

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT POSITION PAPER

LESSONS LEARNED FOR DELIVERY OF THE DEVOLVED BENEFITS

Introduction

This paper is one of a series providing an update on our position on various matters relating to the development of the devolved social security benefits in Scotland.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the lessons learned which the Scottish Government is applying to delivery of the devolved benefits. We have drawn these from a variety of sources, including research with people who have lived experience of the current benefits system, lessons from previous major government change programmes, and learning from our own experience of implementing the first of the devolved benefits, including delivering the Carer's Allowance Supplement and Best Start Grant.

Importance of lessons learned

Under the terms of the Scotland Act 2016, 11 benefits were devolved to the Scottish Government. As at May 2019, our new agency Social Security Scotland is already making payments for the Carer's Allowance Supplement, the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment and the Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment. Social Security Scotland will deliver a further four payments in 2019: the Best Start Grant School Age Payment; Funeral Expense Assistance; Best Start Foods; and a new Young Carer Grant. We are also working to implement our new Job Grant as soon as possible.

Thereafter from 2020 we will move to implementation of the more complex devolved benefits, including the disability and carer benefits. We set out the reasons why these benefits are more challenging to deliver in our position paper [“Sequencing Delivery of the Disability and Carer Benefits”](#).

As we move towards the launch of these benefits, it is increasingly important that we continue to learn and apply lessons from all the relevant evidence sources available to us, in order to deliver a service that meets the needs of the people of Scotland.

Available sources of evidence

From the very start of our programme for the delivery of social security in Scotland, the Scottish Government has been committed to learning lessons to inform how we can be as effective as possible as we set up this new public service. For example, one of our first actions at the start of this programme of work was to hold a series of workshops with staff from over 25 government programmes and projects, to analyse and learn from their experiences.

We have drawn important learning points from a number of key evidence sources:

- User research with people with lived experience of the current benefits system, via our [Experience Panels](#).
- Lessons learned from other large government change programmes. This includes programmes implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), notably Universal Credit, but also from other Scottish Government programmes such as NHS 24.
- Lessons we have learned from our experience of delivering Scottish benefits so far, including the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby and Early Learning payments.
- Structuring the timetable for delivery of the remaining benefits so that we can continue to learn lessons as we move through the implementation programme.

Below, we discuss key lessons learned from each of these sources.

User research

We are committed to co-designing our new services in partnership with the people of Scotland. We believe that people with lived experience of the current system are best placed to tell us what works for them and what doesn't, and to advise on the creation of a service that meets their needs.

For that reason, one of the first actions of the Scottish Government following our 2016 public consultation on social security in Scotland was to continue that conversation with the people of Scotland by recruiting Experience Panels. The panels are made up of over 2400 people with experience of at least one of the benefits being devolved in Scotland. Panel members participate in our social security research projects, sharing their experience and views on topics from Social Security Scotland branding to the design of the application forms for the various benefits. Findings are fed into our decision-making about the implementation of social security assistance in Scotland, shaping decisions as they are made.

For example, we moved from a three month to a six month time period for applying for the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment because Experience Panel members told us that three months wasn't long enough. And our new [Charter](#), which sets out people's rights and responsibilities in the area of Scottish social security, and how our staff and clients should behave, was co-designed with our Experience Panels. They brought to bear their own experience of the current benefits system in order to advise on how people interacting with Social Security Scotland should be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. For example, Our Charter commits that Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government staff will "be patient and kind" to clients and "consider how [they] might feel", and that we will "base services in places that are accessible and welcoming".

This client-focused approach is also in line with the [Scottish approach to service design](#), which prioritises collaborative, inclusive and empathic design, developed in partnership with users and service providers so that users are put at the centre of the service from the start of the design process.

Lessons learned from other government change programmes

Major change programmes, including this one, will always contain risks and unknowns that cannot be fully mitigated; but we can reduce those risks by studying and learning the lessons of previous government programmes and applying these to the delivery of social security in Scotland.

Learning lessons from the UK Government

We have closely considered what we can learn from social security programmes implemented by the UK Government, notably the Universal Credit programme, which has attracted serious criticism from stakeholders. Independent commentators such as the National Audit Office and the Institute for Government think tank, as well as the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, have published reports on the lessons to be learned from Universal Credit, and we continue to take those lessons into account in considering how we implement the devolved benefits.

For example, in its 2016 briefing paper [“Learning the lessons from Universal Credit”](#), the Institute for Government concluded that “there was an underinvestment in policy design” and a “failure...to engage with users early enough”, and noted that “A deep understanding of the people a policy is supposed to affect is a vital starting point for policy change”. We agree with the primacy of involving users right from the start in designing what their social security service should look like; and for that reason we have prioritised and invested in comprehensive user research, which underpins every aspect of our delivery of the devolved benefits, as set out above.

Similarly, the National Audit Office in its 2018 report [“Rolling out Universal Credit”](#) noted that DWP “has repeatedly pushed back the rollout of Universal Credit”, and that even with this slower pace of implementation “one in five claimants do not receive their full payment on time”. In setting out our own timetable for delivery of the remaining devolved benefits, we were mindful of this, and of [our own user research](#), which showed that the most important priority for people as Social Security Scotland takes over their benefits claims from DWP was that “clients continue to receive the correct payments at the correct time.” Accordingly the timetable which was announced in the Scottish Parliament in February 2019 was developed to be ambitious but realistic, and to prioritise taking the time to get the new services right so that people continue to receive the payments they are due in the right amount and at the right time.

In designing how we will transfer people’s cases from DWP to Social Security Scotland, we have also borne in mind the lessons of Universal Credit and other UK Government programmes. For example, in November 2018 the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee published its report [“Universal Credit: managed migration”](#), which criticised the UK Government for requiring people with existing claims to make a new claim for Universal Credit “rather than being transferred automatically from the existing system, [which] places the risk squarely on the claimant”. It was partly in response to the experience of those who have had difficulties with this aspect of Universal Credit that the Scottish Government has committed that people with an existing DWP claim will not have to make a new claim in order to move onto the Scottish benefits: instead, we will work with DWP to

arrange for the transfer to happen automatically. Similarly, we made our commitment that people will not have to undergo a face-to-face reassessment at the point of case transfer in response to the lessons we have learned from DWP's practice of assessing the majority of people migrating from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to PIP – an experience which many have found distressing.

Learning lessons from previous Scottish Government change programmes

Our plans for delivering the devolved benefits also incorporate lessons which the Scottish Government has learned from its own previous change programmes. For example, after well-documented issues with its new IT system in 2015-16, NHS 24 carried out a series of reviews and concluded that not enough had been done to involve users in the planning and testing stages. We have worked hard to ensure that the Scottish Government learns from this finding as we deliver the devolved benefits, and involves users at all stages of design and testing, as set out above.

Audit Scotland has compiled a list of lessons learned from various public sector IT projects, which were published in its 2017 report [“Principles for a digital future”](#). We have paid close attention to these lessons in designing our programme for delivery of the devolved benefits. For example, we have:

- Chosen an “appropriate project management methodology”, whereby the overall programme is being managed using a blended approach, combining traditional PRINCE2 frameworks with Agile delivery methodologies. Audit Scotland noted itself in its 2018 report [“Managing the implementation of the Scotland Acts”](#) that our establishment of Agile multidisciplinary teams, comprising Scottish Government staff as well as contractors with a wide-ranging set of skills, “demonstrated good practice”.
- Ensured that our financial planning includes “optimism bias”, by building in contingency to compensate for any in-built unrealistic assumptions, which cause projects to overspend. This is in line with HM Treasury’s Green Book guidance.
- Implemented an “active governance framework” for the programme, with clear reporting lines and accountability, which we review regularly. This includes our Programme Board, which is led by the programme’s Senior Responsible Owner (who is ultimately accountable for its successful delivery) and includes both senior members of the programme and non-executive members who provide insight and challenge.
- Elected to operate within a “central framework of strategic oversight and assurance”, by putting a number of independent processes in place to provide external scrutiny at important delivery milestones. This includes mandatory “Stop/Go” Gates administered by the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Gateway Reviews carried out by the Scottish Government Programme and Project Management Centre of Expertise; and Digital First Service Standard Assessments to ensure that we are continually improving and retaining our focus on user needs.

Lessons learned from the Scottish benefits delivered to date

When we began the work of implementing a Scottish social security system it was important to take account of the lessons of previous government programmes; and now, as we build up first-hand knowledge from the benefits which we have launched already, we can also increasingly learn and apply our own lessons from our practical experience of delivery.

So far we have delivered:

- Carer's Allowance Supplement (September 2018). The supplement addresses the unfairness that Carer's Allowance is the lowest of the working age benefits, and brings it up to the level of Jobseeker's Allowance – putting an extra £442 in carers' pockets in 2018/19, and an extra £452.40 in 2019/20.
- Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment (December 2018). This is a payment to support low income families around the birth of a child. It replaces and expands on the UK Government's Sure Start Maternity Grant, increasing the payment from £500 to £600 for a first child, and removing the cap on the number of children who can be helped so that subsequent children (who receive nothing from the UK Government) receive £300.
- Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment (April 2019). This is a new payment of £250, to help low income families with the costs of early learning for their child at around the age of 2 or 3.

For Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, we have already carried out a wide range of activities to capture lessons learned, so that we can apply these to the benefits that we have still to deliver, including the more complex benefits from 2020 on. Activities included reflection sessions with senior leaders, one-to-one interviews with programme and Social Security Scotland staff, and structured observations of the live running benefits, as well as joint exercises with DWP staff who were involved in the run-up to the launches.

Some of the key lessons which we have learned so far from these sessions included:

(for Carer's Allowance Supplement):

- Allowing more time for recruitment and induction of the Social Security Scotland staff who will deliver the benefit
- Making sure that the guidance which frontline staff use to support clients is clear and comprehensive, and that staff trainers have plenty of time to familiarise themselves with it
- Cultivating strong relationships with DWP at official level so that we have advance warning of any slippages which could jeopardise delivery milestones, and can take action to help remediate these

(for Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment):

- Recognising the great value added by our "Model Office" (a simulated working environment which we used to test our systems and processes prior to launch) and ensuring that Model Office activity is central to our planning from the start

- Improving our understanding of anticipated client volumes, to support accurate staff capacity planning
- Reviewing our governance to ensure that change control mechanisms are sufficiently robust
- Designing at an earlier stage how we will collect data for management information and evaluation so we are well-placed to answer questions on the performance of the system for different groups of people

We will shortly be carrying out a similar programme of lessons learned activities relating to the launch of the Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment. We will also continue to capture and apply further learning points that arise from the benefits that Social Security Scotland is already delivering, so that we can continuously improve them.

Lessons we have learned from the benefits delivered to date are already shaping our planning for implementing the remaining devolved benefits. For example, we know from our delivery experience so far that we have needed at least a year of detailed design, development and testing before we could be confident about launching new claims for a new benefit: we would expect this timescale to increase in proportion to the scale and complexity of the benefit being introduced. We also know that we need to allow for a “fire break” of several months between launches of different benefits, to allow us to fix technical and operational issues that may arise. We factored this understanding into the timetable for delivery of the more complex post-2020 benefits which was announced in February 2019. More details are set out in our position paper “Sequencing Delivery of the Disability and Carer Benefits”.

In addition, Audit Scotland produces annual reports on the Scottish Government’s progress in delivering the devolved benefits, with the first one published in March 2018, and will continue to do so throughout the life of the programme. We engage closely and regularly with Audit Scotland officials to support their preparation of these reports, which provide a valuable external perspective and a regular opportunity for us to reflect on the lessons we can learn from our delivery experience to date.

The knowledge we are building up from our own lessons learned activities and from independent audit will be important, not only for the later stages of our own programme, but for future major change programmes in the Scottish Government and beyond with whom we can share that learning.

Structuring the future delivery timetable to promote ongoing learning

Learning the lessons of the benefits which we have delivered to date has been of central importance to the Programme; and we intend to continue this “on-the-job learning” as we move into delivery of the remaining devolved benefits. As we set out in our position paper [“Sequencing Delivery of the Disability and Carer Benefits”](#), we have designed the timetable for this future benefits delivery in a way that will allow us to learn as we go, and apply that learning as efficiently as possible.

As set out in that position paper, we plan to deliver new claims for the three main forms of Scottish Disability Assistance in increasing order of complexity and size of caseload, and then to deliver Carer's Allowance in its Scottish form. Since the service pattern for the three disability benefits has similarities, delivering them in sequence in this way will allow us to build their systems incrementally in succession, reusing common elements as each benefit goes live, and learning lessons from each one to apply to the next.

By learning as we go in this way, and building upon our expanding knowledge, we expect significantly to reduce the risk of a failed launch of our PIP replacement Disability Assistance for Working Age People (DAWAP) – the most complex form of Disability Assistance. And what we learn from delivering DAWAP will in turn assist us in delivering Scottish Carer's Allowance, a benefit that is still more complex because of its interactions with tax and a range of other benefits and entitlements.

Next steps

Absorbing and acting upon lessons learned is of central importance to the Scottish Government's implementation of the devolved benefits, whether derived from user research, previous government change programmes, or from our own experience of delivering these benefits. As we move into delivery of the more complex benefits from 2020 on, we will continue to reflect upon and apply the lessons we have learned so far, as well as using the mechanisms we have established to capture and share future learning, so that we can continuously improve and deliver a service that meets the needs of the people of Scotland.

Scottish Government

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