



Social Security
Scotland

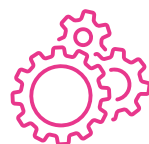
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba



Charter Research 2024-2025

Summary report

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.



Contents

Background 3

A People's Service

Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland as an organisation 4

Processes that Work: Partner experiences of using the service on behalf of clients

Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland 5

Experiences with staff 6

Applications 7

Accessibility of Social Security Scotland's service 8

Working for Social Security Scotland

Staff knowledge and skills 9

Support for staff 10

Inclusive communication 11

A Learning System

Partner experiences of giving feedback 12

Staff experiences of giving feedback 13

Improvements based on feedback 14

Partner experiences of things going wrong and making complaints 15

Next Steps 17

Background

This report presents a summary of findings from research with Social Security Scotland staff and partners about their experiences in 2024-25. The research was designed to provide data for the **2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework**. The Charter Measurement Framework is a co-designed list of measures. It shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are getting on with delivering the commitments in **Our Charter**.

Both the Charter and the Charter Measurement Framework were recently reviewed. This is the first year that the research has provided data for the **revised Charter Measurement Framework**.

The research was carried out between March and June 2025. It involved a survey completed by 999 staff (23% response rate) and a survey completed by 196 partners.

The sections below provide headline findings from the research. Experiences were similar to previous years on the whole for both staff and partners. Staff findings showed some positive annual trends. Some aspects of partner experiences showed decline over time, particularly on working in partnership with Social Security Scotland. Trends in staff and partner sentiment are discussed in the full **Charter Research report**.

A People's Service



Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland as an organisation

Almost half (46%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good.

Around a quarter had worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland in 2024-25. Of those:

- Five in ten said Social Security Scotland worked well with them and answered queries effectively
- Six in ten said Social Security Scotland shared relevant, timely information with them

In comments, partner respondents were positive about Social Security Scotland's values and said clients continued to be treated with dignity, fairness and respect.

Respondents said partnership staff were knowledgeable and reliable. Some felt Social Security Scotland's engagement with partners had become less frequent and in-depth over time. They suggested more collaboration with partners who have expertise in supporting clients and having named members of staff to contact for partnership matters.

Around two-fifths said that Social Security Scotland had been open (40%) and honest (42%).



Some felt Social Security Scotland had been transparent about policies and processes. Others thought the organisation's values didn't match up to its performance in practice and wanted more transparency about decision-making processes.

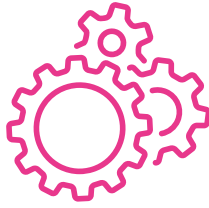
"Social Security Scotland officers have consistently delivered exceptional levels of partnership working [...]."

Partner respondent

"I am sad to put these answers as at the beginning we had a lot of hope for the new system and the commitment to dignity and respect. However it is clear that the reality is falling far short of what was promised and actually many things are worse than they were under the previous system."

Partner respondent

Processes that Work: Partner experiences of using the service on behalf of clients



Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland

Around a fifth (19%) of client-facing partner respondents found it easy or very easy to contact Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients. Two-thirds (66%) found it difficult or very difficult.

Written comments showed some respondents had no issues contacting Social Security Scotland using either phone or webchat. Some praised webchat as an alternative to phone. A couple felt call waiting times had recently improved.

Others reported long call waiting times, being disconnected from calls, and not receiving call backs where promised.

Some faced problems with interpretation, security questions, and third party consent when contacting Social Security Scotland with or for clients.

Suggestions to improve included:

- a dedicated partner phone line or email service,
- a specific team to help partners with client queries,
- and smoother processes for third party consent.

93%

Most partner respondents said they support clients or potential clients of Social Security Scotland.

97%

Of those, almost all had supported clients with Adult Disability Payment although many had helped clients with more than one benefit.

“The telephone response times have improved dramatically and the staff seem to be more informed than they used to be.”

Partner respondent

“It can frequently take an hour to get through on the phone which is completely unacceptable. When we do get through we are unable to speak on behalf of clients without the client present - even in cases where we have sent a signed mandate [...] Call backs are promised and do not happen [...]”

Partner respondent

Experiences with staff

Some partner respondents praised staff saying they were helpful, supportive and well-informed. Some said their experience with staff was a positive aspect of contacting Social Security Scotland.

Others had received incorrect or conflicting information from staff and said knowledge varied. Some were frustrated when staff didn't have the right knowledge for their query. Some said staff manner also varied with a few describing poor experiences.

"Some of the staff I have spoken to have not known the benefit entitlement rules for some of the benefits. [...] It can be very difficult when you are getting told different information each time you call based upon Social Security Scotland staff experience. [...]"

Partner respondent

"I have spoken to really polite and helpful staff at Social Security Scotland which is a real breath of fresh air!"

Partner respondent

43%



Around two-fifths of client-facing partner respondents rated their experience of speaking to staff on behalf of clients as good or very good.

Respondents felt staff would benefit from better training on things like third party consent, benefit entitlement, and understanding client needs.

"[...] They speak with clients as if they were human beings and don't just want them off the phone. [...]"

Partner respondent

"[...] Some/most interactions have been good, but some (the minority) have been poor. Some staff have been very keen to assist and others less so."

Partner respondent

Applications

Most comments were about applications for disability payments.

Positive comments said disability payment applications were straightforward to complete and questions were clear. Some said online applications were quicker, easier, and more user-friendly than paper forms despite some technical issues.

Other comments said applications were time-consuming to complete and highlighted the emotional toll for clients repeatedly going over their condition in detail. The time spent waiting for a decision was also mentioned as a key issue.

Suggestions to improve included:

- shorter versions of paper forms for partner use,
- larger text boxes on paper forms,
- changes to the online form for clients to better explain their disability or condition,
- more information and support for partners on new benefit applications like Pension Age Disability Payment,
- and a dedicated helpline to request Local Delivery support.

"The online and paper applications are clearly laid out and easy to complete."

Partner respondent

30%

Three in ten client-facing partner respondents said it was easy or very easy to go through the application process with or for clients.

39%

Nearly four in ten said it was difficult or very difficult.



"I have to say difficult just now because of the length of time it is taking to make decisions. It is still several months before we hear of an initial decision [...]."

Partner respondent

"It is a very lengthy application which can take hours to get through. This in itself is a barrier for a lot of people. The application does not always give applicants the opportunity to express the challenges they face [...]."

Partner respondent

Accessibility of Social Security Scotland's service

Client-facing partner respondents were asked to score the accessibility of Social Security Scotland's service from 0 (not at all accessible) to 10 (very accessible).

20% A fifth gave a high score between 8 and 10.

55% Over half gave a medium score between 4 and 7.

24% A quarter gave a low score between 0 and 3.

Some respondents said the service was accessible for most clients but not all. Many mentioned digital exclusion for clients who didn't have digital skills or access to online information. Others said call waiting times, problems with interpretation, and difficulties with security questions and identification were key barriers.

Suggestions to improve included:

- better promotion of the support offered by Social Security Scotland to access the service,
- and more opportunities for email, video call and face-to-face communication for clients.



Positive examples of accessibility included:

- a choice of ways for clients to contact Social Security Scotland and apply,
- the ability to save progress on online forms,
- the availability of the Local Delivery service,
- the option to ask for communication in another language,
- accessible letters (large print, easy read),
- and clear, straightforward information online.

"Local Delivery [...] have been great."

Partner respondent

"[...] There have been times I have called Social Security Scotland with a client and an interpreter on the phone. I have then been told my interpreter needs to disconnect the call so Social Security Scotland can get their own translator, only for no translator to be available."

Partner respondent

Working for Social Security Scotland

Staff knowledge and skills



Most (85%) staff respondents felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job.

Professional and personal experience, training and guidance, and support from colleagues and managers had helped staff respondents to feel knowledgeable and well-equipped to do their job. Some felt confident due to peer learning and self-directed development.

Those who didn't feel confident mentioned: being new to their role, a lack of support from managers or colleagues, issues with training, and limited time for development due to high workloads. Some said internal guidance, processes, and systems were unreliable and it was difficult to keep up with frequent changes to these.

There were calls for more training on:

- accessibility;
- how to support colleagues inclusively;
- internal systems and technology;
- specific aspects of the service like re-determinations and appeals;
- and Social Security Scotland's organisational structure and the roles of different departments.

82%

Most staff respondents who interact with clients in their role, or will do so in future, said they knew about support services for clients.



65%

Around six in ten knew how to refer clients to the independent advocacy service (VoiceAbility).

"We have learning opportunities all the time which is great. Within our team we are very supportive of each other and someone is always happy to help if another is struggling [...]."

Staff respondent

"I feel that my current knowledge is enough to do my job, although additional technical training would help to deliver better quality."

Staff respondent

Support for staff

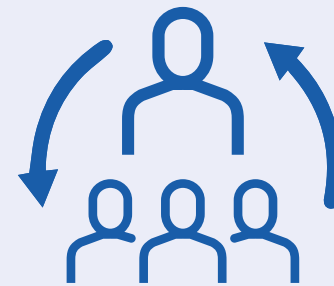
Positive comments said line managers were supportive, approachable, and understanding of both work and personal issues.

Some respondents said line managers were always available to help, offered frequent communication, and made them feel empowered in their role. Some said line managers had supported them with professional development and applying for promotions.

Respondents who didn't feel supported mentioned:

- poor communication,
- feeling micromanaged,
- unreasonable workloads,
- additional needs not being met,
- a lack of feedback or support with development,
- and line managers not having the right training, knowledge or experience to help.

Many felt line managers were trying their best but were let down by high workloads, poor communication from more senior colleagues, and problems with internal procedures. Some mentioned bullying, unfair treatment and exclusionary behaviours by managers.



80%

Most staff respondents said support from their line manager had been good or very good.

“Operational pressures mean that it can be difficult to have or give support [...] but it doesn't mean that line managers don't care, they are just doing the best they can to get through sometimes.”

Staff respondent

“My manager is very responsive, caring and friendly. I get good feedback from them and always feel free to go to them for advice [...]”

Staff respondent

Inclusive communication

Some staff respondents said they were committed to communicating inclusively, either as part of their personal values or as an integral part of their job role.

Challenges to delivering a service based on inclusive communication included: the absence of email communication for clients; inadequate training and guidance on accessibility; and gaps in internal processes for clients who communicate differently. Some said translation and interpretation processes were good, but others described problems with these.

Around three-quarters (73%) of staff respondents found it easy or very easy to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs. Respondents were positive about support they had received from managers and colleagues to meet their individual needs, such as adjustments to the office environment.

Where support was lacking, issues included:

- specific needs not being met,
- delays and problems using accessibility software,
- the use of acronyms and jargon,
- and challenges around hybrid working.



58%

Over half of staff respondents said it was easy or very easy to deliver a service based on inclusive communication.

“My role ensures that I am very aware of the need to be inclusive in all aspects of my work.”

Staff respondent

“[...] system issues and a lack of training/guidance means clients rarely receive the alternative communications they’ve requested, such as large print or translated letters. If clients indicate on a form that they don’t want phone calls, this doesn’t show up on [case system], so unless you scan through all previous forms to check, it’s missed. [...] This is not only unfair to the client, it also becomes difficult for staff to engage with them and get the information we need.”

Staff respondent

A Learning System

Partner experiences of giving feedback



Some partner respondents felt Social Security Scotland was open to feedback and that improvement was embedded in Social Security Scotland's values.

Others were less satisfied with Social Security Scotland's approach to feedback, feeling that suggestions weren't welcomed or actioned. There were calls for a greater focus on actively inviting partner feedback and insights, particularly at meetings and events.

Some respondents who had provided feedback described positive experiences and said they felt listened to. A few said Social Security Scotland acted on their suggestions.

Others were dissatisfied with their experience of providing feedback. Issues included:

- feeling that suggestions were ignored or not acted on,
- and long delays in hearing back about a suggestion or not hearing back at all.

There were calls for Social Security Scotland to communicate more clearly and publicly about whether feedback had been actioned and, if not, the reasons for delays or lack of change.

36%

Around a third of partner respondents thought Social Security Scotland is open to feedback.

14%

Around one in ten thought Social Security Scotland acts on feedback.



"We have seen first hand that the feedback is actioned, and so we are quite happy even if we don't get a response or update directly."

Partner respondent

"[...] I attend an Adult Disability Payment forum through Citizens Advice Scotland and we put forward the difficulties clients face but we are still discussing the same issues so therefore I don't believe Social Security Scotland acts on feedback very well, as changes would be made."

Partner respondent

Staff experiences of giving feedback

Many felt a responsibility to raise issues and provide feedback to improve Social Security Scotland as a workplace and public service. Some felt strongly about challenging poor behaviours.

Some felt supported and safe to raise issues with their line manager and colleagues. They said feedback was taken seriously and often led to change.

Other respondents described mixed or negative experiences of speaking up. Issues included:

- concerns not being welcomed, listened to, or actioned,
- not hearing back about feedback,
- suggestions being delayed in a backlog,
- and not feeling safe or supported to speak up.

Some were worried about how feedback would be received. Several had experienced negative reactions after raising concerns. Some believed there was no point in speaking up as they felt staff feedback didn't lead to change.



79%

Most staff respondents said they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong in Social Security Scotland.

"I have brought up a couple of things I have disagreed with in the past and these were sensitive issues which were dealt with in an appropriate manner."

Staff respondent

"I have made quite a few suggestions about things that are not working and improvements that could be made, but it seldom seems to achieve anything - even when the fix could be relatively simple. I find that discouraging, and I am not sure about the value of flagging this up any more."

Staff respondent

Improvements based on feedback

In the staff survey, respondents mentioned examples where feedback had led to improvements in Social Security Scotland.

Examples were often about improvements to internal processes and guidance which made it easier for staff to do their jobs.

There were also changes to ways of working in certain business areas such as:

- restructuring teams,
- better communication,
- improved HR procedures,
- and different approaches to the way cases are handled and processed.

Other examples were to do with improving Social Security Scotland's service for clients including clearer letters, more effective telephony, and changes to application forms and payment processes.

"The way in which we process large payments to clients who may lack capacity to deal with the money - checks and balances are now put in place so the money can reach the client safely."

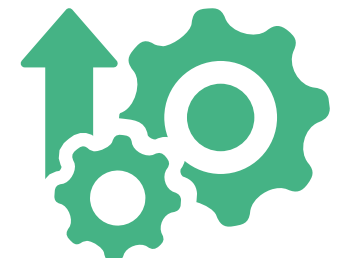
Staff respondent

"That the guidance on if a client enters or leaves hospital needed updated as it did not tell you to update the evidence, so the client was still being paid Adult Disability Payment when in hospital despite them calling in to let us know. This has now been updated."

Staff respondent

"I raised concerns about how information was communicated within my wider team. I approached my manager and senior manager about how I thought things could be improved. I was then given the opportunity to survey staff and compile an options paper which was presented to my senior leaders and suggestions have been implemented."

Staff respondent



Partner experiences of things going wrong and making complaints

Partner respondents described problems and mistakes made by Social Security Scotland including:

- incorrect, conflicting or misleading information;
- specific communication instructions for vulnerable clients not being followed;
- application forms going missing;
- written errors in decision letters;
- and supporting information being missed in decision-making.

A few said Social Security Scotland had admitted when they made mistakes, although some felt this hadn't always led to direct change or improvements.

Some respondents reported problems to staff and said issues were resolved. Others felt staff hadn't understood the problem or situation.



"Clients are often sent decision notices with incorrect information which does not make any sense. It seems as though templates are being typed over when the previous information has not been fully removed. [...]"

Partner respondent

"As a third party representative with signed authorisation to act on behalf of my client, I was not able to lodge a date of claim for my client because I failed security tests which were inappropriate for me. [...] I made my views known in feedback and was pleased that someone got back to me to confirm that this should not have happened and put things right. It was a stressful experience."

Partner respondent

Some partner respondents complained to Social Security Scotland about the problems and mistakes they experienced.

Some said complaints were handled well and that the process was simple. Some received a prompt response and were kept updated on the progress of their complaint.

Others were dissatisfied with the complaints process. Issues were commonly about:

- delays hearing back about the complaint or not hearing back at all;
- not being included in communication to do with complaints from vulnerable clients;
- complaint forms being lost;
- dissatisfaction with the final outcome;
- and feeling complaints weren't welcomed.

22%

Less than a quarter of partner respondents had made a complaint.



Of those, around three in ten agreed they were satisfied with how Social Security Scotland resolved their complaint.

"Complaints process very straightforward and the response was swift. Have been pleasantly surprised at effectiveness of complaints process. To be commended."

Partner respondent

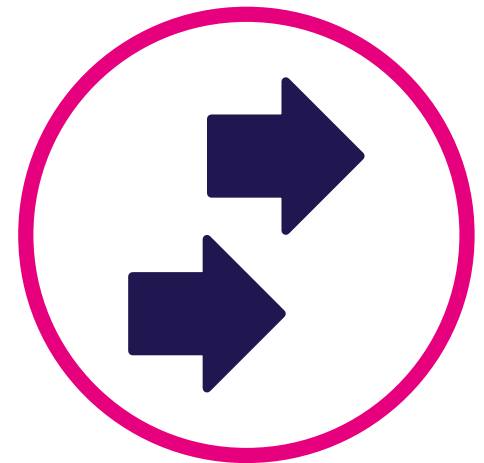
"The complaints process went ok however the overall issues weren't resolved. I felt that the contact from Social Security Scotland only wanted me to agree that everything was fine so the complaint could be closed quickly."

Partner respondent

Next Steps

Findings appear in the relevant sections of the **2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework**. They will be shared across Social Security Scotland to inform continuous improvement activities.

Research will shortly begin for the 2025-26 Charter Measurement Framework.





Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Contact us



socialsecurity.gov.scot



@SocSecScot



Social Security Scotland

ISBN: 978-1-80643-120-5