs from Aberdeenshire to Glasgow = £58; Transport cost to move deceased person = £0, Document costs = £0, Medical costs to remove pacemaker = £20.35; Deduct deceased person's accessible assets = -£250; Total = £1,498.35.

Application and decision making process

Applications can be made online, by phone, and by paper form ('application channel'). Also, it is possible for Funeral Support Payment applicants to submit evidence online. If a client is applying online, they will receive a message guiding them to a new portal to upload their documents.

Social Security Scotland processes each application received and makes a decision whether to approve or deny the application. An application will be denied if the client is not eligible or provides insufficient evidence to demonstrate their eligibility to receive a Funeral Support Payment. An application will be authorised if the applicant is eligible and can provide the appropriate evidence to receive a Funeral Support Payment. Applicants may also withdraw their application before a decision is made.

Social Security Scotland aims to process completed applications within ten working days of receiving all supporting evidence for an application, and they will make payment as soon as possible thereafter. Applications may take longer to process if copies of documents need to be requested and received from clients. This is less likely when applicants choose to work with a funeral director and provide Social Security Scotland with consent to contact that funeral director. This is because the funeral director often has all required information available and the payment can be made direct to the funeral director, if the client is eligible and consents for Social Security Scotland to pay the funeral director.

In this publication, the application processing time is calculated as the number of working days from the application being received by Social Security Scotland to

the date that a decision was made or the application was withdrawn. We do not include time to make payments within processing time.

Redeterminations and appeals

Applicants can ask Social Security Scotland to look again at what they have decided if their application is denied, or if they think the amount they are going to be paid is wrong. This is known as a redetermination. A request for a redetermination should be made within 31 calendar days of being notified of the determination. This can be extended to up to 1 year if there is a good reason. Social Security Scotland then has 16 working days to make the new determination. Applicants also have the right to appeal to a Tribunal if they do not agree with Social Security Scotland's redetermination decision, or if Social Security Scotland is not able to make a redetermination within 16 working days.

Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020

On 1 April 2020, the Scottish Parliament approved emergency legislation to help businesses, public services and people through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Measures include helping to ensure that Social Security Scotland clients are not disadvantaged because of the coronavirus outbreak and are able to claim assistance to which they are entitled and which they may have missed if late applications were not allowed.

Changes, which came into force on 7 April 2020, include temporarily relaxing time limits for Funeral Support Payment. Where original time limits have not been met directly because of Covid-19, the measures temporarily relax time limits for Funeral Support Payment in relation to:

- Making an application for assistance
- A request by a client for a redetermination
- A decision on a redetermination
- Appealing to the First tier Tribunal

Whilst the Coronavirus (Scotland) 2020 Act provides Social Security Scotland extra time to complete a re-determination, Social Security Scotland will continue to make all re-determinations as quickly as is possible under the circumstances. The Act requires Social Security Scotland to make the re-determination as soon as reasonably practicable within a new extended timescale of an additional 9 weeks on top of the current 16 working days.

About the data

How the data is collected

The data in this publication is sourced from Social Security Scotland's case management system. The system holds information on all applications received, decisions and payments. Data about the applicant, their partner, and the person who has died is collected through the online application form, or is entered by client advisors during telephone applications, or the processing of paper applications. Information about the application outcome and payments is created in the case management system as an application is processed.

The information is held across multiple tables within the system. 100% extracts of administrative data are taken from this system every day for internal reporting purposes. Data cuts combine information from the different tables in the system into one daily extract that includes details of all Funeral Support Payment applications made since 16 September 2019.

To take into account backdating and delays between applications being authorised and payments being made, the data cut from 1 February 2021 has been used to produce statistics on applications received and decisions made up to 11.59 pm on 31 December 2020. Later data cuts may include additional retrospective changes to application details, including corrections to details in the case management system, and changes that have resulted from redeterminations and appeals.

Where a redetermination or appeal has been requested but not decided, decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value will be updated to reflect information about the redetermination or appeal, rather than the original application. If a redetermination or appeal has been decided, the data in this publication will show the decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value according to the new decision.

The Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland collects more detailed redeterminations and appeals management information manually. However, in future updates to these statistics, information on redeterminations and appeals will be available for each application directly from the case management system.

Within our statistical reporting, key dates are used to assign applications received, applications processed and payments issued to time periods. This is a different methodology to that used in financial reporting and, as a result, there may be differences in the values reported for a given time period.

Quality assurance

The data used to produce the official statistics are the same as the data extracted from the case management system on a daily basis that is used for internal reporting within Social Security Scotland. As such, the data is checked daily for consistency with previous extracts (i.e. do applications, decisions and payments figures increase as expected over time, and are they in proportion to each other) and compared to other sources of information such as the number of payment instructions reported by the finance team.

Additional quality assurance and cleaning has been carried out on the variables used in the official statistics:

- Check for duplicate and missing application references
- Check that application dates, processing times and payment times are within the expected ranges
- Check that payment date is present where a payment value is present
- Check any postcodes that do not match to local authorities – see [Geography](#) section

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 lead statistician checks the final documents.

Data Quality

Rounding and disclosure control

Application and outcome figures have been rounded to the nearest five for disclosure control. Data has been suppressed where it would disclose fewer than five applications or payments.

Missing and duplicate applications

The data comes from 100% data cut of the case management system.

The data cut was checked for applications where the fields relating to application date and the outcome and payment of the application were blank. These applications would represent temporary 'prospect cases', which are created when clients contact Social Security Scotland without a National Insurance number, and are later replaced once a National Insurance number is received from the applicant. Any such applications are therefore duplicates and are excluded from the statistics.

Clients may make repeated applications to Funeral Support Payment in certain circumstances. For instance, if their initial application is withdrawn or denied.

This means that there can be several applications from the same client in the data cut. For this publication, we have retained all of these applications.

Unverified information from application form

Information about the client and the person that died is taken from the application form completed by the client or by a client advisor over the telephone. This information may contain errors because it has not been verified by comparison to other sources of information such as records held by the Department for Work and Pensions. This means, for example, that it is possible to have authorised applications where the original application form did not include complete details of the deceased but was later amended as the application was processed.

Delay between application authorised and payment

In this publication, the date that applications were processed by client advisors is the date used to produce statistics of processed applications by month. After applications are authorised for payment by client advisors, a manager approves the decision, and then a payment is issued. In some cases, payments will be issued on the same day that payments are authorised by client advisors, however in other cases there can be a delay before payments are issued. Clients should receive money in their nominated account within four working days after payment is issued.

In this publication, we report on the value of payments that have been issued by the end of each month and not the payments successfully received by the applicants.

Application channel

Application channel is automatically entered into the case management system for online applications, and manually entered for applications taken by phone or paper. If ever an application channel has been manually entered incorrectly, the application channel will be classed as 'unknown'.

Geography

Applications are assigned to local authority by postcode using a Scottish Government lookup file. For some applications, the postcode will not match to the lookup file. This can be because the postcode is not in a Scottish local authority, or because the postcode has been introduced too recently to appear on the lookup file, for example if a property is in a new development. For postcodes that could not be matched to a Scottish local authority, the postcode area was used to check whether the postcode was in Scotland or elsewhere. Non-matching postcodes from Scottish border postcode areas (postcodes starting 'DG' and 'TD') were also checked individually and assigned to Scottish local authorities or as 'non-Scottish postcodes' manually.

Following these checks on postcodes, in this publication a small proportion (25, <1%) of applications did not include address information and therefore could not be matched to a local authority or country [Table 3].

Effect of redeterminations

Application decision dates, outcomes and payment amounts are updated to reflect information about redeterminations and appeals as described in the [How the data is collected](#) section. Information in tables about decisions, outcomes and payments should therefore be viewed as the final decision, outcome and payment value, after a redetermination request or appeal has been received and/or decided. This excludes the processing times table, where applications with redeterminations and appeals have been removed from the processing times calculations.

Processing time

Processing time is the number of days from the application being received to a decision being made or the application being withdrawn. It includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents from clients or funeral directors, but does not include additional time to make payments. It is calculated in working days. Weekends and public holidays are excluded, even if applications were processed by staff working overtime on these days. The time of day that an application was received or processed is not taken into account.

Processing times calculated do not include any applications that are flagged as having had a redetermination request because the decision date for these applications will represent the redetermination decision date, which can be some time after the original decision date. The number of applications in the processing times table is therefore lower than the number of applications shown as processed or decided in other tables. Redeterminations are a small proportion of the total applications processed, and the initial average processing times for applications that go on to redetermination or appeal compared to other applications should not differ from all other applications. Therefore, removal of these should not impact the average processing times shown in the table.

Processing time is only calculated for applications that were decided within the period being reported on. Data is presented by the month of decision rather than month the application was received.

Future developments

We will be seeking users' views on the content of this publication to ensure it best meets their requirements. If you have any comments or suggestions that you would like to provide us please email MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot.

Information on Department for Work and Pensions Funeral Expense Payment statistics

Department for Work and Pensions publish information about Funeral Expense Payment in the Social Fund annual report 2018 to 2019 at Great Britain level only: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-fund-annual-report-2018-to-2019>. Department for Work and Pensions also publishes annual expenditure for Funeral Expense Payments at Great Britain level in their Benefit expenditure and caseload tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/benefit-expenditure-tables>.

Related Social Security Scotland publications

Future statistics publications will be available through the Social Security Scotland statistics collections webpage at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-scotland-stats-publications/>.

Statistics on Funeral Support Payment feedback (complaints, compliments and suggestions) are included in the Social Security Scotland feedback statistics published at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-feedback-statistics-to-30-September-2020/>.

Information on client diversity and equality of application outcomes for clients applying to Social Security Scotland is published at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-client-diversity-and-equalities-analysis-to-may-2020/>

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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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:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/>.

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

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