



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Research: Child Disability Payment - Early experiences of applicants, staff and partners



Exploring this research

Choose how much detail you want to read:

- For 'Findings at a glance' → page 4
- For findings in six pages → 'Executive Summary' on page 6
- For full findings, start at page 12

For key findings in a more visual format, a separate '[Summary report](#)' has also been published.

Contents

1. Findings at a glance	4
2. Executive Summary	6
3. Background and research methods	12
3.1. Background	12
3.2. Research aims	13
3.3. Research methods	14
3.4. Analysis and understanding findings	17
4. Applicants' experiences of learning about Child Disability Payment	18
4.1. How did applicants first hear about Child Disability Payment?	18
4.2. What further steps did applicants take to learn about Child Disability Payment?	18
4.3. Did applicants think their child would be eligible for support after learning about Child Disability Payment?	19
5. Applicants' experiences of applying for Child Disability Payment	21
5.1. How did applicants find completing the Child Disability Payment application form overall?	21
5.2. How did applicants complete the application form?	23
5.3. How long did applicants take to complete the application form?	27
5.4. What did applicants think about the content of the application form?	28
5.5. How did applicants find providing supporting information?	33
5.6. What happened once applicants had submitted their application?	37
6. Applicants' experiences of receiving a decision on their Child Disability Payment application	40
6.1. How did applicants feel about the decision received?	40
6.2. How did applicants feel about the content of the decision letter?	42
6.3. How did applicants feel about the time taken to receive a decision?	44
6.4. How have applicants found receiving Child Disability Payment payments?	45

6.5. Were applicants aware of the need to keep Social Security Scotland informed of changes in their circumstances?	47
6.6. Were applicants able to access other forms of support as a result of receiving a Child Disability Payment award?	48
7. Applicants' experiences of interacting with Social Security Scotland staff across their journey	49
7.1. How did applicants reflect on their interactions with Social Security Scotland staff?	49
8. Key themes from research with Social Security Scotland staff	52
8.1. How did staff find working on Child Disability Payment following its launch?	52
8.2. How did staff find their training ahead of working on Child Disability Payment?	54
8.3. What did staff think about guidance and systems they use?	56
8.4. Did staff feel supported by colleagues?	58
9. Key points from research with partner organisations	60
10. Where are we now?	63
Annex A: Additional Client Survey data tables	65
How to access background or source data	66

1. Findings at a glance

Child Disability Payment was firstly introduced in three Pilot areas in July 2021 ahead of a nationwide launch in November 2021. The Pilot approach provided the opportunity to start receiving and processing applications at a controlled volume. The Pilot approach also provided an early opportunity to identify any issues affecting the applicant experience, so that they could be addressed while the number of applicants was still relatively low.

This report presents the findings from research carried out during the Pilot and in the first months of Child Disability Payment's nationwide launch. Alongside other feedback routes and operational information, the findings have been used to refine systems, learning and processes. Key findings 'at a glance' are summarised below.

Most applicant interviewees said completing the application form was straightforward. However, some found it an emotional or difficult process. Most applied online. This was seen as a positive change from dealing with paper forms. Some said the content of the form was appropriate and allowed them to describe their child's condition and circumstances. However, some had negative feedback on elements of the form. Views varied on whether it was repetitive.

A few interviewees described issues with the processes and communication around getting supporting information from other organisations or Social Security Scotland collecting this for them. This had an impact on the outcome of their application.

Interviewees would have liked to have known more about the progress of their application while waiting on the decision. The time interviewees waited for a decision varied. The decision letter was commonly described as straightforward, clear and informative. However, some unsuccessful applicants disagreed with the reasoning set out and said the information provided could have been improved. Some interviewees received their first payment days before the decision letter arrived, and

some of them found this distressing. However, interviewees mostly said that recurring payments had been arriving as expected.

Applicant interviewees were generally positive about Social Security Scotland staff they interacted with, but some received incorrect or inconsistent information.

The research with Social Security Scotland staff was carried out during the Pilot period. Several participants said their knowledge, confidence and efficiency in completing tasks was growing as they got more practice at parts of their jobs. Staff feedback on training was mixed. Participants highlighted scope to improve the guidance, systems and tools they use. Staff described being supported by colleagues and being able to provide feedback on areas for improvement.

2. Executive Summary

Child Disability Payment was the first application-based disability benefit to be launched by Social Security Scotland. It was firstly introduced in three Pilot areas in July 2021 ahead of a nationwide launch in November 2021.¹ The Pilot approach provided the opportunity to start receiving and processing applications at a controlled volume. This aimed to ensure that staff working in a brand new service were able to embed their training by using the new processes and systems at a managed pace, before the volume of activity scaled up at the nationwide launch. The Pilot approach also provided an early opportunity to identify any issues affecting the applicant experience, so that they could be addressed while the number of applicants was still relatively low. This chance to learn lessons and refine processes is in line with the commitment to continuous improvement which underpins the delivery of the social security system in Scotland.

This report presents the findings from research carried out during the Pilot and in the first months of Child Disability Payment's nationwide launch.² The research aimed to identify early insights into what was working well with the new benefit and any areas for improvement ahead of the national roll out and beyond. Alongside other feedback routes and operational information, the findings have been used to refine systems, learning and processes.

Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government researchers carried out:

- 21 interviews with Child Disability Payment applicants

¹ From the 26 July 2021, applications were accepted for children living in the Pilot areas of Dundee City, Western Isles and Perth and Kinross. On 22 November 2021, Child Disability Payment launched nationwide to all new applicants living in Scotland.

² The research continued beyond the Pilot period to allow the inclusion of a larger number of Child Disability Payment applicants.

- 19 interviews and six remote observation sessions with Social Security Scotland staff working on tasks relating to Child Disability Payment
- A survey completed by five respondents and four interviews with individuals from partner organisations who support applicants or work with Social Security Scotland.

Below is a summary of the key findings.

Research with applicants

Applicants' experiences of learning about Child Disability Payment

Applicant interviewees first heard about Child Disability Payment from a range of sources, including medical professionals, friends and family, and through social media. Having learned about the benefit, around half of the applicant interviewees said they thought their child would be eligible. Others were not sure. Some were uncertain how their child's age or their wider financial status affected eligibility.

Applicants' experiences of applying for Child Disability Payment

Most applicant interviewees said completing the application form was straightforward. Several expected it to be more difficult than it had been. Some parents or carers were not used to considering or recognising how their child's daily life compares to other children of a similar age. This made completing the form an emotional process or difficult to do.

Applicant interviewees typically applied by themselves or with help from other household members only. Child Disability Payment was the first disability benefit in the UK where applicants could apply online, as well as by phone, post or face-to-face. Most applicant interviewees applied online. Reasons for this included general preference, convenience and it being a familiar way to complete forms. Applying online was described as a positive change from dealing with paper forms. Some who

completed a paper version of part two³ of the application form felt it took a long time to complete and asked for a lot of information.

Some said that the questions in the form were appropriate and allowed them to describe their child's condition and circumstances. Having the opportunity to write more information about their child's circumstances alongside the tick-box questions was felt to be important. Applicant interviewees thought the additional information provided would have likely strengthened their claim. However, some had negative feedback about the form. This included the questions being too focused on physical disabilities or not feeling relevant. Views varied on whether or not the form was repetitive.

Some applicant interviewees said that providing supporting information was straightforward. Others had to overcome technical challenges to provide this online. A few described some issues with the processes and communication around getting supporting information from other organisations or Social Security Scotland collecting this on their behalf. This had an impact on the outcome of their application.

Applicant interviewees said they would have liked to have known more about the progress of their application while waiting on the decision.

Applicants' experiences of receiving a decision on their application

Applicant interviewees who had received a Child Disability Payment award generally agreed with the decision they received. Receiving a Child Disability Payment award was described as "overwhelming" and a relief. The decision letter was commonly described as straightforward, clear and informative. However, some who did not receive an award disagreed with the reasoning set out and said the information provided could have been improved. Others also said there could be more

³ The Child Disability Payment application has two main parts. Where part one is completed over the phone with Social Security Scotland, part two is generally completed on a paper form sent by post.

information on how the award rate and review point had been decided, and what the review process involves.

The time applicant interviewees waited for a decision varied. Some thought receiving a decision in four to eight weeks was quite quick as they were told it would take around eight weeks when applying. One applicant interviewee who waited several months said the decision “took way too long” and meant they could not buy some items that their child needed.

Some applicant interviewees reported receiving their first payment days before the decision letter arrived. Most would have preferred to have received the letter first. The money arriving unexpectedly was distressing for some. However, applicant interviewees mostly said that recurring payments had been arriving as expected.

Applicants’ experiences of interacting with Social Security Scotland staff

Applicant interviewees described Social Security Scotland staff they had contact with as knowledgeable and helpful. Staff made them feel relaxed, listened to and comfortable. Feedback about staff was also positive in some cases even where people were unhappy about elements of the process or decision they had received. However, some said staff provided incorrect or inconsistent information.

Key themes from research with Social Security Scotland staff

The research with Social Security Scotland staff was carried out during the Pilot period. It had a strong focus on identifying areas for improvement which is reflected in the key themes emerging from the research.

How did staff find working on Child Disability Payment following its launch?

Some participants had limited experience of certain parts of their job at the point of interview. This is likely to be related to the timing of the research with staff. Staff participants said their knowledge, confidence and efficiency in completing tasks was

growing as they got more practice at parts of their jobs. Some said they had been involved in fewer cases than they expected and thought there was scope to get involved more often.

How did staff find their training ahead of working on Child Disability Payment?

Staff feedback on the training they received was mixed. Many commented that the training was useful. Some said they had to learn more 'on-the-job' with the support of managers and peers. Staff participants thought it would have been helpful for guidance to have been finalised before training. Some felt more time to practice using systems would have been useful ahead of working on live cases.

What did staff think about guidance and systems they use?

Staff participants mentioned the importance of using guidance to support them in their role. However, they said the guidance is difficult to navigate and the content could be improved. Some were happy that feedback was being taken on board and updates were being made. Others suggested updates could be made more quickly and communicated more clearly.

Some staff participants were still trying to get to grips with and build their confidence around the systems and devices used as part of their job. It was suggested that it would be useful if these could be streamlined, reduced or more integrated.

Did staff feel supported by colleagues?

Staff participants outlined how they had been supported by colleagues to learn and carry out their role. They also described being able to provide feedback on their experiences and where they thought things could be improved.

Key points from research with partner organisations

The low number of partner organisation participants limits our ability to identify key themes from this strand of the research. Whilst headline points of feedback are included in this report, please note some were only made by one or two people.

All five respondents to the partner organisation survey got the information they needed or expected from Social Security Scotland about Child Disability Payment. However, some partner organisation interview participants felt that the information available could be improved and more consistent.

Survey respondents who expected to support people to apply for Child Disability Payment said they would feel confident helping someone to do so. Interviewees with experience of the Child Disability Payment application form had mixed views about it.

Where are we now?

Alongside wider operational information, this research has offered early insights into what was working well with Child Disability Payment shortly after its launch and helped to identify areas for improvement. In response to the feedback gathered, a number of changes to the application form and information available to applicants have been introduced. There have also been improvements to address points raised by Social Security Scotland staff, such as updates to guidance and feedback loops.

3. Background and research methods

This chapter provides background information about the project and outlines the methodology used during the research.

3.1. Background

Child Disability Payment was the first application-based disability benefit to be launched by Social Security Scotland. It provides money to help with the extra care and mobility costs that disabled children and young people might have. It replaces Disability Living Allowance for children in Scotland that was previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

From the 26 July 2021, applications were accepted for Child Disability Payment for children living in the Pilot areas of Dundee City, Western Isles and Perth and Kinross. On 22 November 2021, Child Disability Payment launched nationwide to all new applicants living in Scotland. In this report, the period from 26 July to 21 November 2021 will be referred to as the 'Pilot period'.

The Pilot approach provided the opportunity to start receiving and processing applications at a controlled volume. This aimed to ensure that staff working in a brand new service were able to embed their training by using the new processes and systems at a managed pace, before the volume of activity scaled up at the nationwide launch. The Pilot approach also provided an early opportunity to identify any issues affecting the applicant experience, so that they could be addressed while the number of applicants was still relatively low. This chance to learn lessons and refine processes is in line with the commitment to continuous improvement which underpins the delivery of the social security system in Scotland.

Further information on Child Disability Payment and other Social Security Scotland benefits is available at: <https://www.mygov.scot/browse/benefits/social-security-scotland>.

3.2. Research aims

This report presents the findings from research carried out by Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government researchers. It took place during the Pilot and in the first months of Child Disability Payment's nationwide launch.⁴ The research was conducted to find out more about the experiences of:

- those applying for Child Disability Payment,
- partner organisations supporting applicants or who work with Social Security Scotland, and
- Social Security Scotland staff processing applications received.

Alongside other feedback routes and operational information, the research aimed to identify early insights into what was working well with the new benefit and any areas for improvement.

Importantly, the research project was not intended to be an evaluation of Child Disability Payment as a benefit or policy overall. A wider evaluation⁵ of Social Security Scotland's disability benefits overall is being led by the Scottish Government over the next few years.

⁴ The research continued beyond the Pilot period to allow the inclusion of a larger number of Child Disability Payment applicants.

⁵ More information on the evaluation strategy can be found at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluating-devolution-disability-benefits/>.

3.3. Research methods

This section provides an overview of each strand of the research project and the methods used.

Research with applicants

This report mainly focuses on the findings from the research conducted with people who applied for Child Disability Payment shortly after its introduction. Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government researchers invited applicants to take part in an interview. Each interview explored experiences of applying for Child Disability Payment and receiving a decision. Where relevant, interviews also covered applicants' experiences of contact with Social Security Scotland and support organisations in the process of applying for Child Disability Payment.

Researchers conducted 21 interviews with Child Disability Payment applicants; three in October and November 2021, and 18 in February 2022. Around 620 applicants were invited to take part in an interview in total. Researchers aimed to invite everyone who applied during the Pilot period. However, some cases were excluded, such as where contact information available to the research team was incomplete or not suitable for use. To boost the number of interviews completed, an additional batch of applicants who applied on the first day Child Disability Payment was available nationwide were also invited to take part.

Sixteen applicant interviewees had applied for Child Disability Payment during the Pilot period, and five on the first day of Child Disability Payment's national launch.

All interviews were carried out remotely. The vast majority were conducted by phone, with a small number taking place over video call.

Wider insight from Social Security Scotland's Client Survey

Social Security Scotland runs a Client Survey to capture information on the overall experiences and needs of clients. Selected Client Survey findings have been included in this report to provide further insight alongside the feedback from applicant interviewees. Unless otherwise stated, the Client Survey results are presented for respondents who said that since April 2021 they have applied for (or received a decision on an application for) Child Disability Payment only. Findings draw on data collected in November-December 2021 and January-February 2022, so do not represent a full years' worth of experiences.⁶

Research with Social Security Scotland staff

Research was also conducted with a range of Social Security Scotland staff during the Pilot period. This strand of research aimed to understand staff members' experiences of working on the new benefit. A total of 19 interviews were carried out. These took place remotely over video call. Staff interviewees included:

- client-facing and decision-making staff who are responsible for delivering Social Security Scotland's live services to clients and applicants. This also included staff working in Social Security Scotland's recently launched Local Delivery service.⁷

⁶ The full 2021/22 findings covering content across the whole survey will be published in the Client Survey report later in 2022. Further information on the Client Survey and previous findings is available at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/about/social-research>.

⁷ Since late November 2021, Social Security Scotland have had specially trained advisers based within every local authority in Scotland. This service launched in the Child Disability Payment Pilot areas in July 2021 at the same time as Child Disability Payment. These advisers can help people to apply for benefits and answer queries. People can phone Social Security Scotland to book an appointment to meet with an adviser. The appointment could be at a venue within their local community, at their home, by video call or telephone. This is called Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service. Further information is available at: <https://www.mygov.scot/if-you-need-help-from-social-security-scotland/local-delivery>

- staff who support decision-making on Child Disability Payment applications within Social Security Scotland (such as health and social care practitioners).
- staff from the Client Experience team who work on cases where clients challenge a decision, and on complaints, compliments and suggestions from clients.

Interviews were slightly tailored according to the job role of the interviewee. Key themes explored with staff in relation to Child Disability Payment were generally whether they had the right training, tools and support to help them carry out their tasks to identify where improvements could be made.

Additionally, six remote observations were carried out to gain a deeper understanding of how staff process Child Disability Payment applications. These took place over video call using the screen-sharing function. These sessions involved researchers observing staff working through various processes related to processing an application. Researchers also asked questions to clarify their observations and gather wider feedback. All the information gathered from the interviews and observations was analysed together.

A summary of the key findings from the research with staff is presented in Chapter 8.

Research with partner organisations

Lastly, researchers aimed to gather feedback from partner organisations about their experiences of working with people applying for Child Disability Payment or Social Security Scotland in relation to the new benefit. Partner organisations were invited to take part in a survey about their experience, an interview with a researcher, or both if they wanted to.

Despite a range of promotion activity and an extension to the originally planned fieldwork period, overall participation in the partner organisation strand of the

research was low. A total of five survey responses were received; four from people responding as individuals and one from a partner organisation as a whole. Four interviews were completed. Two of the interviewees also responded to the survey. Most participants were from third sector organisations or advice providers. One survey respondent was from a Health and Social Care Partnership.

The low number of participants in the partner organisation strand limits our ability to identify key themes or draw strong conclusions from this strand of the research. Therefore, only headline points of feedback raised by partners are included in this report. These are outlined in Chapter 9.

3.4. Analysis and understanding findings

It is important to note that the findings in this report represent the views of those who took part only. For example, findings from the research with applicants and the Client Survey should not be seen as representative of all Child Disability Payment applicants now or in future.

Quotations are used to illustrate the findings discussed in the report. Edits to improve the readability of quotations were made as appropriate. We have avoided acronyms throughout this report to make it easy to read. This includes replacing acronyms with the full words in quotations where possible.

Results for each Client Survey question shown in the report exclude any respondents who were either filtered out of the question or who left the response blank. Results presented in tables use percentages to show proportions choosing different answer options. Results are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results included in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Where a result was less than 0.5%, this is shown as 0%. Where no respondents selected a particular answer, this is shown as '-' in tables.

4. Applicants' experiences of learning about Child Disability Payment

This chapter summarises feedback from applicant interviewees about how they first heard about Child Disability Payment and steps taken to find out more about it.

4.1. How did applicants first hear about Child Disability Payment?

Many applicant interviewees were first made aware of Child Disability Payment by medical professionals they have contact with as part of their child's care. Other sources mentioned included: friends and family, support organisations and advice services, social media, the mygov.scot website, and on-going communication with Social Security Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions.

In some cases, applicant interviewees were advised to apply for Disability Living Allowance for children. They only discovered that Child Disability Payment had replaced this in Scotland when they tried to apply or find out more about the process. Some others who knew about the two benefits said they believed or were advised the Social Security Scotland benefit would have an easier application process. Relatedly, one applicant interviewee said a support organisation had advised them not to apply for Disability Living Allowance for children and wait until Child Disability Payment was available in their area.

4.2. What further steps did applicants take to learn about Child Disability Payment?

After hearing about Child Disability Payment, some applicant interviewees said they looked online to find out more information. They looked for details on the eligibility criteria, the application process and the information they would need to provide. Several said the information provided was useful and helped them understand how to apply.

“I went on and it told me everything I would need before I started the application process, everything they would ask for, so I could get it all ready before I started. It said how long it would take to fill in.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some also mentioned getting information on Child Disability Payment from support organisations. However, one applicant interviewee said most of the information they found on support organisations’ websites was confusing and often focused on Disability Living Allowance for children.

“I couldn’t really find a straight answer. Once I looked into it and started researching more I ended up being more confused. So I just decided to wait til I had the forms and set aside the morning. I thought this might take a while so thought I’ll just sit down and do the form online. Obviously not having any idea what it was going to be like because it was a brand new form. Everything I researched was based on the Department for Work and Pensions one so I just had an open mind and thought “there’s the information that they’re asking for and try to put down as much as I can.”” **Applicant interviewee**

A couple of applicant interviewees phoned Social Security Scotland to get more information. Staff were described as being “helpful” and “informative”. Wider feedback on interactions applicant interviewees had with Social Security Scotland staff is outlined in Chapter 7.

4.3. Did applicants think their child would be eligible for support after learning about Child Disability Payment?

Around half of the applicant interviewees said they thought their child would be eligible for Child Disability Payment before applying, mainly based on their needs. Some said medical staff or support organisations had told them they would be eligible. Some were not sure which level of award they would receive. One felt that

the scoring criteria and how this translates into an award level could be more clearly set out in the application form.

“When we thought about the things we need to do every week compared to other parents we felt fairly sure we’d be eligible.” **Applicant interviewee**

Other applicant interviewees said that they were not sure if they would be eligible for support, at least initially. Some mentioned uncertainty, including amongst medical professionals, about whether their child’s age would affect eligibility. Others were unsure if Child Disability Payment was means-tested and how their income, other benefits or wider financial situation might impact their eligibility. One applicant interviewee said they delayed applying for other benefits for themselves whilst waiting on the Child Disability Payment decision because they were worried about being accused of trying to commit fraud.

“The [medical specialist] had said she should apply for it, but then the nurses said “Oh she might not get it because of her age” because she’s fifteen. It was kind of mixed even with the hospital... But I thought if an eight year old is entitled, why would a fifteen year old not be?” **Applicant interviewee**

“No I didn’t think I’d get it as thought it would be means-tested. Because I work and my partner works we didn’t think we’d get it.” **Applicant interviewee**

5. Applicants' experiences of applying for Child Disability Payment

This chapter outlines feedback from applicant interviewees about their experience of applying for Child Disability Payment.

5.1. How did applicants find completing the Child Disability Payment application form overall?

For general context, Table 5.1 shows the majority of Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment (84%) said that their overall experience of filling in and submitting their application and any supporting information was very good or good. The majority of respondents (85%) also strongly agreed or agreed that 'the application process was clear' (Table 5.2).

Table 5.1: How respondents rated their overall experience of filling in and submitting the application and any supporting information
Column percentages (n=201)

Response options	
Very good	49%
Good	34%
Neither poor nor good	12%
Poor	4%
Very poor	-

Table 5.2: Whether respondents agreed or disagreed that ‘the application process was clear’

Column percentages (n=203)

Response options	
Strongly agree / agree	85%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%
Disagree / strongly disagree	6%
Can't remember / Don't know	0%

Similarly, most applicant interviewees said completing the application form was straightforward. Several expected it to be more difficult than it had been. However, a few wondered if others, such as people with dyslexia or less familiar with English, could struggle to complete it without support.

“I thought it was really quite easy and I expected it to be harder.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I’m fine with that but if it’s the first time applying, if you’ve never applied before, it might be quite daunting [for someone] that doesn’t have a welfare rights background. It didn’t phase me as I’ve obviously done it before but it could put people off. But I know you’ve got that service to help people fill it in.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some parents or carers were not used to considering or recognising how their child’s daily life compares to other children of a similar age. This made completing the application form an emotional process or difficult to do. Suggestions to help with this

included more prompts or examples in the form, having guidance to refer to, or getting support when completing the form.

“I think you do need a little bit of guidance, if I had to do it on my own I would’ve felt it was quite hard. There are things you don’t think to include on the form. The things [my child] does are my normal so I don’t necessarily think things are difficult compared to others. So if you had somebody to help you that would be good.” **Applicant interviewee**

5.2. How did applicants complete the application form?

Online respondents to the Client Survey in January-February 2022 who had applied for Child Disability Payment were asked about their approach to completing the application.⁸ Table 5.3 shows most (75%) completed it by themselves with around a quarter (23%) saying they got help or support.

⁸ These questions were specifically about Child Disability Payment so those who also applied for other benefits are included in the results. The questions were only asked in the online version of the Client Survey where more complex filtering and additional questions could be included more easily. The vast majority of respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment completed the survey online in this round of data collection.

Table 5.3: Whether respondents got any help or support to complete the Child Disability Payment application

Column percentages; online respondents only (n=253)

Response options	
Yes	23%
No	75%
Prefer not to say	0%
Don't know / Can't remember	1%

The most common sources of support mentioned were Social Security Scotland (47%), friends and family (22%), and Citizens Advice Bureau (17%).⁹ Smaller proportions mentioned other organisations such as health services, welfare rights and advocacy services. Support received included help to understand eligibility, complete the form and ensure the right amount and sort of information was provided.

Nearly all applicant interviewees involved in the Child Disability Payment research said they applied by themselves or with help from other household members only.

As well as doing it themselves, most applicant interviewees applied for Child Disability Payment online. This follows the general trend seen in early Child Disability Payment applications with 84% of all part one Child Disability Payment applications submitted during the Pilot period being completed online.¹⁰ Reasons provided by

⁹ The full results are provided in Annex Table A1.

¹⁰ Social Security Scotland statistics on applications and methods used can be found at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/reporting/publications/child-disability-payment-pilot-high-level-statistics-to-21-november-2021>

applicant interviewees for applying online included general preference, convenience and it being a familiar way to complete forms. Some specifically said that applying online was better than having to deal with paper forms and the postal system. Applicant interviewees appreciated being able to save their online application form and come back to complete it in stages. One said they experienced technical issues where the form crashed and lost the information previously entered.

Some applicant interviewees with experience of completing similar forms for Department for Work and Pensions benefits felt that the Child Disability Payment form was easier to understand and complete. Child Disability Payment was the first disability benefit in the UK where applicants could apply online, as well as by phone, post or face-to-face. Being able to complete it online was seen as a positive change.

“It’s just easier to do it online. I think once it’s online you know it’s been sent. Doing it with a paper and pen you’re at the mercy of the Royal Mail getting it delivered. Having kids, the paper can just get ripped or lost or drawn on. I do as much online as I can. I think it’s just a lot simpler process and you’ll normally get a confirmation email that they’ve received it so you know that it’s gone in where it’s supposed to be.” **Applicant interviewee**

“So when I did do it it was like a breath of fresh air cause I could do it online, there was so much space that I could fill in lots and lots of information. Now on the forms I’d had previously it was very limited to what you could put in. So for me, it was like a breath of fresh air because I can put down all the information that I need to and I’m not worrying about running out of space or missing out information. I can put it all on the online form.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I work full time but it’s easier for me to obviously pick it up and save it and do it over a couple of nights or a week. That was handy to do it online.” **Applicant interviewee**

Two applicant interviewees who completed a paper version of part two¹¹ of the application form said it took a long time and needed a lot of information. One found it “tricky to fill in”, partly due to not having enough space to write their answers.

“[Completing the paper form] was a lot of effort and quite a lot of information was required.” **Applicant interviewee**

One applicant interviewee relied heavily on a support organisation to complete the form. They said the support worker was “thorough so made it easy to go through”. However, they felt their experience would have been better if they were also able to look at the questions as the support worker read them out over the phone.

Another applicant interviewee got remote support from Social Security Scotland’s Local Delivery¹² service to apply. This helped them overcome accessibility issues which made the form difficult to complete. However, they also said they were confused by the process and range of materials they received as part of it.

“I got somebody over the phone to help me fill it out, they did it online. I also got a paper form sent to the door. I then got something in through the door with everything I had said on the phone. I thought this was for me to fill in online. There was a lot of confusion.” **Applicant interviewee**

Awareness of the Local Delivery service was low amongst other applicant interviewees. Some felt this would have been useful to know about. However, others

¹¹ The Child Disability Payment application has two main parts. Where part one is completed over the phone with Social Security Scotland, part two is generally completed on a paper form sent by post.

¹² Further information on the Local Delivery service is outlined in Section 3.3 of this report.

did note that they had been asked if they needed any help with their application in interactions with Social Security Scotland.

“Never heard of that. Never even been offered that. Yes I would use the service if I was offered it...even on the web chat which I have used on numerous occasions they didn’t say that I could get face-to-face [help] or that you could speak to someone. There was no booking appointments or anything. I didn’t get offered any of that.” **Applicant interviewee**

5.3. How long did applicants take to complete the application form?

Around half of the applicant interviewees said they completed the whole application in one go. The estimated time taken generally ranged from 10 or 15 minutes up to an hour, though some took more time. These applicant interviewees typically said the time taken was fine and in line with their expectations or quicker. Others completed the application over multiple sittings, either due to personal preference or their circumstances. This approach was seen as useful as it enabled them to consider their answers and go back to provide more information in the form.

“I was expecting a battle to fill everything in but I was surprised. Although it was three and a half hours, I was still surprised at how quick it was and I knew that the documents were uploaded, the application was complete, it had my reference number and I didn’t have to do anything else.” **Applicant interviewee**

Over half of the Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment (61%) agreed that ‘filling in and submitting the application did not take too long’ (Table 5.4). However, a quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 5.4: Whether respondents agreed or disagreed that ‘filling in and submitting the application did not take too long’
Column percentages (n=203)

Response options	
Strongly agree / agree	61%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%
Disagree / strongly disagree	25%
Can't remember / Don't know	0%

5.4. What did applicants think about the content of the application form?

The majority of Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment strongly agreed or agreed the application form only asked relevant questions (78%) (Table 5.5). However, around one in ten disagreed (11%).

Table 5.5: Whether respondents agreed or disagreed that ‘the application asked only relevant questions’
Column percentages (n=203)

Response options	
Strongly agree / agree	78%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%
Disagree / strongly disagree	11%
Can’t remember / Don’t know	0%

Applicant interviewees were also asked about the content of the application form. Several said that the questions in the form were appropriate and enabled them to describe their child’s condition and circumstances. One liked that the language used was “inclusive and respectful”.

“It was very easy to fill in the form and submit it. When I was reading about it, if it was a 16 year old filling it in for themselves it would even be easy for them because it’s not got any trick questions.” **Applicant interviewee**

However, others were less positive about the application form. Issues highlighted included: questions being too focused on physical disabilities or not feeling relevant; and being unsure if the right information was being provided in the right place. Some applicant interviewees needed advice from family or support organisations to help them understand the correct information to provide.

“But I felt it was more physical disabilities, rather than mental disabilities, which most of the application form is about which was confusing... I felt at the time that this was the wrong idea that we might be entitled to this, because there are no physical disabilities.” **Applicant interviewee**

Views varied on whether or not the form was repetitive. One felt the repetition was useful as it allowed them to fully explain their child’s challenges and circumstances to present a strong case to Social Security Scotland. Another applicant interviewee said the repetition was okay for them but may be “daunting” for others.

“I did feel like I was repeating myself a lot but then I don’t think that’s a bad thing because it gives the person making the decision a rounded understanding of the child.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I thought the form was quite easy. With my oldest son I am quite used to filling in forms. So you usually find with forms that you usually get asked the same questions with different words but that wasn’t the case with this.” **Applicant interviewee**

Part two of the application form covers various aspects of the child’s health condition(s), care needs and daily life. As well as a series of tick-box questions, it contains text boxes where applicants can write in more information, clarification or context to help decision-makers at Social Security Scotland understand the child’s circumstances. Having the opportunity to do this was seen as important. Some applicant interviewees said the information written in these spaces would likely have strengthened their claim.

“Although some of the questions were quite vague and I think disabilities are different, I think a lot of the questions wouldn’t fit into a lot of disabilities...you needed those boxes to write about your experience.” **Applicant interviewee**

“The options were very general sometimes. Like they could mean anything sometimes! So I just gave more detail and I think that has actually been quite important for the application actually being successful because I showed the impact on our family.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I think that the guidelines need to be more explicit because I was worried I wasn’t putting in enough information. But I like that it’s open so people can make it a really personal experience rather than clinical. I think having more information for the person applying so they know that Social Security Scotland isn’t looking for x, y and z. They’re just looking for my experience rather than me having to justify why my daughter needs it.” **Applicant interviewee**

Of those asked, most applicant interviewees felt there was enough space for them to write what they needed to. One said there was not enough space so they had to leave key bits of information out. Another said they had to attach additional sheets to the paper form to continue their answers which made the form feel “disjointed”.

“I found it gave me ample opportunity to write what I wanted.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I think I just used a paper clip [to attach extra sheets to the paper form]. I was worried about the person who was processing this and I wrote some notes to say ‘look here’ but I didn’t think it was the best way to do it and it could be designed better...I needed more like between half a page to a page [to provide answers]. The second part [of the application form] was already quite chunky when it had arrived, so that’s why I think it’s been done like that. But I would want more space.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some applicant interviewees said they filled in all the text boxes. Others were more selective and said it depended on whether they felt the answer to the tick-box question was clear enough on its own. A few applicant interviewees said they had

been advised by others to provide as much information as possible to support their application.

“I felt like the tick-box was a blunt tool. So we did use the text boxes in every single case.” **Applicant interviewee**

“There were questions that were quite straightforward when I didn’t have to give additional information if the question wasn’t vague. Some questions were really just quite straightforward like ‘has the disability been this long?’ or ‘does the disability impact his life?’. But I found a lot of them to be quite vague, the answer was neither yes or no. You needed the additional information for the answer to make sense.” **Applicant interviewee**

“There were some bits where you didn’t know quite how much detail to go into. I only knew from speaking to my sister and other people who know how to fill [the form] in to just give as much detail as possible. So that maybe doesn’t come across.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some applicant interviewees were asked how they would feel if they had to fill in all the text boxes before the application could be submitted. Some felt that this would not be a problem as they filled them in anyway. One suggested this approach might prompt some people to share more information which may help their application. However, others said they would not have liked this requirement. One applicant interviewee said it would lead to lots of repetition.

“It would be good if [the text boxes] were mandatory because that might give people more [indication that] it might be a good idea to share more information and then if it’s not relevant you can write ‘not applicable’. If it was mandatory that might help people know that the information might be helpful.” **Applicant interviewee**

“It could be good and bad. A lot of the time when you get forms like that you would just put a dot in so would just end up wasting it. I don’t think I would like that if you had to put something in thinking about it now.” **Applicant interviewee**

5.5. How did applicants find providing supporting information?

Just under three-quarters of Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment (72%) said they submitted supporting information online (Table 5.6). A fifth (19%) said they sent it through the post. Some did not provide any (7%).

Table 5.6: How respondents provided supporting information¹³
Column percentages (n=207)

Response options	
I submitted it online	72%
I sent it through the post	19%
I did not submit supporting information	7%
I asked a Client Support Adviser to collect it on my behalf ¹⁴	3%
I provided it in person	1%
Other	2%
Can’t remember / Don’t know	4%

¹³ Please note, respondents could select more than one response option.

¹⁴ This reflects the Client Survey wording. However, people can ask Social Security Scotland more generally to collect their supporting information. Some people who did ask Social Security Scotland to do this may not have selected this response option if they feel it did not represent their experience.

Table 5.7 shows the majority of respondents thought it was clear what supporting information they should supply (88%) and how to include it (86%). Most respondents also found it easy to get the information they wanted to provide (82%).

Table 5.7: How much respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment agreed or disagreed with statements about providing supporting information

Row percentages (n=184-185)

	Strongly agree / agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree / strongly disagree
It was clear what information I should supply (n=185)	88%	7%	5%
It was easy to get the supporting information I wanted (n=185)	82%	10%	8%
It was clear how to include the supporting information (n=184)	86%	8%	5%

Some applicant interviewees said that providing supporting information was straightforward. Being able to provide this online alongside the application form was seen as useful as it meant it was completed in one go. However, other applicant interviewees said they had some technical issues to overcome when providing supporting information online. This included having to resize or reformat documents, or upload things in batches. One described this as “a pain” and left them unsure of which documents they had submitted.

“I submitted [the supporting information] online and it would have been better to just submit it all at once because I had to do it a couple at a time. I sometimes forgot what I had already uploaded.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some applicant interviewees said they struggled to find out how they could provide additional supporting information online following a request from Social Security Scotland for more documents. They also said they did not receive confirmation that their additional documents had been received. However, another applicant interviewee described how Social Security Scotland were “dead understanding” when they explained they did not have a requested document and agreed they could provide an alternative.

“So yeah I got a letter saying extra things were needed, but because the form had already been submitted you couldn’t access it to add further information using the same process. So I had to call the helpline and they directed me to a generic government site where it said ‘upload your documents’. I think it would be better if you could upload things later to the same application.” **Applicant interviewee**

Some applicant interviewees described challenges in getting other organisations, such as schools, social workers and GPs, to provide supporting information. This had an impact on their application. This tended to be where applicants did not already hold relevant documents themselves and their child did not have a diagnosis yet. Some described feeling confused about the process and input required from others, and like they had limited options to progress matters.

“It is confusing saying, you don’t need a diagnosis, then you need medical evidence.” **Applicant interviewee**

“Give a bit more information about how you go about getting support for it. Because my recollection was you just went on and filled it in yourself. I wasn’t aware at the time that you needed the doctor, school or social work or someone else to complete it.” **Applicant interviewee**

As part of their application, most applicant interviewees had given Social Security Scotland details of relevant contacts at other organisations to enable them to gather any further information needed. One said they did not do this as they felt they could source information more quickly themselves. Applicant interviewees often did not know if Social Security Scotland had reached out to anyone or did not think they had. Some described issues with Social Security Scotland contacting organisations to collect supporting information on their behalf. For example, one spoke about Social Security Scotland failing to gather enough or the right information from an NHS service. As a result their application was denied.

“I left it to [Social Security Scotland] originally. I had a call from [Social Security Scotland] to say, according to the person that’s looking after my application, they are limited to only asking [NHS service] five questions, which I think is absolutely ridiculous, and the information they got from [NHS service] meant they couldn’t go ahead with my application. But once they’ve asked these five questions [Social Security Scotland] can’t go back to [NHS service] with more questions. So I said “Can I speak to [NHS service] to try to get more information and get it to you?”. They said “Well if you want”. So I contacted [NHS service] and they had never heard of a five question rule. And I don’t know the exact questions that went to [NHS service], but the questions they asked weren’t relevant to [my child’s] case which is why the information that [Social Security Scotland] got back meant they couldn’t go ahead with the application because it was seemingly all the wrong questions.

... [NHS service] have said it’s impossible for them to write information out to [Social Security Scotland] for every person that they are dealing with. As they are saying, they are not [my child’s] personal assistant. So I’m stuck in the middle where [Social Security Scotland] are saying they need more information but we’re not allowed to ask for it. And [NHS service] are saying “Look, we can give you more information but don’t have the time to give it.”” **Applicant interviewee**

5.6. What happened once applicants had submitted their application?

Once submitted, most applicant interviewees said they got confirmation their application had been received. Several said they received a call from Social Security Scotland after submitting their application to clarify aspects of it. Some said they appreciated Social Security Scotland reaching out to confirm they had understood issues correctly and had all the information needed.

Although some said the calls were unexpected, most felt this was a suitable way to gather this sort of information. This was most commonly because it was a quick way to get the information needed. One applicant interviewee suggested that knowing clarification calls can take place if needed could make people feel more relaxed when completing the form. Further feedback on applicant interviewees' interactions with Social Security Scotland staff is outlined in Chapter 7.

"It was good somebody was able to phone you up. The guy was clarifying the information as maybe I didn't put enough information so that was good as well."
Applicant interviewee

"It was the fact it was quick. I mean they could email me and ask me to respond, I don't know if that would be possible. But I feel having that personal approach and they're getting the answer they need because I suppose if you go back and forth on emails or letters or whatever you might not get the specifics that they're looking for. So they're able to elaborate. So it speeds up the process of your claim."
Applicant interviewee

"I wasn't sure if I was giving enough or the right information in the application. I think it would be better to just reassure people that "it's fine, don't worry, we'll iron it out at the end if we need more information."
Applicant interviewee

Most said the decision letter was the next thing they heard about their case after submitting their application and carrying out any clarification calls or identity checks. Whilst some accepted there was nothing else they could do but wait on the decision, others said they felt nervous whilst waiting. Several applicant interviewees would have liked to have known more about the progress of the application. It was suggested that being able to monitor progress online would be helpful. Some proactively sought progress updates from Social Security Scotland after waiting several months without receiving a decision.

“I was quite nervous. Not for me but for the wee one. She deserves all the support that we can get for her. It makes you feel like a failure as a parent when people turn you down or when she can’t access services and after school clubs and things. It makes you feel like a failure. So I was quite nervous.” **Applicant interviewee**

“Yes, so I got a text and email to say that they would be in touch for any extra information. It would be great if it did say it would give me a link to go back into the form, so that would be really helpful. It would be good to go back and look at it just to check over everything and see what’s happening with it.” **Applicant interviewee**

For context, just over half of the Client Survey respondents (55%) who had applied for Child Disability Payment said they got enough updates on the progress of their application (Table 5.8). A little over a quarter (28%) said they disagreed with this point.

Table 5.8: How much respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment agreed or disagreed that they ‘got enough updates on the progress of their application’
Column percentages (n=196)

Response options	
Strongly agree / agree	55%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%
Disagree / strongly disagree	28%
Can't remember / Don't know	1%

6. Applicants' experiences of receiving a decision on their Child Disability Payment application

This chapter outlines applicant interviewees' experiences of receiving a decision on their Child Disability Payment application and any initial payments. It also explores awareness of the need to report any changes in circumstances and extra forms of support that may be available to Child Disability Payment recipients.

6.1. How did applicants feel about the decision received?

The majority of applicant interviewees said their application for Child Disability Payment resulted in them receiving an award. Four applicant interviewees received no award, and one was waiting to hear the decision at the time of interview.

Those who received an award generally agreed with the decision they received. Some also noted the review period seemed fair. Some specifically said they felt the level of award their child had received was correct, including where this was not the highest rate. One applicant interviewee noted they would have been happy even if they had received a lower award as they did not know what to expect.

"I think he met the criteria for middle rate care. He's not high rate care or high mobility, so that is where I think he should have been placed." **Applicant interviewee**

Receiving a Child Disability Payment award was described as "overwhelming" and a relief. However, one interviewee said they felt relieved because their application had taken a long time to resolve due to a technical issue. Another noted they were glad but also upset to receive the award as it confirmed their child has extra care needs.

“It was good but there was a wee sadness because of what it means for him. It means we can give him some things he needs.” **Applicant interviewee**

“One thing I want to point out is I actually cried when I read the part that said she would be assessed again when she’s 18 and not in a few years’ time. You previously had to go through it every five years as if a lifetime condition is not going to be diagnosed again. That was a huge relief. I think that will be a huge relief to a lot of people.” **Applicant interviewee**

While most applicant interviewees agreed with the award received, one was unhappy that their child’s payments would not begin for some time.

“The reason [for the delay in payments starting] is just because it’s generic they just wait 13 weeks. I understand and I get it but don’t feel like my child was treated as an individual, it felt more blanketed.” **Applicant interviewee**

The applicant interviewees whose application had resulted in no award had mixed views on the decision. Two disagreed with the reasons provided in relation to their child’s case, whilst another said there was no reason given. However, another applicant interviewee said they understood the decision was due to a lack of supporting information being supplied by third parties. This left them frustrated with other organisations rather than Social Security Scotland.

Only one of the applicant interviewees who had received no award was planning on challenging the decision at the time of the interview. They said the information on how to do this and timescales involved was clear. The others said challenging the decision would require too much effort or they did not know how and did not have plans to look into it.

“No [I did not challenge the decision]. We were just really disheartened and I wanted nothing to do with them after that. I just felt so sad.” **Applicant interviewee**

6.2. How did applicants feel about the content of the decision letter?

Most Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment said the decision received ‘was explained clearly’ (83%) and that they understood it (89%), as shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: What respondents thought about the decision received
Row percentages (n=150)

	Strongly agree / agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree / strongly disagree	Can't remember / Don't know
It was explained clearly	83%	7%	9%	1%
I understood the decision	89%	3%	7%	1%

Similarly, applicant interviewees commonly described the decision letter as straightforward, clear and informative. They generally understood the decision reached, the rate their child had been awarded, the review period and payment schedule. Many said that the amount of information provided was suitable. Some said that a lot of information was included but this was to be expected. Understanding how the decision had been reached was helpful. One applicant interviewee particularly appreciated the “empathetic” tone of the letter they received.

“[The decision letter was] very easy to read, very self-explanatory. Very easy to understand as well.” **Applicant interviewee**

“[The decision letter] was a lot easier to read and it’s not like a booklet. There was enough information in that letter to understand everything. Nothing missing. The letter wasn’t small but there wasn’t too much information, just enough to understand.” **Applicant interviewee**

However, some applicant interviewees who did not receive an award felt the letter did not provide enough or clear information about the reason behind the decision. One said the letter content suggested the information submitted had not been considered properly and was “incredibly patronising and cheeky”. However, another applicant interviewee whose application had been denied felt the letter content was clear and outlined how to appeal if required.

“It was quite upsetting. It was quite like the person who had took on his application hadn’t read a single thing I’d submitted or a single thing any of the specialists had submitted. It was about two paragraphs long and basically [said] my son’s not disabled enough... I felt like the letter basically just said “your son needs no more care than a normal child his age” and I felt that was a slap in the face because everything I submitted would say that’s not correct.” **Applicant interviewee**

“There was no reason about why I didn’t fit the criteria.” **Applicant interviewee**

Applicant interviewees who were more positive about the decision letter overall also noted scope for improvement. Issues highlighted included: factual inaccuracies and content seeming to be copied from other places. However, there was an appreciation that personalised content would take longer. Other suggested improvements included more information on how the award rate or review point had been decided, and about what the review process involves.

“I think the whole process is good but once the award runs out I'm not entirely sure if it's online or what. I know it'll need to be re-applied for so [it would be] helpful if you got a letter to know what's happening in the future.” **Applicant interviewee**

6.3. How did applicants feel about the time taken to receive a decision?

Around three-quarters of Client Survey respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment (74%) strongly agreed or agreed that their application was handled within a reasonable time frame. However, 15% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, as shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: How much respondents who had applied for Child Disability Payment agreed or disagreed that their 'application was handled within a reasonable time frame'
Column percentages (n=189)

Response options	
Strongly agree / agree	74%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%
Disagree / strongly disagree	15%
Can't remember / Don't know	1%

The time applicant interviewees waited for a decision varied. In some cases it took four to eight weeks. Some thought this was quite quick as they were told it would

take around eight weeks when applying. Applicant interviewees suggested that Child Disability Payment being a new benefit might have impacted on the processing time.

Others said they waited a few months. One said the decision took “way too long” and meant they could not buy some items that their child needed in the meantime. They compared this to their previous experience of receiving a decision for Disability Living Allowance for one of their other children in just a couple of weeks.

“I knew that was the length of time it would take so I was quite happy with that. It did say it might take longer because it was just a new thing. But it was understandable to me it would be that long.” **Applicant interviewee**

“We couldn’t go out in the weather [due to not being able to buy some items needed]. I was told it would be backdated once approved but that didn’t help me now.” **Applicant interviewee**

6.4. How have applicants found receiving Child Disability Payment payments?

Nearly all Client Survey respondents who received a Child Disability Payment¹⁵ award said they got their payment(s) when Social Security Scotland said they would (98%), as Table 6.3 shows. The vast majority also got the right amount first time (98%) and every time where relevant (99%). Almost all respondents (95%) said they would rate their overall experience of receiving benefit payments from Social Security Scotland as very good or good (Table 6.4).

¹⁵ These results include respondents who applied for Child Disability Payment even if they also applied for any other benefits. However, only those who received a payment for Child Disability Payment and no other benefits are included.

Table 6.3: Whether respondents received payments when expected
Column percentages (n=77-92)

Whether respondents received:	Yes	No
Their benefit payment(s) when Social Security Scotland said they would (n=92)	98%	2%
The right amount first time (n=94)	98%	2%
The right amount every time (n=77)	99%	1%

Table 6.4: How respondents would rate their experience of receiving payments from Social Security Scotland
Column percentages (n=97)

Response options	
Very good / Good	95%
Neither poor nor good	5%
Poor / Very Poor	-

A number of applicant interviewees reported receiving their first payment days before the decision letter arrived. Whilst one described this as a “nice surprise”, most said they would have preferred to have received the letter first. This would have meant they knew what the money was and the rate they had been awarded. The money arriving unexpectedly was distressing for some.

“So there’s the care and mobility [components]. I was trying to figure out what it was for. So I would have liked to have known with the letter first and understand why we were getting the payment.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I think [my daughter] just panicked because money had appeared in her account and she didn’t know where this money had come from because the reference on it wasn’t really quite clear. It was just lots of numbers and letters. But I said, “That’s not how people scam you”. I think if we’d got the letter first, that was probably the only thing. If we’d got the letter first it wouldn’t have been such a shock for her.” **Applicant interviewee**

Where relevant, most applicant interviewees said that recurring payments had been arriving as expected with no issues. One noted that they are receiving payments on a different day to that specified in their decision letter. They said that this was okay for them, but others “might get stressed or get anxious”.

6.5. Were applicants aware of the need to keep Social Security Scotland informed of changes in their circumstances?

Applicant interviewees who had been awarded Child Disability Payment were generally aware of the need to report changes in their circumstances to Social Security Scotland. This was most commonly because it had been outlined in the decision letter. Some were aware due to previous experience or said it was common sense. One applicant interviewee was unsure about what would “constitute a substantive change” to report. They said that they probably would not get in touch about “small things”.

One applicant interviewee had experience of communicating a change to Social Security Scotland at the time of interview. They did this online and said that they would be “comfortable doing [it] again”. Others said they expected or wanted to be

able to notify Social Security Scotland about changes in their circumstances online when required.

6.6. Were applicants able to access other forms of support as a result of receiving a Child Disability Payment award?

Children and young people who get Child Disability Payment can also get extra support. This can include a range of benefits and services to help with the cost of care, housing, transport and travel depending on their Child Disability Payment award. These can be for the child or young person, or their parent, guardian or carer. Relevant applicant interviewees were generally aware that they and their child may be able to access additional support. Some said they had been told this by Social Security Scotland staff. Others knew about this from their previous experience of the benefit system or from friends of family.

Some applicant interviewees said they were already receiving or trying to access extra support, such as Carer's Allowance, as a result of receiving a Child Disability Payment award. Others said they did not feel the need to apply for additional forms of support (such as Blue Badges) or thought they would not be eligible for means-tested benefits.

7. Applicants' experiences of interacting with Social Security Scotland staff across their journey

Most applicant interviewees had contact with Social Security Scotland staff at some point in the process of applying for Child Disability Payment. Reasons for contact with staff included:

- initially finding out information about the benefit
- getting help to apply
- completing identity checks
- telephone calls from Social Security Scotland to clarify aspects of their application or seek further supporting information.

This chapter summarises feedback from applicant interviewees about their interactions with Social Security Scotland staff.

7.1. How did applicants reflect on their interactions with Social Security Scotland staff?

Applicant interviewees were mostly complimentary about Social Security Scotland staff. Staff were often described as knowledgeable about Child Disability Payment and helpful. Interviewees explained how staff were able to provide them with advice on navigating the application process, as well as wider benefits and support available. Some commented that staff made them feel relaxed, listened to and comfortable during interactions.

“The person that first spoke to me to go through some questions, she asked me for more information about my daughter and it was obvious that she knew what she was looking for. Staff were knowledgeable and really helpful. I hope others had an experience like me. There’s obviously teething issues and that’s to be expected, but I’m hoping others had a good experience too.” **Applicant interviewee**

“They just went through the information that I had filled out and asked if there was anything I wanted to add in. I thought the phone call was a really amazing addition to the process. I’m comparing it to applying for other benefits. When I have applied for disability benefits in the past the whole time I felt like I wasn’t being believed and I was having to push to be believed. And the phone call felt like he wanted us to get the support and he was supporting us to provide any other information that might be helpful. And it felt like he was listening rather than I was trying to prove anything.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I can’t tell you what it means to have someone call to ask if you need support. Everyone I spoke to was so nice. I would recommend people to apply for it.” **Applicant interviewee**

Applicant interviewees spoke about how Social Security Scotland staff treated them when they experienced issues during the application process. One noted how staff were “courteous”, “polite” and “apologetic” when a paper application form did not arrive. Another applicant interviewee found regular updates when their application was affected by a technical issue useful. However, they said Social Security Scotland should have contacted them proactively when they first identified the issue rather than initially finding out when seeking a progress update.

Some applicant interviewees described getting in touch with Social Security Scotland as they were unhappy about part of the application process or the decision received. Although the outcome did not change, feedback provided about Social Security Scotland staff was positive in these instances too.

“Everybody I’ve spoken to has been dead helpful, understanding and empathetic. I’m not just saying that. Brilliant.” **Applicant interviewee**

“I had no problems with the staff whatsoever. It’s not the staff that’s the issue, it’s the process. The staff were brand new, they were brilliant. It was like they wanted to tell me things but they were holding back.” **Applicant interviewee**

However, some applicant interviewees provided less positive feedback about interactions with staff. This mainly related to receiving incorrect or inconsistent information. For example, some applicant interviewees were told a decision on their application would be made or received imminently when seeking a progress update, which then did not happen.

“Most of my experience was good, some of it could have been better. I know it was in the early stages and there was some teething. Some of the staff need to think of their job and not rush through things. Some parents are anxious and worry about this type of process. Some of [the staff] are too quick to tell you something untrue to get you off the phone.” **Applicant interviewee**

8. Key themes from research with Social Security Scotland staff

This chapter provides an overview of the key themes emerging from the research carried out with Social Security Scotland staff during the Pilot period. Whilst touching on their experience of working on Child Disability Payment more generally, research with staff had a strong focus on identifying areas with scope for improvement. As such, staff participants often gave feedback on specific elements of their job and where things could be better. This means the key themes emerging are also centred around areas for potential improvement. Steps have already been taken to address some of the themes highlighted in staff feedback. More information on steps taken on the basis of feedback gathered from applicants, Social Security Scotland staff and partner organisations is outlined in Chapter 10.

8.1. How did staff find working on Child Disability Payment following its launch?

Some staff participants said they had not had much or any experience of certain parts of their job at the point of interview. This is likely to be related to the timing of the research with staff. That said, several participants said their knowledge, confidence and efficiency in completing tasks was growing as they got more practice at parts of their jobs.

In some cases, the volume of tasks and extent of experience may have been related to the number of applications received or stage in cases that particular staff get involved. Several health and social care practitioners noted they had been involved in a low number of cases at the time of the research. They believed this may have been partially due to decision-making staff not being confident about reaching out to them for advice. One noted that this could mean that there are cases where practitioners could offer helpful advice which influences the outcome of an application, but they are not approached. With this in mind, another described how

work was underway to ensure decision-makers were confident enough to reach out for support.

“I would have thought we’d have been getting quite a few [requests for advice], even just in the geographical areas that they’re doing. I think with the case managers, a lot of them are scared to ask a stupid question, but there’s no question which is ever stupid when it comes to that. We’re only in a fortunate position because we’re medically trained. If I was to go and do the case manager’s job I’d be asking questions left, right and centre, because I wouldn’t be able to do it. I think sometimes people are maybe a wee bit apprehensive about sending a question in case it is stupid, but we’re very nice!” **Staff participant**

Some staff working in areas outside of decision-making wanted to understand more about the journey of Child Disability Payment applications within Social Security Scotland and the outcome of cases. They felt this would help them learn whether their input was useful and improve their offer to applicants and colleagues.

“Before I start my work on Child Disability Payment, I would like to know the end-to-end process. We know what Child Disability Payment is but we do not have much about what it looks like in practice. More of that would be good to know what we are doing. It was not covered during the training. We got basics about what Child Disability Payment is, about tools, but nothing about the end-to-end process.” **Staff participant**

“I think when it’s quite a difficult case you’d want to know what the outcome was, because you want to know that the advice you’re giving is being interpreted correctly. So if you’ve written your paragraph, you’d like to see how that then correlates with the decision being made so you know it’s been interpreted correctly.” **Staff participant**

8.2. How did staff find their training ahead of working on Child Disability Payment?

Staff participants gave mixed feedback on the training received. Many commented that the training was useful for enabling them to carry out their jobs. However, others felt that some parts of the training were not complete or specific enough for their role. This meant they had to learn more 'on-the-job' with the support of managers and peers.

Some staff participants noted that training being delivered as or before guidance was finalised had a negative impact. This also meant that staff noticed differences later between what they had been told in training and the guidance they were using. Others wanted more time to practice with systems as part of training to build their confidence and experience ahead of working on live cases.

"Yeah absolutely [the training supported me to carry out my role], I couldn't have done it without the training we got." **Staff participant**

"I learnt more from the consolidation week in the end and have learned more on-the-job. I think discussions after [the formal training] have prepared me much more." **Staff participant**

"The general feeling with my colleagues is that this benefit had been delayed a year, so all the guidance should have been in place well before training started but that didn't happen. That had a huge knock on effect not only on the training but for us starting to process the benefit as well. That's really the major complaint we had about the training. A lot of it was still up in the air because things hadn't been decided. It had to be decided before the training". **Staff participant**

“I don’t feel like I got that much more [from the training] than just reading [all the information]. I think we needed more time on the systems in a test environment. I have never used [the case management system] and if I don’t go into the systems to see how they function then it doesn’t stick. It would be good if we had some proper cases where we could try it out.” **Staff participant**

Some participants felt that the training they completed was long, did not meet their learning style or keep them engaged. However, a few noted that the approach and length of the training has since been updated.

“Quite a lot was “here’s a link, go read it”. I can’t really learn like that. I would have much preferred classroom training but obviously we couldn’t with everything going on. To an extent we maybe could have as we are in the office a matter of weeks after this. It was all over the place.” **Staff participant**

Many participants spoke about going through training with colleagues who perform other roles and learning about their jobs too. Views on whether this was useful were mixed. Some felt having an overview of what others did was helpful for knowing how best to fulfil their own role. They also appreciated being able to build relationships with colleagues in other teams. However, others felt they learned more than they needed to about other roles which was not valuable.

“Yeah what it was really good for was it built relationships with people. There were [health and social care] practitioners in there and the people who dealt with the guidance. So there were people I would maybe never meet in person day to day plus you feel people are more approachable. [It was] good to see other people’s points of view and way of learning.” **Staff participant**

“[We] spent a few weeks with the case managers. It was good to know what they were doing but a lot of the time the training wasn’t relevant to us so felt a bit of wasted time. It could have been condensed...” **Staff participant**

8.3. What did staff think about guidance and systems they use?

Many staff participants mentioned the importance of using guidance to support them in their role. Some said that they were referring to guidance all the time as they continued to build their confidence and experience on working on Child Disability Payment applications or new aspects of Social Security Scotland’s service. Some said they used guidance more selectively. One mentioned that based on their experience of working on other benefits they would expect to be less reliant on guidance over time.

“Although I know the process, I’m not confident to go through it without the guidance. I’ll be using that for every application for another few months until I get more familiar with it or need to look at it when I have problems. It was very similar on low income benefits, you gradually reduce the amount you need it.”
Staff participant

Staff participants said the guidance is difficult to navigate and find what they are looking for. Some said that once they got to the right part of the guidance then the information was helpful. However, several staff participants also thought the content of the guidance could be improved in places. Issues included guidance being either being too detailed or not detailed enough, and parts being incomplete.

“There’s a lot of issues with it. I think to be quite honest what we’ve reported back is it’s more of a hindrance than a help. I’m searching and searching, taking up to an hour and a half looking for guidance. Quite a lot is missing so it’s a needle in a haystack.” **Staff participant**

“We’ve always had problems with guidance. I’ve been here since [2020] and I know it’s been complained about since well before I joined. The guidance a lot of the time just isn’t fit for purpose. It goes into too much detail on some stuff, not enough detail on other stuff. It doesn’t follow the process flow that we use. And I know it’s been complained about for about two and a half years. We keep pushing it up and they say “we’ll change this” but nothing’s happened with it. But that said, I know senior management are looking at it to see if it can be improved, but I haven’t heard any feedback on that recently.” **Staff participant**

Staff participants spoke about their experience of providing feedback on the guidance where they found issues. Some were happy that feedback was being taken on board and updates were being made. Others suggested that updates could be made more quickly and communicated more clearly. Some said to overcome the challenges with guidance they had put together their own instructions or tips.

“I’m happy the feedback is being taken seriously and things are being done”
Staff participant

“It is not easy to see whether something has been updated. So say you have ten pages that you use regularly, there is nothing on the page to tell you when it has changed. So if it is only a subsection that has changed then you don’t get told. What happens is someone will catch an update and tell us.” **Staff participant**

“The guidance jumps from here to there. So to make sure you know the steps I have to make my own notes. Using guidance you forget where you are. It’s easy to read but hard to put all the pages together to work out what you have to do.”
Staff participant

In addition to specific bugs or issues they had come up against in their work on Child Disability Payment, staff participants made more general points about the systems they use on a daily basis. Some said they were still trying to get to grips with and build their confidence around the systems in place to help them carry out their job.

Sometimes this related to more general confidence and skills with using IT. Staff participants suggested that it would be useful if the number of systems or devices they use could be streamlined, reduced or more integrated. Some also noted that workarounds were in place in some areas where improvements could be made, and that as caseloads increased more streamlined processes would be helpful.

“So I think it was IT that I was quite scared of...thinking, you know, could I do it? But to be fair that was one of the things that we said for training that we would need more training on the IT systems. We did have someone come on the team that is an IT whizz so that’s been great. So yeah, for me that was the biggest challenge I would say was the IT.” **Staff participant**

“We’re having to use two systems. I think in an ideal world we’d just be using the one but I get that due to the sensitive nature of the documents that we’re working with that isn’t possible so that’s why we have to divide it between [two systems]. So I think there’s always scope to make things better, to make them feel more streamlined, but it’s fine, you’re able to work around it and you just have to get used to it.” **Staff participant**

“So the application capture tool won’t let you open part two [of the application form] if part one is not complete on it. So you need to copy over part one into the application capture tool, because the tools do not speak to each other and then you can access part two. So lots of toing and froing. The two devices don’t talk to each other and they stand alone, so it doesn’t talk to [the case management system]. Even when I submit it, it still doesn’t go to [the case management system].” **Staff participant**

8.4. Did staff feel supported by colleagues?

Staff participants outlined how they had been supported by colleagues to learn and carry out their role outside of official training. Helpful approaches mentioned included: having daily meetings with peers, sharing learning and tips as people completed tasks or came across issues for the first time, and using digital

communication tools (such as group chats on Microsoft Teams) to keep in touch and seek advice from colleagues. This support also helped staff overcome challenges.

“Quite often you’ll ask more experienced people and it’s just verbally... [we have] set up a Teams chat for consolidation. One for telephone and webchat, and one for processing. You can ask any question you want on that and hopefully get an answer. It’s great when people send you a link to guidance but sometimes there isn’t any. You couldn’t do this without others as the guidance isn’t good enough to do it on your own.” **Staff participant**

Staff participants also described being able to provide feedback to managers and peers on their experiences and where they thought things could be improved. Some also commented that managers were good at keeping them updated.

“So I think [manager] is quite good at keeping us up-to-date, just about what goes on and any changes that might be arising. Like things that they’re querying or things that they’re looking to change, such as how can we improve our relationship with [other colleagues]. So [they] are very open and transparent about that in a way that I really appreciate. And [they] are really open to feedback and suggestions from us as [staff] which is nice because it makes me feel like my skills and experience are being valued.” **Staff participant**

9. Key points from research with partner organisations

As outlined in Chapter 3, it is not possible to provide detailed findings on the views and experiences of partner organisations. Instead, this chapter provides a brief overview of key points raised. Please bear in mind that points were often made by only one or two people.

Positive feedback

All five respondents to the partner organisation survey said they know how to get information about Child Disability Payment. Four respondents had attended or accessed materials from the Child Disability Payment information sessions run by Social Security Scotland. All said they got the information they needed or expected.

Four survey respondents would expect to help people to apply. All said they would feel very confident or confident:

- getting the right information to help someone to apply
- supporting someone to complete either the paper or online application form
- raising a query with Social Security Scotland.

One partner interviewee had positive feedback on using the application form:

“Yeah, so I’ve found the forms that I have supported with really encouraging. I like the fact that you can stop and start at any time. Pre-Covid, with the Department for Work and Pensions form, we would never have done them online. We would have done them together, sitting together and help them to fill it out. With the new form online I find it’s much quicker, it’s much more efficient and effective. What we have done with some parents is I do all the typing. But with the parent on the phone and they are telling me what to write, so I am basically scripting for them. Also, I just find it a lot quicker and I find it neater.” **Partner organisation participant**

Areas for potential improvement

Some partners felt that the information available could be improved and more consistent. Two partner interviewees wanted to see more guidance. This included information to support applicants and guidance used by decision-makers within Social Security Scotland.¹⁶ One partner interviewee received inconsistent information about how they could support applicants through the application form. They also said lack of clarity about some processes amongst Social Security Scotland staff can make it difficult for them to explain things to their clients. This can make things “frustrating and stressful” for the people they are supporting.

“But then the biggest issue is around the guidance that staff actually use because advice workers don’t want to be told what applies to 80% of people. The way we can help our clients is to know exactly what to expect from the people on the other end of the phone and how their internal guidance tells them that they should be dealing with things to let us take some of the burden off Social Security Scotland.” **Partner organisation participant**

One partner interviewee said it would be useful to be able to access a test version of the online form before they had to support someone to complete it. Another partner interviewee said supporting someone through the paper form remotely (due to Covid-19 related restrictions and risk management) was a complex process which involved passing a paper version around a few times. They also said that the form was long, repetitive and could allow more space for answers. They felt the design and content had been impacted by the online form being prioritised as the application process was developed.

¹⁶ Guidance used by staff to process applications is now available on the Social Security Scotland website: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/guidance-resources/guidance/decision-making-guide>

One partner interviewee suggested that Social Security Scotland gathering supporting information for applicants should be the standard approach rather than an option. They said this would still leave applicants the choice of providing information if they wanted, but would allow Social Security Scotland to progress cases.

Another partner interviewee was supporting someone who had applied without support to challenge the decision received. They suggested that people who request an application form to complete themselves should be told about support available which can help them fully outline their circumstances.

10. Where are we now?

This report has outlined findings from research designed to identify early insights into what was working well with Child Disability Payment shortly after its launch and any areas for improvement. As a result of the feedback gathered and wider operational information, a number of changes to the application form and information available to applicants have been introduced. There have also been improvements to address points raised by Social Security Scotland staff. Key examples related to research findings highlighted in this report are summarised in the list below.

- The 'optional' wording shown alongside the free-text questions in the application form has been removed. It is recognised that the spaces provided are not equally relevant to every question for every applicant. However, removing this wording helps to convey that the general intent is that applicants should provide a personalised description of the child's needs for a particular area. This helps to ensure that case managers have an accurate understanding of the support provided.
- The content in the questions that ask for further description has been changed. It is now laid out more clearly (with better spacing and bullet points), and examples are highlighted more clearly. This supports applicants to understand what they can tell Social Security Scotland about.
- There have been updates to how supporting information is asked for in the application form. Some applicants have been left with the impression that it was unnecessary to provide supporting information, or more than one piece of information. New wording explains more clearly that it is helpful to provide supporting documents directly where possible, in order to speed up the process.
- Some applicants have not been sure which supporting information documents Social Security Scotland is asking them to include. These instructions on the

application form now more clearly explain the sorts of documents which commonly exist and are useful for applicants to provide.

- Some of the wording in the application form was felt to be clearer in relation to physical difficulties than for learning, mental or sensory difficulties. As a result, the wording on mygov.scot guidance and the application form has been updated to make this clearer for non-physical difficulties.
- Some applicants have expressed dissatisfaction with the processing time for their application, since it exceeded the estimated processing time. The content on mygov.scot has been updated to reflect more accurate timescales. It also explains that processing times may depend on third party organisations responding to requests for further information.
- Social Security Scotland staff have commented on difficulties navigating operational guidance, and getting guidance updated. The guidance platform has been updated to have better categorisation of content for easier navigation. The feedback loop for getting guidance updated when staff do raise potential issues of accuracy or clarity with existing information has also been improved.

Annex A: Additional Client Survey data tables

Table A1: Who Client Survey respondents asked for help or support from to complete the Child Disability Payment application¹⁷

Column percentages; online respondents only (n=53)

Response options	
Social Security Scotland	47%
Friend or family	22%
Citizens Advice Bureau	17%
Health services	10%
Advocacy services	9%
Money help (for example, Money Advice Service)	7%
Welfare rights (for example, your local council)	5%
Housing support	3%
Pregnancy and baby services	2%
Childcare services	2%
Other	3%

¹⁷ Please note, respondents could select more than one response option.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this report:

- ☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- ☐ are available via an alternative route
- ☒ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact ResearchRequests@socialsecurity.gov.scot for further information.
- ☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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