



Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba



Client Survey 2023-2024

Summary report

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.

Contents

Background	2
About the survey respondents	3
Overall experience	4
Contact with Social Security Scotland	5
Experiences with staff	6
Applying for benefits	7
Application decisions	8
Case Transfer	9
Receiving payments	10
Barriers	11
Discrimination	12
Consultations	13
Change across the year	14

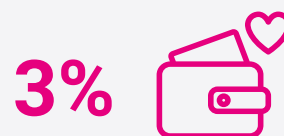
Background

- This report presents the combined results from nine rounds of the Social Security Scotland Client Survey. The first round ran from 12 September to 9 October 2023, the ninth from 15 May to 6 June 2024.
- Everyone who received an application decision or a benefit payment between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 was invited to take part in the survey.
- The survey is split into three strands, each targeted at respondents with experience of particular groups of benefits. The three benefit groups consist of 'Five Family Payments', 'Disability Payments' and 'Other Low Income and Carer'.

About the survey respondents

- The report is based on a total of 36,914 responses.
 - Most described their ethnicity as 'white' (89%, compared to 5% minority ethnic)
 - Most described their gender identity as 'woman' (63%, compared to 33% 'man')
 - Over a third said their age was 55-64 (34%)
 - A greater number had a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more (73%), than those that did not (19%)
 - Most lived in an urban area (86%, compared to 14% rural)
 - 18% of respondents said that they had some form of communication need
- The majority of respondents (85%) had experience of one benefit, 10% of two benefits and 6% of three benefits.
- Fewer than 25 respondents told us they had experience of Job Start Payment.

Of survey respondents:



had received
Carer's Allowance
Supplement



had experience of
Best Start Grant



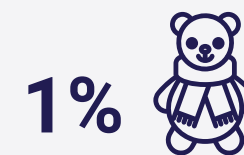
had experience of
Funeral Support
Payment



had experience of
Young Carer Grant



had experience of
Best Start Foods



had received Child
Winter Heating
Payment



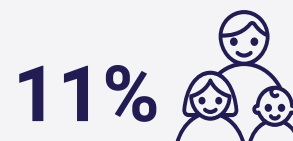
had experience
of Winter heating
Payment



had experience
of Child Disability
Payment application



had experience
of Adult Disability
Payment application



had experience
of Scottish Child
Payment



had Case Transferred
to Child Disability
Payment



had Case Transferred
to Adult Disability
Payment

Overall experience

- Nearly nine-in-ten respondents believed that they had been treated with dignity (79%), fairness (77%) and respect (82%). Three-in-four respondents agreed that Social Security Scotland had not wasted their time (73%), whilst 78% said they understood what Social Security Scotland does.
- Slightly fewer respondents said Social Security Scotland is an honest (71%) or open (68%) organisation.
- Those with experience of Scottish Child Payment and Young Carer Grant were more likely to rate their overall experience as 'very good' or 'good' (95%). Those with experience of applying for Adult Disability Payment (75%) had the lowest overall satisfaction rate.

My experience has been very positive every time and has helped me rebuild my life.



8 in 10 respondents said their overall experience was 'very good' or 'good'.

5% described their experience as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Respondents were asked to make any suggestions for improvement or further comment on their overall experience.

Many suggested that better and more frequent communication from Social Security Scotland would have been helpful.

Make it easier for updates on applications. Have an online service for tracking applications and their progress.

Great service if anything more call staff to answer calls to reduce waiting time to get through.

Would suggest sending a text message acknowledging receipt of application, where you are in the process and notification of decision on the way. Think this would reduce applicants anxiety levels.

Contact with Social Security Scotland

- Almost half (48%) of all respondents said they had tried to contact Social Security Scotland at some point since 1 April 2023.
- Respondents most commonly made contact with us via: the phone helpline (71%), sending a letter (28%), the webchat (18%), or a phone appointment (14%).
- Most respondents felt they had enough choice about how they communicated with Social Security Scotland (75%). A slightly lower proportion (69%) said they got the support they needed.
- Respondents with experience of applying for Adult Disability Payment were less likely to agree with each of the statements regarding communication choices and support received, whereas agreement was highest among five family payment applicants.
- Two-in-three (65%) respondents who had used the service said their experience was 'good' or 'very good', while one-in-five (20%) said their experience was 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- The most common reason for using webchat was to check the progress of an application with two-thirds (67%) of respondents selecting it.



64%

Almost two thirds of respondents who had tried to contact Social Security Scotland agreed that 'it was easy to contact Social Security Scotland'

When respondents were asked how they first heard about us...

19%



said it was by word-of-mouth

17%



said it was through a health service (e.g. NHS worker, GP, health Practitioner, Psychologist).

15%



said they were contacted by us

The webchat was very easy to understand and set up and I connected to someone very quickly; they were very helpful in finding out how my application was coming along.

Experiences with staff

- 45% of respondents said they had been in contact with a member of Social Security Scotland staff.
- The majority of respondents who had been in contact said their overall experience with staff was 'very good' or 'good' (85%) while 5% rated their experience with staff as 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- A large proportion of respondents said staff listened to them (85%) and made them feel comfortable (83%), while 89% of respondents said staff treated them with kindness.
- 80% of respondents said they trusted staff and a similar proportion felt like they were trusted by staff (79%).
- Respondents with communication needs rated their overall experience with staff as 'very good' or 'good' in a very similar rate to those with no communication needs (84%, compared to 85% of respondents with no communication needs).
- Around two-in-five respondents who had been in contact with staff said they would have liked to have been told about other benefits (38%), or other sources of additional help (42%), but were not.



85%

Most respondents said their experience with staff was 'very good' or 'good'.

Most comments about staff were positive and complimented their manner and helpfulness.

Advisor was lovely, caring, knowledgeable and helpful.

They explained all questions that I asked and I found on the two occasions I phoned the staff were very polite. I understand they are very busy but they showed patience and respect. They do a tremendous job in helping people.

A minority had a mixed or negative experience with staff.

There was an issue with the documents I had returned. I spoke to an advisor, they were going to investigate my issue and contact me. I was not contacted as promised.

There was a different answers given. At different calls made. So was a bit confusing.

Applying for benefits

- Around half (52%) of respondents said they had applied for at least one Social Security Scotland benefit.
- Around three quarters of respondents (74%) who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit said their experience of the application process overall was 'very good' or 'good' while 7%, described their experience of the application process overall as 'very poor' or 'poor'.
- Around seven-in-ten respondents who had applied for a benefit said that the application process was clear (69%), and a similar proportion felt that they were only asked relevant questions (65%). Over half of respondents said that filling in and submitting the application(s) did not take too long (56%).
- Respondents who had applied for Child or Adult Disability Payment were less likely than other respondents to agree with the statement 'filling in and submitting the application(s) did not take too long' (51% and 45% respectively, compared to 84-87% for all other benefits).



74%

Three quarters of respondents said their overall experience of applying for a benefit was 'very good' or 'good'.

Many comments were positive, detailing how respondents were treated with understanding, empathy and fairness. When comments were negative, they largely reflect on the length and complexity of the application process.

Thank you for making me feel, for the first time, that being disabled is not something that should provoke an anxiety attack just by you thinking about how your impairments are translated into official paperwork.

I found the form quite daunting.

I am so grateful to the professionalism, understanding and kindness shown to me by the persons of SSS in dealing with my application for adult disability, as they demonstrated SSS values of dignity, fairness and respect.

The whole process is complicated and should be easier for people with temporary disabilities who need help temporarily.

Application decisions

- A little over three quarters of respondents who had applied for a benefit agreed that they 'understood the decision' (76%).
- Among all respondents who had applied for a benefit, almost half (47%) agreed with the statement 'I got enough updates on the progress of my application(s)'. A third (33%) disagreed with this statement and around one-in-six (17%) answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.
- Around half (51%) agreed with the statement 'My application(s) was (were) handled within a reasonable time frame'. Around three-in-ten (29%) disagreed with this statement.
- 35% said they disagreed with a decision they received.
- Almost one-in-five (18%) respondents received an unsuccessful decision on their application. Of those, 11% asked for Social Security Scotland to look at the decision again, 14% made a new application for the same benefit, more than half said that they took no further action (57%).



76%

Most respondents agreed that the decision on their application was 'explained clearly'.

Many of the comments were positive, often highlighting the clarity, helpfulness and level of detail included in decision letters. Negative comments often mentioned a lack of updates between application submission and a decision being received.

The decision was explained very clearly and thoroughly. It was a very respectful communication.

I never received any updates on my application. It was only when the funds appeared in my account I called to find out what award (I got).

All good but it took at least 7 months to be processed.

The only improvement I would ask is that people are kept up to date about their application status.

Case Transfer

- Over four-fifths (84%) of those who had completed a Case Transfer from benefits administered by the Department for Work and Pensions to either Child or Adult Disability Payment agreed with the statement 'I felt informed about the process'.
- Three-quarters (76%) agreed that they felt reassured by the process, however only half (56%) felt supported during the process.
- When respondents were asked if being case transferred made them feel anxious, almost half (48%) strongly agreed or agreed that it did.
- Those who transferred from Working Age Disability Living Allowance (WADLA) to Adult Disability Payment were more likely to agree that being case transferred made them anxious (52%). Around two-fifths (44%) agreed who transferred to Child Disability Payment.

Thinking about the communication you received from Social Security Scotland about your case transfer...



81%

agree it was
clear and easy
to understand



78%

agree it helped them
understand what
was happening
and why



78%

agree the tone
was friendly

My case transfer was very simple. I did not need to do anything. SSS sent me letters to let me know that the transfer was upcoming, and then again to let me know what date it would happen. It was an anxious time for me because of how the English system used to work, but so far I feel SSS have lived up to their promises of a fairer and easier system.

I was informed that my case was being transferred from PiP to adult disability. It was straight forward and I didn't even notice the transfer as it went smoothly.

Receiving payments

- Most respondents said they received their payment(s) when Social Security Scotland said they would (97%). The same amount reported that they received the right amount on the first time (97%) and every time (97%).
- On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'a lot', respondents gave the following average scores for how much benefit payments:
 - Helped to make a difference to their life – 8.4
 - Helped them to control their finances – 7.8
 - Helped them to pay for what they needed – 8.1
- The mean ratings given by those who received Child Disability Payment and Best Start Grant were higher across all three statements compared to other benefit groups. The mean ratings given by those who had received Winter Heating Payment were lower than across most other groups.



90%

Nine-in-ten respondents said their overall experience of receiving benefit payments was 'very good' or 'good'.

Overall, respondents comments were largely positive about the ways in which payments have impacted their ability to purchase goods and services, cover daily living expenses and to care for dependents. However, comments also discussed whether payment amounts were sufficient, accurate and paid on time.

This has helped me to be able to buy the right food I need and takes so much pressure off me.

Now that I receive the benefits I can afford to buy things which help in managing my pain. I have also been able to buy things for my home which help me in my daily living.

Having to care for someone full time, unable to get a job to support yourself. The amount received is not enough to live on.

They have made my life so much easier and I have much better quality of life.

Barriers

- 24% of respondents said they had faced some form of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland.
- Around one-in-twelve respondents (8%) across all benefits said 'I could not get the information or updates I needed'; one-in-fourteen (7%) said 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to'; one-in-sixteen (6%) said 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when I wanted to'
- Just under a third (30%) of respondents who had faced barriers said they told Social Security Scotland.
- Of those respondents, over a third (36%) felt that Social Security Scotland 'understood them'. A fifth felt that Social Security Scotland 'supported [them] in overcoming them' (21%).

The most frequently mentioned barrier was difficulties relating to communication.

I think it may be helpful to try and update those waiting to hear, even if it's an email or quick note in post to say, we have not forgotten about your application, please be patient. Sometimes that's all it takes.

Absolutely no communication from Social Security Scotland unless I make the effort.

When trying to use the online chat function on a phone if you do not watch the screen continuously for the reply, (which can be up to 40 minutes before someone is available) you get timed out and have to restart the whole process. It's really difficult not to look away from your phone for a minute or two while waiting so long.

Discrimination

- 6% of respondents said they had been discriminated against during their experience with Social Security Scotland, and 5% preferred not to say.
- Of the 2,048 respondents who said they had experienced discrimination, 55% said it related to Social Security Scotland's process; 45% to its policies; and 24% said it related to staff.
- Of those who had experienced discrimination, 58% disagreed that it was 'clear how to challenge it'.
- 59% also disagreed with the statement 'I felt I could challenge it', and around a quarter (27%) said they told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination.

The first questions are targeted towards those with physical disabilities. I felt I was the wrong 'type' of disabled.

A key theme was discrimination against particular health conditions within the application and decision-making process. This was especially notable for those who identified as having mental health conditions or 'invisible' disabilities.

The application process was bias[ed] towards [...] physical disabilities, less consideration of learning or cognitive disabilities.

The application questions are not specific enough for someone with a hearing loss disability to be able to get across how difficult daily living is with hearing loss. Subsequently I did not get the award I expected. The points system does not seem fair when someone who needs an aid for daily living does not get the same points as someone who needs an aid for mobility. I realise that there are probably millions of people who wear hearing aids, and not everyone can get an award, but I'd suggest some information on the level of hearing loss that qualifies would be useful.

Consultations

All Adult Disability Payment respondents that applied for the benefit were asked if they had had a consultation.¹

For those who said they had...



86%

rated their overall experience as 'good' or 'very good'



89%

they were treated with dignity and respect by their practitioners



87%

their practitioners communicated with them in a way that was clear and they could understand



78%

their practitioners understood their disability/condition and how it affects them

Overall the consultation interviewer was kind and compassionate and I felt at ease opening up to her about personal medical problems she is a credit to Social Security Scotland.

The person I spoke to was very nice and easy to talk to, but I don't think they fully understood my health issues and the longevity of them.

The whole process ran smoothly and I never felt under-pressure, I never felt bullied and, most important of all, I felt believed.

¹ The data indicated that the word 'consultation' might have led to some confusion with respondents answering to consultation questions with other forms of contact with our staff and not about their experience with our practitioners as intended. Caution is required when interpreting the figures.

Change across the year

- Respondents' overall experience with staff remained largely consistent for all benefit groups, with a small fluctuation between 80-82% of all respondents giving a rating of 'very good' or 'good' across each of the three rounds.
- The overall experience rating as 'very good' or 'good' fluctuated between 79% and 82% over the three rounds for all respondents. This was consistent with minimal fluctuations across the three round for most benefits.
- Child Disability Payment applicants saw the most noticeable decline in experience ratings across the three rounds (89% in round 1 and 2, to 85% in round 3). Conversely Child Disability Case Transfer saw the greatest increase (88% in round 1, 86% in round 2, to 91% in round 3).
- Agreement with the statement 'my application was handled within a reasonable time frame' increased across the three rounds for all respondents (46% in round 1, 52% in round 2, and 59% in round 3).

Fieldwork was split into three benefit experience strands, each of which ran across the three rounds of fieldwork.



Five Family Payments –

experience of Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, or Scottish Child Payment



Disability Payment –

applied for, or Case Transferred onto, Adult or Child Disability Payment



Other Low Income and Carer –

applied for Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, or Job Start Payment, or received Carer's Allowance Supplement, Winter Heating Payment or Child Winter Heating Payment



Round 1
Sep-Dec 2023

Round 2
Jan-May 2024

Round 3
Apr-Jun 2024



Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Contact us



socialsecurity.gov.scot



@SocSecScot



Social Security Scotland

ISBN: 978-1-83601-826-1