



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland Client Survey: 2018-2021

Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	5
2. Background and methodology	13
2.1 Survey purpose.....	13
2.2 Structure of this report and supporting materials available	14
2.3 Survey design and distribution.....	15
2.4 Data cleaning and analysis	19
2.5 Understanding and interpreting survey results.....	20
3. Overall experience	22
3.1 Overall rating of experience – all respondents	22
3.2 Overall rating of experience – by benefit experience	23
3.3 Overall rating of experience – by demographic characteristics	25
3.4 Comments about overall experience and general suggestions	28
4. Finding out about Social Security Scotland.....	36
4.1 Finding out about Social Security Scotland – by benefit experience.....	37
5. Getting information and advice	39
5.1 Whether and how respondents had sought information and advice	39
5.2 Experience of getting information and advice	41
5.3 Comments about getting information and advice	46
6. Experiences with staff	52
6.1 Whether respondents had been in contact with staff	52
6.2 Views on contact with staff.....	52
6.3 Information and advice provided by staff	56
6.4 Comments about experiences with staff	57
7. Applying for Social Security Scotland benefits	62
7.1 Applying for benefits and success rate	62
7.2 Application method	63
7.3 Date of most recent application	64

7.4 Views on application process.....	65
7.6 Comments about applying for Social Security Scotland benefits	68
8. Receiving payment	74
8.1 Receiving payments from Social Security Scotland	74
8.2 Overall experience of receiving benefit payments.....	74
8.3 Timing and accuracy of benefit payments.....	76
8.4 Impact of benefit payments.....	77
8.5 Comments about receiving benefit payments	80
9. Application decisions	86
9.1 Views on and agreement with decisions	86
9.2 Challenging decisions	87
9.3 Comments about application decisions.....	88
10. Barriers.....	92
10.1 Experience of barriers.....	92
10.2 Tackling barriers	93
10.3 Comments about barriers	94
11. Discrimination.....	99
11.1 Experience of discrimination	99
11.2 Nature of discrimination	100
11.3 Tackling discrimination.....	100
11.4 Comments about discrimination.....	102
12. Single benefit experience	106
12.1 Overall experience.....	106
12.2 Experience with staff	107
12.3 Applying for Social Security benefits	110
12.4 Receiving payment	110
12.5 Application decision.....	112
12.6 Barriers	113
13. Change over time.....	114
13.1 Change in overall experience over time	114

13.2	Change in experience with staff over time	116
13.3	Change over time in experience of the application process	117
13.4	Change over time in experience of receiving payments	117
13.5	Change over time in experience of barriers	118
14.	Next steps	120
	Annex A: Client Panels - characteristics of members.....	121

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the combined results from the first and second rounds of the Social Security Scotland Client Survey. The first round ran from 17 August to 25 September 2020, and the second from 10 May to 20 June 2021. It was open to everyone who had received a successful decision on an application for at least one of [Best Start Grant and/or Best Start Foods](#), [Funeral Support Payment](#), [Young Carer Grant](#), [Scottish Child Payment](#), or [Job Start Payment](#) from the beginning of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 to 31 March 2021. The survey invite was also sent to anyone who had received [Carer's Allowance Supplement](#) or [Child Winter Heating Assistance](#) (which do not require an application) during this time.

The Scottish Child Payment, Job Start Payment, and Child Winter Heating Assistance benefits were not launched until after the first round of the survey, and so were only included in the second round of fieldwork. Clients who took part in the first round of the survey but then went on to apply for Scottish Child Payment, Job Start Payment or receive Child Winter Heating Assistance were invited to take part in the second round. A maximum of 23 clients took part in the survey at both rounds (contributing a maximum of 46 responses). These responses were retained.

The survey asked about key aspects of respondents' experience with Social Security Scotland. The results are a key source for measuring how well Social Security Scotland is performing and where it can improve. In particular it gives data for the [Charter Measurement Framework](#).

3,253 people responded to the first round of the survey (around 2% of those who were sent invites) and 7,322 to the second round (around 8% of those who were sent invites). This means that this report is based on a total of 10,575 responses.

- 41% had received Carer's Allowance Supplement
- 53% had applied for Best Start Grant and/or Foods
- 5% had applied for Funeral Support Payment
- 2% had applied for Young Carer Grant
- 0.3% had applied for Job Start Payment
- 44% had applied for Scottish Child Payment
- 8% had received Child Winter Heating Assistance

Around half (53%) of respondents had experience of one benefit, a little over a third (37%) of two benefits, and 6% of three or more. A small proportion (4%) said that they had no experience of any Social Security Scotland benefits, although our sampling approach means that this cannot be the case.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the first round of the survey fieldwork in a number of ways. The survey was postponed and completing it was limited to doing so online or by calling a telephone helpline. The results will also reflect some experiences influenced by the impact of Covid-19 on Social Security Scotland's services. For example, the temporary move to telephone call backs. The data does not allow us to compare

experiences before and during the pandemic.

Looking across the survey, respondents were largely positive about their experience with Social Security Scotland. For example, 92% rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as 'very good' or 'good'. Most were also positive about their interactions with staff and experience of applying for benefits.

However, there were specific areas where some respondents were more negative. These included low awareness of how clients can challenge application decisions they disagree with, or report barriers or discrimination faced when dealing with Social Security Scotland.

Some respondents also had low awareness of who Social Security Scotland are, or what benefits they might be eligible for. A number also felt that communication of benefit information and application updates could be improved.

The sections below provide more information on the headline results from each part of the survey.

Overall Experience

92% of respondents rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as 'very good' or 'good'. Only 2% described their experience as poor or very poor.

Around nine-in-ten respondents believed that they had been treated with dignity (90%), fairly (90%) and with respect (91%). A similar proportion agreed that Social Security Scotland had not wasted their time (89%), whilst 85% said they understood what Social Security Scotland does.

Although the majority were still positive, fewer respondents said Social Security Scotland is an honest (83%) or open (74%) organisation. However, only 1% of respondents said they disagreed with each of these points. The rest said they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or that they 'didn't know'.

Comments made about overall experience were mostly positive. Many respondents said that they found staff 'professional', 'caring' and 'helpful'. Others favourably compared their experience to that with the Department for Work and Pensions. Among suggestions for improvement, some respondents called for better publicity of Social Security Scotland and its benefits. Others asked for better communication in the application process, such as quicker replies and more updates or information.

Finding out about Social Security Scotland and Getting Information and Advice

Respondents were asked how they first found out about Social Security Scotland. A little under a quarter said by being contacted by Social Security Scotland (23%), via 'online or social media' (21%), or 'word-of-mouth' (22%). Around one-in-ten first found out via the 'Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Jobcentre Plus' (10%) and a 'Health service (for example, NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist)' (12%).

Around four-in-ten (38%) of Carer's Allowance Supplement and three-in-ten (31%) Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients said they first heard about Social Security Scotland through being contacted by them. This was by far the most common means of first hearing about Social Security Scotland within these cohorts. However, Scottish Child Payment (33%), Best Start Grant/Foods (30%), and Young Carer Grant (23%) applicants were most likely to have first heard about Social Security Scotland online or via social media (for example, Twitter, Facebook).

All survey respondents were asked if at any point they had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services. Nearly three-fifths (56%) said they had. This was more common amongst respondents who had applied for a benefit (67%) than those who had only experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement (37%) or Child Winter Heating Assistance (31%).

Respondents' experience of looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services was generally positive. For example, 87% said they found doing so 'very easy' or 'easy'. Nearly nine-in-ten agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough choices of communication to (89%), and from (88%), Social Security Scotland. A similar proportion said they got the support they needed (89%).

Comments left regarding experiences of getting information and advice from Social Security Scotland were mainly positive. Many respondents mentioned finding information clear and easy to locate, or having a good experience contacting and getting advice from staff. Several comments about staff also complimented their helpfulness and friendliness. Again however, some respondents felt that they did not have enough information or awareness about Social Security Scotland's role or services and benefits that they may be eligible for. Other negative comments referred to helpline waiting time and voice messages not being responded to, as well as issues with the call back system. Some also mentioned the same issue with web chat.

Experiences with staff

Two-in-five (41%) respondents said they had been in contact with a member of Social Security Scotland staff. Most (93%) of these respondents said their experience with staff was 'very good' or 'good'.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that they were treated with kindness (94%) and that staff listened to them (92%). Most also reported that staff were able to help them (91%), made them feel comfortable (91%) and were knowledgeable about benefits (90%). Finally, nine-in-ten (90%) said they trusted staff and a similar proportion felt like they were trusted by staff (88%).

Marginally more than two-in-five said that staff told them about other benefits they might have been entitled to (44%) or other sources of help that might be available (41%). However, only slightly fewer said that they would like to have been told but were not (38% and 36% respectively). Respondents who said they were told about other benefits or sources of additional help were much more likely to rate their overall experience with staff positively.

Respondents also emphasised wanting more information and communication in the comments section on experiences with staff. Some other negative comments spoke of staff not being able to give the help respondents wanted, or having to wait too long to get through. But overall, most comments were positive and complimented staff manner and the help provided.

Applying for benefits

Around three-fifths (61%) of respondents said they had applied for at least one Social Security Scotland benefit – Best Start Grant/Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Job Start Payment, or Scottish Child Payment.

Of these respondents, 93% rated their overall experience of applying for a benefit as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. This measure was above 87% for all benefits and above 90% for all key demographic groups. Respondents most commonly reported applying for benefits online (89%), whereas fewer had applied by phone (13%) or by post (7%).

The vast majority of respondents considered the application process clear (94%) and said they were asked only relevant questions (92%). However, relatively fewer agreed their application was handled within a reasonable time frame (85%) or that they got enough updates (76%). Around one-in-ten respondents disagreed that they got enough updates on the progress of their application (11%).

Again, the majority of comments given in this section were positive. Most positive comments said the application process was straightforward, clear and easy. Several mentioned getting help from staff. The largest group of negative comments were about the time taken for a decision to be made on an application as well as a lack of updates while waiting. Some respondents commented that they found an application process unclear or had technical issues with an online application.

Receiving payments from Social Security Scotland

Around nine-in-ten (91%) respondents said they had received a benefit payment from Social Security Scotland. Nearly half had received Scottish Child Payment (46%), and around two-fifths had received Carer’s Allowance Supplement (43%) and Best Start Grant (38%). Around a quarter (26%) had received Best Start Foods. Much smaller proportions had received payments for Child Winter Heating Assistance (9%), Funeral Support Payment (4%), Young Carer Grant (1%), and Job Start Payment (0.3%).

The vast majority of respondents (94%) said their overall experience of receiving benefit payments was ‘very good’ or ‘good’. Most respondents said they received their payment(s) when Social Security Scotland said they would (91%). A similar amount reported that they received the right amount on the first time (93%) and every time (92%).

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'a lot', respondents gave the following scores for how much benefit payments:

- Helped to make a difference to their life – 74% gave a rating of 8-10, mean rating of 8.4
- Helped them to control their finances – 65% gave a rating of 8-10, mean rating of 7.8
- Helped them to pay for what they needed – 72% gave a rating of 8-10, mean rating of 8.2

Around 1,700 respondents provided comments in the section on receiving payments. This was the most to any open text question by some distance. Around three-in-five comments were positive and around one-in-five were negative. The most frequent theme among positive comments was an appreciation from respondents for their benefit payments, and the positive impact they had had for them and their families/children. Respondents also made positive comments about the ease, accuracy or timing of payments, and some respondents who received Carer's Allowance Supplement felt the benefit recognised their value as carers.

Among negative comments, two clear themes emerged as the most commonly mentioned: unhappiness with payment amounts, and long waits for payments. Several also mentioned a lack of, or inaccurate, communication regarding their payment issues.

Your application decision

Over nine-in-ten respondents who had applied for a benefit agreed that the decision on their application was 'explained clearly' (92%). A similar proportion (93%) said that they 'understood the decision'. 95% said they agreed with the decision, with 5% disagreeing.

Of the 261 respondents who disagreed with the decision made on their application:

- 50% disagreed with the statement 'I knew how to challenge it'
- 47% disagreed with the statement 'I felt I could challenge it'
- 26% said they challenged it.

In this section the number of positive and negative comments were around equal in number. Most positive comments expressed that the whole process was clear, straightforward and that receiving the benefits had made a difference the respondent's life. Other positive comments mentioned that staff were helpful and had good knowledge of Social Security Scotland benefits and processes. However, many negative comments mentioned long waits and lack of updates on decisions. A number of respondents also brought up difficulties challenging decisions, including being unaware of how to do this or that it was possible.

Barriers

7% of respondents said they had faced some sort of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland.

Just over half (53%) of those people who had faced barriers said they told Social Security Scotland about them. Of those respondents, less than two-in-five (38%) felt that Social Security Scotland 'understood them'. A similar proportion felt that Social Security Scotland 'supported [them] in overcoming them' (35%).

Negative comments varied greatly, as respondents interpreted 'barriers' widely. Many issues mentioned elsewhere reoccurred here, including staff treatment, being unable to get the required help, or lack of updates. Most prominent was mention of helpline and application decision waiting times. Most positive comments were of a brief and general nature, relating to the absence of any issues, clear information, helpful staff, or good overall experience.

Discrimination

2% of respondents said they had been discriminated against during their experience with Social Security Scotland, and 3% preferred not to say.

Of the 220 respondents who said they had experienced discrimination, 40% said it related to processes, 41% said it related to policy, and 25% said it related to staff.

Of those who had experienced discrimination, 60% disagreed that it was 'clear how to challenge it'. The same proportion disagreed that they 'felt [they] could challenge it.' Less than three-in-ten (28%) said they told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination.

A large proportion of the negative comments given in the discrimination section were about disagreement with eligibility requirements, particularly in relation to thresholds on income and child age. Other negative comments referred to experiences considered unfair, of feeling generally mistreated as a benefit claimant, or issues with general process. Most comments in this section were positive though, these generally expressed good overall experiences or satisfaction, including with staff.

Single benefit experience

This section isolated respondents who had only experienced one benefit, meaning that the responses given related solely to this benefit, and not an amalgamation experiences across multiple benefits. The results presented in this section cover many of the other section topics from the survey. A total of 5,593 respondents (53%) experienced just one benefit.

No one benefit group was associated with a clear difference in overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland. However, those who had solely experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance were less likely to say that Social Security Scotland was honest (75% and 71% respectively) or open (63% and 58% respectively) compared to others with sole experience of different benefits.

Those who only experienced Young Carer Grant gave consistently high ratings across a range of topics; 100% of this group rated their experience with staff as 'good' or 'very good', and 99% rated their experience with the application process likewise.

Those who only experienced Best Start Foods payments (a small proportion of all who experienced this benefit) were far less likely to agree with the statements 'I received payment when Social Security Scotland said I would' (69%), 'I received the right amount first time' (73%), and 'I received the right amount every time' (72%). Conversely, each of these statements was agreed with by 95% of those who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement.

Those who only experienced Best Start Grant/Foods (10%) and Funeral Support Payment (9%) were more likely to say that they faced barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland compared with those with sole experience of other benefits.

Change over time

This section explores whether any changes in response to key questions have occurred over time; represented as a difference in responses between the two fieldwork cohorts. To control for variation in experience based on benefit, comparisons can only be made between fieldwork cohorts for those who had only experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=2,290 in the 2020 cohort, n=895 in the 2021 cohort) and Best Start Grant/Foods (n=513 in the 2020 cohort, n=465 in the 2021 cohort).

There was little change over time between the rating of overall experience among Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients from the 2020 and 2021 fieldwork cohorts (90% and 89% rated 'good' or 'very good' respectively). However, Best Start Grant/Foods applicants from the 2021 fieldwork cohort were marginally more likely to give this rating (93%) compared to those from the 2020 fieldwork cohort (89%).

Similar results were evident for overall rating of experience with staff; Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients from both fieldwork cohorts rated similarly (88% and 90% rated 'good' or 'very good' respectively), whereas Best Start Grant/Foods applicants from the 2021 fieldwork cohort were more likely to give the highest rating (93%) compared to those from the 2020 fieldwork cohort (87%). Responses to the more detailed questions on experience with staff followed the same trends.

Respondents who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods from the 2020 fieldwork cohort were less likely to say that the application process was 'good' or 'very good' (87%, compared to 92% from the 2021 fieldwork cohort) and more likely to rate as 'poor' or 'very poor' (7%, compared with 3% from the 2021 fieldwork cohort).

Conversely, on the whole, those who solely experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement and Best Start Grant/Foods in the 2021 fieldwork cohort were less likely than their 2020 fieldwork cohort counterparts to say that they had 'received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would' (93% and 84% respectively the 2021 fieldwork cohort, compared with 95% and 88% in the 2020 fieldwork cohort), 'received the right amount first time' (95% and 88%

respectively the 2021 fieldwork cohort, compared with 95% and 93% in the 2020 fieldwork cohort), and 'received the right amount every time' (93% and 85% respectively the 2021 fieldwork cohort, compared with 96% and 88% in the 2020 fieldwork cohort). No change over time was seen for experience of barriers or discrimination.

Next steps

The survey results provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients. The results will be used alongside other evidence to populate the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) which reports on Social Security Scotland's performance. The findings will also support Social Security Scotland's continuous improvement. They have also highlighted areas where more research may be useful to further explore clients' experiences, views and expectations.

We are also planning for the future of the survey. The intention, from spring 2022 onward, is for the survey to be issued on a rolling basis to all applicants following a decision on an application. Invites will also be sent annually to people receiving recurring benefits. Before the rolling survey is launched, there will be further rounds of Social Security Scotland Client Survey fieldwork. These surveys will be issued at set intervals between starting in November 2021.

We will consider lessons learned from the initial rounds of the survey and whether any changes are required for future versions. [Please get in touch](#) with any feedback, comments or suggestions you have on this report or any aspect of the survey.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Survey purpose

Social Security Scotland was established in 2018. It is an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Its purpose is to deliver benefits which the Scottish Government has responsibility for.

In 2018 [Our Charter](#) was co-designed by the Scottish Government and people with lived experience of social security. It informs the work and culture of Social Security Scotland:

- How Social Security Scotland will uphold the Principles in the [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#)
- What people should expect from the new social security system
- How Social Security Scotland will make sure it is taking a human rights based approach
- How Social Security Scotland will demonstrate dignity, fairness and respect in all its actions.

The Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland and a diverse group of people with lived experience of the social security system then co-designed the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) (the framework). The framework consists of measures to monitor how well Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are meeting the commitments of Our Charter.

The Social Security Scotland Client Survey (the Survey) was designed in 2019/20. Its purpose is to inform the Charter Measurement Framework and learn about the overall experiences and needs of Social Security Scotland's clients.

This report provides the combined results from the first two rounds of the Survey, conducted in Aug/Sep 2020 (round 1) and May/June 2021 (round 2). All those who had received a benefit payment or had a successful decision on an application for a benefit from the formation of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 until 31 March 2021 were offered the chance to take part in this initial survey¹.

The Scottish Child Payment, Job Start Payment, and Child Winter Heating Assistance benefits were not launched until after the first round of the survey, and so were only included in the second round of fieldwork. Clients who took part in the first round of the survey but then went on to apply for Scottish Child Payment, Job Start Payment or receive Child Winter Heating Assistance were invited to take part in the second round. A maximum of 23 clients took part in the survey at both rounds (contributing a maximum of 46 responses).

¹ Further information on the design, timing and scope of the survey is provided in Section 2 of this report.

The survey sits alongside and complements other research activities which aim to capture the views and experiences of those who use (or will use) the social security system in Scotland. This includes short surveys at the end of application forms and phone calls. It also includes the work of the Social Security Experience Panels, set up by Scottish Government researchers in 2017.

Additionally, as part of the survey, respondents were offered the opportunity to sign-up for Social Security Scotland's Client Panels for the first time. The Client Panels are made up of Social Security Scotland clients from across Scotland. Panel members will be invited to participate in research and asked to share their experiences and opinions on how Social Security Scotland should work. The Client Panels provide another route to ensure user voices inform how Social Security Scotland operates.

All clients are eligible to join the Client Panels and joining is completely voluntary. Around 2,900 respondents to the first two rounds of the Social Security Scotland Client Survey chose to sign up for Client Panels. Further information on the characteristics of those who signed up is provided in [Annex A](#). The invitation to get involved in the Client Panels will also be included in future rounds of the survey. This will help to ensure the Panels continue to evolve as Social Security Scotland's live benefits and client base grow further.

2.2 Structure of this report and supporting materials available

The main body of the report is structured as follows:

- the remainder of Section 2 (this section) provides information on the survey methodology and factors to be aware of when interpreting results
- Sections 3 to 11 outline the main findings across the survey, grouped into themes as structured in the questionnaire
- Sections 12 and 13 cover the main findings from most sections of the survey, among isolated groups; those who only experience one benefit (Section 12) and those who only experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement or only experienced Best Start Grant/Foods (Section 13)
- Section 14 briefly outlines how the results will be used and the future of the survey
- Annex A provides further information on the characteristics of those who signed up to the Client Panels

A '[Summary report](#)' which presents the key findings from across this report in a more concise and accessible format is also available.

More detailed information on the characteristics of respondents is provided in the '[Supplementary document: tables and methods](#)' published alongside this report. It also contains findings for the headline question from each section of the survey, broken down by respondents' benefit experience and a range of demographic characteristics for readers looking for more detailed results.

2.3 Survey design and distribution

Survey content

The survey was designed to understand and report on Social Security Scotland clients' experiences and needs. In particular, reporting requirements as part of the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) were taken into account when the survey content was developed.

The survey aimed to capture the most important aspects of client experience without being too long and inaccessible. To achieve this, it underwent extensive review prior to the content being finalised before the first round of fieldwork. This included:

- Quality review by Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland officials responsible for the design and delivery of Social Security in Scotland
- Review by Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland officials specialising in content design and communications
- Cognitive testing with a range of Social Security Experience Panels members across various locations (Dundee, Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy, Oban, Inverness, Aberdeen). This helped to ensure questions were relevant and fit for purpose.

Once finalised, the survey contained questions designed to gather:

- clients' overall views on their experiences of dealing with Social Security Scotland
- information on particular and specific aspects of client experience, such as their experience of submitting an application, views on contact with staff, and feedback on receiving benefit payments.

A small number of very minor amendments were made to the survey between the first and second rounds of fieldwork. These addressed some usability feedback from the first round, and changes / additions to Agency processes, for example the introduction of the option to contact staff via Webchat. A more extensive review of the survey content will be implemented for the third round of survey fieldwork, which will launch in November 2021.

Survey structure

The structure of the final survey reflected the key ways a client would interact with Social Security Scotland, in loose order. The table below provides an overview of the structure of the survey by its main themes.

Table 2.1: Overview of survey questionnaire sections

Section
1. Finding out about Social Security Scotland
2. Getting information and advice
3. Our staff
4. Applying for Social Security Scotland benefits
5. Receiving payments from Social Security Scotland
6. Your application decision
7. Barriers
8. Discrimination
9. Overall experience
10. Taking part in future research (Client Panels sign-up)
11. More about you (standardised demographic characteristics/equalities questions)

A number of questions were filtered based on previous answers so that respondents only completed questions relevant to them. For example, respondents who had not been in contact with staff were not asked follow up questions about how staff had treated them. A copy of the questionnaire can be provided on request. Please send requests to our [research mailbox](#).

Section 2.2 outlines the structure of this report which varies a little from the order in which questions were asked. Most notably, this report presents findings on respondents' overall experiences of dealing with Social Security Scotland (Section 9 of the questionnaire) first as these represent the survey's headline results. It then reverts to following the order of the questionnaire from start to end – i.e. from Section 1 to Section 8. There are then a further two sections which look at responses given across the survey by specific respondent groups.

Section 10 of the questionnaire offered respondents the chance to sign up for the Client Panels (discussed above). Section 11 gathered a range of demographic information from respondents. This helps us understand who took part in the survey in terms of broad characteristics and spread across the population. It also allows us to explore whether views and experiences vary among different population groups.

Eligibility

Everyone who had received a benefit (where an application is not required) or received a successful decision on an application for a benefit from the formation of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 until 31 March 2021 was eligible to take part in the survey. This included applicants for any of the following Social Security Scotland benefits:

- [Best Start Grant and/or Foods](#)
- [Funeral Support Payment](#)
- [Young Carer Grant](#)
- [Job Start Payment](#)
- [Scottish Child Payment](#)

Invites were also sent to anyone who had received [Carer's Allowance Supplement](#) or [Child Winter Heating Assistance](#) up to the end of March 2021. These payments do not require an application so involve limited interaction between recipients and Social Security Scotland in most instances.

Fieldwork round one

Distribution of survey invites and fieldwork period

Intended for distribution in April 2020, the first round of the survey was postponed to prioritise operational services during the Covid-19 outbreak. Instead, the survey was released on 17 August 2020 and closed on 25 September 2020.

Invitations to participate in the first round of the survey were posted to all those eligible to take part².

The invitation explained the purpose of the survey and the options to complete it online or by calling a free helpline. It was not possible in the first round of survey to offer the option to complete the survey by post due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as mail processes were prioritised to support operational activities, such as processing applications.

Number of responses

In total, 164,752 survey invites were posted, in approximate batches of 20,000 per day from 17 August to 27 August 2020. 1,923 letters were returned as undelivered to the mail service provider.

A total of 3,253 responses were received once the data had been cleaned and duplicate checks performed. This represents 2% of the number of invites issued. The vast majority of respondents completed the survey online (95%), with the remainder doing so over the phone (5%).

² Using information from Social Security Scotland's database of clients or appointees who had received a benefit or received a successful decision on an application for a benefit between September 2018 and July 2020.

Fieldwork round two

Distribution of survey invites and fieldwork period

The second round of survey fieldwork was able to invite eligible respondents via email³, as well as letter. It was also able to provide the option of completing the survey on paper, as well as online or over the phone (with a translator if required). Respondents who received their invitation via letter were also sent a paper survey to complete, along with a pre-paid return envelope. These respondents were also able to complete the survey online if they preferred, and those who received an email invite were also able to request a paper survey.

The content of the invite letter / email for the second round of the survey was very similar to the letter sent for the first round. Many of the clients who did not have an email address on record (and thus received an invite letter) had not applied for a benefit. Subsequently, a 'non-application' version of the survey was developed and sent to these clients. This version omitted the 'application' and 'decision' sections of the survey, which reduced unnecessary burden for these respondents.

A total of 98,779 clients were invited to take part in the second round of the survey fieldwork. 72,942 (74%) were sent an email invite, split into 5 batches of around 14,600 sent from 10-14 May 2021. Of these emails, 961 were unable to deliver, and so these clients were sent a letter invite. 26,798 (27%) clients were sent a letter invite (including those whose email was undelivered). Letters were sent out in three batches (of around 9,000 each) on 10th, 17th, and 24th May 2021. 458 letters were returned undelivered. All clients were sent a reminder (email or letter) 7 days after they received their invite, and a second reminder 14 days after they received their invite.

Number of responses

A total of 7,322 responses were received once the data had been cleaned and duplicate checks performed. This represents 7.4% of the number of invites issued.

Around three quarters of respondents completed the second round of the survey online (75%), and one quarter did so with a paper survey (25%). A very small proportion (0.4%) completed the survey over the phone.

³ Those who had provided a valid email address as part of their benefit application were sent an email invite. Those who had not were sent a letter invite.

2.4 Data cleaning and analysis

Closed questions

The majority of the survey questions were closed questions, meaning they had tick boxes for people to choose from. Responses to these questions were analysed alongside the demographic information provided by respondents. All personal identifiable information is held in a separate secure file.

Data was cleaned and analysed by Scottish Government researchers. This included removing a small number of responses which were identified as duplicates⁴ or where nearly all questions had no valid answer provided. The data has not been weighted due to a lack of publicly available information about a comparable population.

Results from the closed questions are generally presented for all respondents then broken down by benefit experience. Key results across the survey were also examined for differences across selected demographic characteristics⁵. These were gender identity, age, ethnicity, whether respondents have a long-term health condition, and whether they live in an urban or rural area. Notable differences between groups are highlighted in the report. Further results and more demographic breakdowns are provided in the [‘Supplementary document: tables and methods’](#) published alongside this report.

Open text questions

Most sections of the survey ended with a chance to provide comments⁶. Respondents were asked if they would like to say anything more about the subject of that section (i.e. applying, staff, discrimination, and so on). For the ‘Overall’ section the open text question asked the respondent if they would like to make suggestions for improvement or further comments.

Responses were categorised as positive, negative, neutral, mixed, other and suggestion, before undergoing further thematic analysis. During this analysis stage, the open text responses (quotes) were not linked to the respondent’s wider contextual information, for example the respondent’s demographic information or responses at other questions.

After themes had been identified and quotes selected to best reflect these themes, the gender identity, age, and benefit experience of the corresponding respondent was included with each quote. This means that no efforts were made to present quotes, for each theme, from a wide range of sub-groups with the respondent sample. Rather, that the contextual information included with the quotes may be indicative of whether the themes identified were raised by a wide range of groups, or more commonly amongst particular groups.

‘Other’ applied to comments that did not fit another category or were unclear. A substantial number contained details that made it clear the comment was not about Social Security Scotland. Most of these described experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions.

⁴ Where a client completed the survey more than once within a fieldwork period. See paragraph 2 of the Executive summary for details on completing the survey in both fieldwork periods.

⁵ A minimum base of 25 was required for a benefit experience or demographic characteristic to be used a break down.

⁶ There were eight opportunities to provide comments in total. The one exception was the first section. This contained only one closed question which asked respondents how they had first heard of Social Security Scotland.

Some detailed experiences with Jobcentres, the NHS or home visits⁷. These comments were not included in the analysis. It is likely that more comments, without explicit indicators, were also about experiences not to do with Social Security Scotland. However, only those comments explicitly about other organisations or experiences were labelled 'other'.

2.5 Understanding and interpreting survey results

Summary of who responded and implications for findings

The survey results provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients. However, we cannot assume that the results represent the views of Social Security Scotland's clients as a whole. Therefore, findings should be seen as representing the views of clients who responded only and are not generalisable. This includes when results are shown by benefit experience and demographic group.

However, information on the benefit experience and demographic characteristics of respondents does help us further understand the results contained in this report and view them in context. A detailed analysis of who took part in the survey is provided in the ['Supplementary document: tables and methods'](#).

The demographic background of respondents did differ across each benefit group. For example, we know that respondents with experience of applying for Funeral Support Payment were more likely to be older and living with a long-term health condition. These relationships may be a factor behind any difference in results seen across these groups. In other words, for example, findings for Funeral Support Payment applicants may be influenced by (e.g.) the older age profile of this group. In other places, what appears to be an age effect in results may actually be related to different benefit experience in each age group.

Understanding results and quotations presented in the report

Other key factors to be aware of when interpreting the findings in this report are listed below.

- Most results to the closed questions presented in this report are rounded to whole numbers. As such, results included in charts and tables figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
- Results for each question shown in the report exclude any respondents who either skipped the question, said 'not applicable' or were filtered out of the relevant question, unless otherwise stated.
- Some percentages quoted in the report relate to questions that allowed respondents to choose more than one response. These percentages will not sum to 100% with the other percentages presented.
- All quotes presented under the 'Comments about...' sections throughout this report are contained within coloured text boxes to separate them from the analytical commentary. The quotes included in the report serve as examples that illustrate or represent key themes or points raised in client comments. Quotes are presented in a manner that reflects the comments received as accurately as possible. This includes where capitalised text may have been used by respondents for emphasis. Any potentially identifying information has been omitted.

⁷ Social Security Scotland only performed home visits on a few occasions under exceptional circumstances

- ‘#’ indicates a value is suppressed due to a small number of respondents in a group. To reduce risk of disclosure, the minimum base size for a cross break variable was set at 25.
- Some base sizes greater than 25 (for example the 31 respondents with experience of Job Start Payment) are included but should be interpreted with caution.
- Most results are presented to zero decimal places. ‘0%’ should therefore be interpreted to mean <0.5%. If no responses were given then this is denoted by ‘-’. Some values less than 1% are presented to 1 decimal place.

3. Overall experience

This section presents findings from the survey's headline questions which asked how respondents felt overall about their experiences with Social Security Scotland.

3.1 Overall rating of experience – all respondents

The survey's highest level question asked respondents how they would rate their overall experience with Social Security Scotland. The vast majority of respondents (92%) said that their overall experience was 'very good' or 'good'⁸. Just 2% said their experience was 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Table 3.1: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland
All respondents; Column percentages

Response options	All respondents ⁹ (n=10,456)
Very good	64%
Good	29%
Neither poor nor good	6%
Poor	1%
Very poor	1%

Respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of more specific statements about their experience. Again, respondents generally indicated a positive experience, with a clear majority agreeing with each of the statements (see Table 3.2 below).

Notably, nine-in-ten believed that they had been treated with dignity (90%), fairness (90%) and respect (91%). A similar proportion agreed that Social Security Scotland had not wasted their time (89%), whilst 85% said they understood what Social Security Scotland does.

Few respondents actively disagreed with each of the statements, as Table 3.2 shows. Instead, respondents who did not give a positive response to each statement tended to say they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or 'don't know'. For instance, the statements about whether Social Security Scotland is an 'open' organisation attracted the lowest level of agreement (74%). However, only 2% of respondents said they disagreed with this point. The statement which produced the highest level of disagreement was 'I understand what Social Security Scotland does' (4%).

⁸ Unrounded figures for 'Very good' and 'good' sum to 92%.

⁹ In this table, and all other tables and figures, the sample size does not include respondents who skipped the question, or (with some other questions) were routed around the question.

Table 3.2: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland
All respondents; Row percentages

Thinking about your overall experience with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly (n=10,069)	90%	6%	2%	2%
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect (n=10,063)	91%	6%	1%	2%
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity (n=10,068)	90%	7%	1%	2%
Social Security Scotland did not waste my time (n=10,172)	89%	6%	3%	2%
I understand what Social Security Scotland does (n=10,312)	85%	9%	4%	3%
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland (n=10,284)	84%	10%	2%	3%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation (n=10,297)	83%	11%	1%	5%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation (n=10,242)	74%	13%	1%	12%

3.2 Overall rating of experience – by benefit experience

It is also possible to examine views on Social Security Scotland based on the benefit experience of respondents. Section 2.5 provides key information to consider when looking at findings presented in this way throughout the report. The key point to note is that all respondents are presented against each of the benefits they said they had experience of, meaning there is some overlap between the groups, given that more than 40% of respondents had experience of more than one benefit.

The proportion rating their experience as 'good' or 'very good' was lowest amongst Funeral Support Payment applicants (90%) and highest for those with experience for applying for Young Carer Grant (98%) (see Table 3.3). Again, few respondents in each group answered 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Table 3.3: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit; Column percentages

Benefit experience	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=4,320)	91%	7%	2%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants (n=4,920)	95%	3%	2%
Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=500)	90%	7%	3%
Young Carer Grant applicants(n=214)	98%	1%	0%
Job Start Payment applicants (n=31)	97%	-	3%
Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=4,610)	96%	3%	2%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=825)	93%	5%	2%

Table 3.4 shows results for the more detailed questions on respondents' overall experience by benefit experience. Broadly, respondents who had applied for Best Start Grant/Foods, Scottish Child Payment, or Young Carer Grant were most likely to strongly agree or agree with the statements, and those who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance were least likely.

For the statements 'Social Security Scotland is an honest' (79%) and 'open' (67%) organisation, agreement was lowest among recipients of Carer's Allowance Supplement (79% and 67% respectively) and Child Winter Heating Assistance (71% and 83% respectively). This may be related to the fact that recipients of these benefits typically have less interaction with Social Security Scotland, as no application is required. As such, they may not have formed a strong view on these matters¹⁰.

Funeral Support Payment applicants were less likely to agree with some of the statements than those who applied for Best Start Grant/Foods, or Scottish Child Payment. For example, such respondents less commonly agreed they were treated with dignity, fairness, or respect (see Table 3.4). However, these differences were often partly driven by Funeral Support Payment applicants saying 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know', as well as a larger proportion disagreeing.¹¹

¹⁰ For example 14% of respondents who received Carer's Allowance Supplement answered 'Don't know' to the statement Social Security Scotland is an open organisation, and 12% of Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients. This was more than among those who applied for Best Start Grant/ Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Scottish Child Payment, or Young Carer Grant (10%, 9%, 9%, and 9% respectively).

¹¹ For instance, when asked if they felt they had been treated with dignity, 9% of Funeral Support Payment applicants answered 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know'. This compares to 6% of Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicants.

Table 3.4: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit; Column percentages

Strongly agree or agree that...	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=4,050-4,241)	Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants (n=4,861-4,904)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=488-458)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=209-213)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=4,557-4,601)	Job Start Payment applicants (n=30-31)	Child Winter Heating Assistance applicants (n=769-815)
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	87%	93%	89%	94%	94%	84%	91%
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	88%	93%	89%	94%	93%	84%	91%
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	88%	94%	91%	96%	95%	90%	91%
I understand what Social Security Scotland does	81%	91%	85%	89%	92%	84%	84%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	67%	81%	76%	82%	82%	70%	71%
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland	81%	89%	84%	87%	90%	83%	83%
Social Security Scotland did not waste my time	87%	91%	90%	95%	92%	94%	88%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	79%	89%	86%	88%	89%	80%	83%

3.3 Overall rating of experience – by demographic characteristics

Around nine-in-ten or more respondents in all demographic groups said their experience was 'very good' or 'good' (with the exception of respondents who would not describe their gender identity as male or female, although the cohort is small (n=26)). Despite this, some variation was evident when assessing respondents' overall rating of their experience with Social Security Scotland by some demographic characteristics. Women (93%) were more likely than men (89%) to rate their overall experience as 'very good' or 'good', as were those with no long-term physical/mental health condition (94%) compared to those with such a condition (90%), and respondents aged 16-44 (94-95%) compared to those aged 45 and older (88-91%).

Table 3.5: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by demographic and geographic breakdowns
All respondents; Column percentages

Demographic/Geographic group	Proportion saying overall experience was very good or good
Gender identity	
Man (n=1,817)	89%
Woman (n=8,341)	93%
Prefer not to say (n=104)	90%
Answered in another way (n=26)	81%
Long-term health condition	
With long-term physical/mental health condition (n=3,096)	90%
No long-term physical/mental health condition (n=6,533)	94%
Prefer not to say (n=624)	90%
Ethnicity	
White (n=8,828)	92%
Minority ethnic (n=1,052)	95%
Prefer not to say (n=215)	91%

Table 3.5: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by demographic and geographic breakdowns – continued

Demographic/Geographic group	Proportion saying overall experience was very good or good
Age	
16-24 (n=546)	94%
25-34 (n=2,614)	95%
35-44 (n=2,854)	95%
45-54 (n=1,298)	91%
55-64 (n=1,304)	88%
65+ (n=403)	91%
Urban-rural classification	
Urban (n=8,382)	93%
Rural (n=1,137)	93%

Results for the set of more detailed questions exploring respondents' overall experience were also generally positive across the range of demographic groups. However, differences were again evident between some groups.

For example, respondents living with a long-term health condition were less likely than people without such a condition to agree with each of the statements, as shown in Table 3.6. Other breakdowns are provided in the '[Supplementary document: tables and methods](#)'.

Table 3.6: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland by whether respondents have a long-term health condition
All respondents; Column percentages

Proportion strongly agreeing or agreeing that:	With long-term physical/mental health condition (n=2,989-3,056)	No condition (n=6,265-6,443)	Prefer not to say (n=608-621)
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	87%	92%	86%
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	87%	93%	87%
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	87%	92%	85%
Social Security Scotland did not waste my time	86%	91%	86%
I understand what Social Security Scotland does	81%	88%	79%
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland	81%	87%	80%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	80%	86%	79%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	69%	77%	66%

3.4 Comments about overall experience and general suggestions

The survey's final question invited all respondents to offer suggestions for improvement or make further comments about their overall experience with Social Security Scotland¹²

1,150 respondents provided a comment. Around a fifth were suggestions for improvement. The rest were general comments about overall experience, of which the majority were positive and less than a fifth negative.

¹² 'Would you like to make any suggestions for improvement or further comments about your overall experience?'

The section below presents the most common points made in response to this question.

Many positive comments were brief mentions of satisfaction, such as and similar to:

“Very satisfied”

Male, aged 45-54, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Good experience”

Female, aged 25-34, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“100% great system”

Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“It was very helpful”

Female, aged 45-54, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Excellent service...keep it up”

Male, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Good staff”

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

“No need for improvement as they are doing a first class service.”

Male, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“My overall experience, I would say, was compassionate.”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“From our experience, you could not improve the amazing service you provide.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Our overall experience with Social Security Scotland has been very positive. We are kept well informed of updates to payment and all communication has been very respectful. Thank you.”

Female, aged 45-54, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Several respondents said their experience was ‘professional’, ‘caring’ or ‘helpful’. A number believed that nothing or very little could be improved having received what they felt to be a high standard of service:

“Overall happy with service and any contact that I had with staff have been helpful and professional”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“My overall experience has been nothing short of perfection and I think you provide an extremely dignified and respectful service to the people of Scotland. I would like to thank you all for providing the utmost professionalism at all times.”

Female, aged 45-54, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Overall happy with service and any contact that I had with staff have been helpful and professional”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Literally could not do better. So helpful and genuinely nice”

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Excellent organisation that help people. I feel it help me and my boys very much. Please keep up the great work.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

“The whole experience from applying online to receiving the payments was simple, easy and done within the timeframe stated by Security Scotland.”

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

Also present were positive comparison of experiences with Social Security Scotland to those with the Department for Work and Pensions. Several respondents called for further benefits to be administered by Social Security Scotland and for this to happen as soon as possible, a point that was also made a number of times across the other open text questions. Comments of this nature given at this question were overwhelmingly given by Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients:

“Stress free experience unlike dealing with the Department of Work and Pensions. Please can Social Security Scotland deal with all benefits.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Social Security Scotland should take over all Department of Work and Pensions functions in Scotland.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“I don't feel scared dealing with Social Security Scotland. I feel that way dealing with the UK Govt for my children's DLA and PIP.”

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Can't wait till sss takes over all benefits - less stressful and fair.”

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Speed up the process of taking over all welfare matters from the Department of Work and Pensions.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Of the negative comments and suggestions for improvement, many were about different aspects of communication. This included frustration with not getting a response to applications / queries in a timely fashion or at all, and enough information or updates when waiting for applications or payments to be processed. Some also commented on the manner in which they felt treated by staff. These were themes that were also raised in other sections of the survey:

“Communication, communication, communication! I am sitting months on from the application wondering why I didn't receive the payment”
Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Train your staff in professionalism and empathy. Put systems in place to inform applicants their appeals are being logged and taken seriously (no audit trail given or opportunity given to track appeal progress online, for example). No timescales given as to when appeals will be viewed and resolved, no call back arranged. Sack the existing staff and start over!”
Male, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“To answer emails quickly because I am still waiting for my decision to be made”
Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“A quicker response would be helpful”
Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“I can understand you have many applications to proceed with. But when you sent message that states we will get in touch with you after 10 working days and nothing happens. It is a bit frustrating. It is better to do not state the number of days.”
Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Consistency, when you make a mistake, admit to it and don't blame the person you should be helping”
Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“More information regarding targets for payment dates”
Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“More updates when a delay is long like in my case. Maybe at least one per month so I could be sure you still have my application.”
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

There were also calls for more accessible and simplified language in communications across the service. Several respondents wanted to see clearer information in plain wording and some felt the quality of translation could be improved:

“Plain English would be preferred.”
Aged 35-44, Young Carer Grant applicant

“Make your wording very clear.”
Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Better translation services (letters) to help people understand the services.”
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Make information clearer to people!”
Female, aged 16-24, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

A broader communication issue was lack of awareness about Social Security Scotland's existence, role, benefits and their eligibility requirements. Several respondents said that they had never heard of Social Security Scotland and were only doing so for the first time:

"Not aware of Social Security Scotland"

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I did not even know of the existence of Social Security Scotland until today. I just assumed Carer's Allowance came from the same place as Universal Credit."

Male, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I don't know anything about this organisation other than it's to do with the Scottish Government and that my counterparts in England do not receive this."

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"More awareness of the organisation as people are missing out due to lack of knowledge"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Make Social Security Scotland more visible online."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"They should tell people what they are entitled to without them having to find out themselves."

Male, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Would like to know Social Security Scotland does overall and what support they can give"

Male, aged 16-24, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"I initially thought this was a scam of some sort until I googled it. Then I found out that SSS is a legit organisation. Didn't know I had dealt with you as all my forms were sent to English addresses"

Aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"It would be helpful to get more info about what you do, how you can help and what you offer. For example, I am a young carer and I didn't know about the young carers grant until I received this survey!"

Female, aged 16-24, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"I did not know about Social Security Scotland until the organisation contacted me and I read a bit about it on Twitter. I think it needs to be promoted."

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

The issue of awareness about Social Security Scotland was also emphasised by the large number of comments that described experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions. These comments showed that many respondents were not aware of the difference between the two organisations.

Some respondents directly raised their confusion between the Department for Work and

Pensions and Social Security Scotland. They recognised the two as distinct but did not understand the relationship between them or how to navigate it. They called for more information on what is delivered by each organisation:

“Would like to understand more about what Department of Work and Pensions UK takes care of versus Social Security Scotland, and if there are additional benefits that myself (Carer) or my daughter, who has special needs, may be entitled to.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“The differences in Social Security Scotland benefit entitlement and the Department of Work and Pensions should be clear.”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“There is a bit of confusion in general re what department deals with what i.e. universal credit, PIP, ESA, unemployment benefit, carers allowance, attendance allowance”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Furthermore, some comments related to the transition of Disability Allowance to Child Disability Payment, including lack of clarity and suggestions for implementation:

“When taking over DLA for children from DWP don't subject us to the huge form for completion. When your son's brain did not develop it's a lifelong condition and the 3 yearly form filling is a depressing exercise. If the condition will not change or repair, less admin all round to make the award longer term rather like the condition.”

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“More clarity about the taking over of DLA child payment and if the mobility scheme will still be available. And clarity on when children will receive the child payment and if you will need to reapply.”

Male, aged 25-34, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Having 3 children with additional needs, I have filled in DLA forms for the last 16 years so I'm hoping that this system is fairer and recognises that conditions like autism don't go away. It's stressful enough for families who have children with additional needs without having to prove they still have for eg autism every 2 years.”

Female, aged 45-54, Scottish Child Payment applicant, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Other suggestions for improvement focused on practical matters with the application and payment process. Some respondents suggested that payments should be made on a more regular basis whilst several called for higher payments. Others commented on the length and ease of the application:

“I suggest to raise the payment of Best Start Foods to be at least £80 monthly.”

Male, aged 25-34, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Make Carer's Allowance Supplement payments more regularly.”

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Just that carers should get more money.”

Aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I suggest to raise the payment of Best Start Foods to be at least £80 monthly."

Male, aged 25-34, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Simplify all forms and procedures and take care to be consistent in usage of terminology throughout."

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Make the application process less hassle and the outcome of application quicker."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant/Foods, and Funeral Support Payment applicant

"Not to take long periods of time to receive payment"

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I suggest that once you made any payment to let the customers know because you have all our contact information"

Female, aged 45-54

"A notice ahead of cancelling payments would have been a nice courtesy"

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"As a lone carer for my mum I think the payments should be higher for those who are not able to/are not working as other benefits don't cover most costs of living"

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"There should be a section on the online application form where to attach documents. This is to avoid sending documents twice."

Female, aged 16-24, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Online examples of filled in applications, could be a big help. Indeed any online application form examples should be available."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Many respondents disagreed with some of the ways payment amounts and eligibility were affected by other benefits, pensions income, or their child's age. Disagreement with eligibility also came up in relation to receiving payments, barriers, and discrimination. These issues are discussed further in Sections 8, 10 and 11.

Carer's Allowance (and thus Carer's Allowance Supplement) income and pension status eligibility is determined by the Department for Work and Pensions, although the comments on this topic did not seem aware or account for this:

"I feel that people who get their pension should not be discriminated when it comes to Carer's Allowance Supplement."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I look after my 2 boys with ASD and ADHD. They go to school 9am - 3:20pm, I now work in their school 9am - 3pm totalling 25 hours per week but now lose my Carers allowance even though I still care for them exactly the same amount of time before I started to work."

Female, aged 35-44

"I feel that people who get their pension should not be discriminated when it comes to Carer's Allowance Supplement."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Scrap the £120 a week limit it keeps carers in poverty and more likely means they have to claim other benefits and damages the economy because people are forced not to work!"

Male, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I don't understand why the payment stops aged 5? My son is 6 in June and still needs just as much stuff, if not more for school etc than before. Aged 5 is a silly cut off point and hopefully in the future, you will be able to roll this out for all Primary aged children."

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant/Foods, and Job Start Payment applicant, and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"I would like to see the scottish child payments opened up to those with children over six years old."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

4. Finding out about Social Security Scotland

The survey opened by asking respondents how they had first found out about Social Security Scotland. They could identify more than one method if applicable.

The most common method given by respondents was as a result of Social Security Scotland contacting them (such as by phone call or letter); nearly one-in-four (23%) selected this answer. A marginally smaller proportion had first heard about Social Security Scotland 'online or via social media (for example, Twitter, Facebook)' (21%) or via 'word-of-mouth' (22%), and around one-in-ten via a 'Health service (for example, NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist)' (12%) or from the 'Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Jobcentre Plus' (10%).

Table 4.1: How respondents had first heard of Social Security Scotland
All respondents; Column percentages

Response options	All respondents (n=10,530)
Social Security Scotland contacted me (for example, phone call or letter)	23%
Word-of-mouth	22%
Online or social media (for example, Twitter, Facebook)	21%
Health service (for example, NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist)	12%
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Jobcentre Plus	10%
Advert (for example, TV, radio, newspaper)	7%
Citizens Advice Scotland	5%
Community or social care service	5%
Another organisation or advice service	5%
Leaflet, pamphlet or poster	3%
News article	2%
Other	6%
Can't remember/don't know	8%

4.1 Finding out about Social Security Scotland – by benefit experience

Table 4.2 shows how respondents had first heard of Social Security Scotland by benefit experience. There were clear differences between those with experience of a benefit requiring an application, compared to Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients. Around four-in-ten (38%) of Carer's Allowance Supplement and three-in-ten (31%) Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients said they first heard about Social Security Scotland through being contacted by them, easily the most common means within these cohorts.

However, around one-in-three Scottish Child Payment (33%) and Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (30%) said they found out about Social Security Scotland online (including social media), as well as around one-in-four (23%) Young Carer Grant applicants. The most common 'other' means of first hearing about Social Security Scotland for Funeral Support Payment applicants was via a funeral director. Very few respondents, across all benefits, first heard about Social Security Scotland via a 'News article', 'Advert (for example, TV, radio, newspaper)', or 'Leaflet, pamphlet or poster'.

Table 4.2: How respondents had first heard of Social Security Scotland by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; Column percentages

Response options	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=4,357)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=4,938)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=498)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=212)	Job Start Payment applicants (n=31)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=4,630)	Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=832)
Social Security Scotland contacted me (for example, phone call or letter)	38%	13%	16%	19%	16%	12%	31%
Word-of-mouth	16%	26%	26%	22%	29%	26%	16%
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Jobcentre Plus	15%	6%	26%	5%	23%	6%	13%
Online or social media (for example, Twitter,	11%	30%	11%	23%	32%	33%	16%

Facebook)							
Health service (for example, NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist)	9%	17%	7%	10%	6%	14%	12%
Another organisation or advice service	6%	4%	7%	8%	6%	4%	6%
Community or social care service	6%	4%	4%	8%	-	4%	6%
Citizens Advice Scotland	5%	4%	9%	6%	16%	3%	5%
News article	3%	1%	2%	2%	-	1%	2%
Advert (for example, TV, radio, newspaper)	3%	10%	4%	6%	16%	12%	5%
Leaflet, pamphlet or poster	3%	3%	3%	4%	10%	3%	3%
Other	5%	5%	12%	7%	3%	5%	6%
Can't remember/ don't know	9%	6%	5%	9%	3%	6%	10%

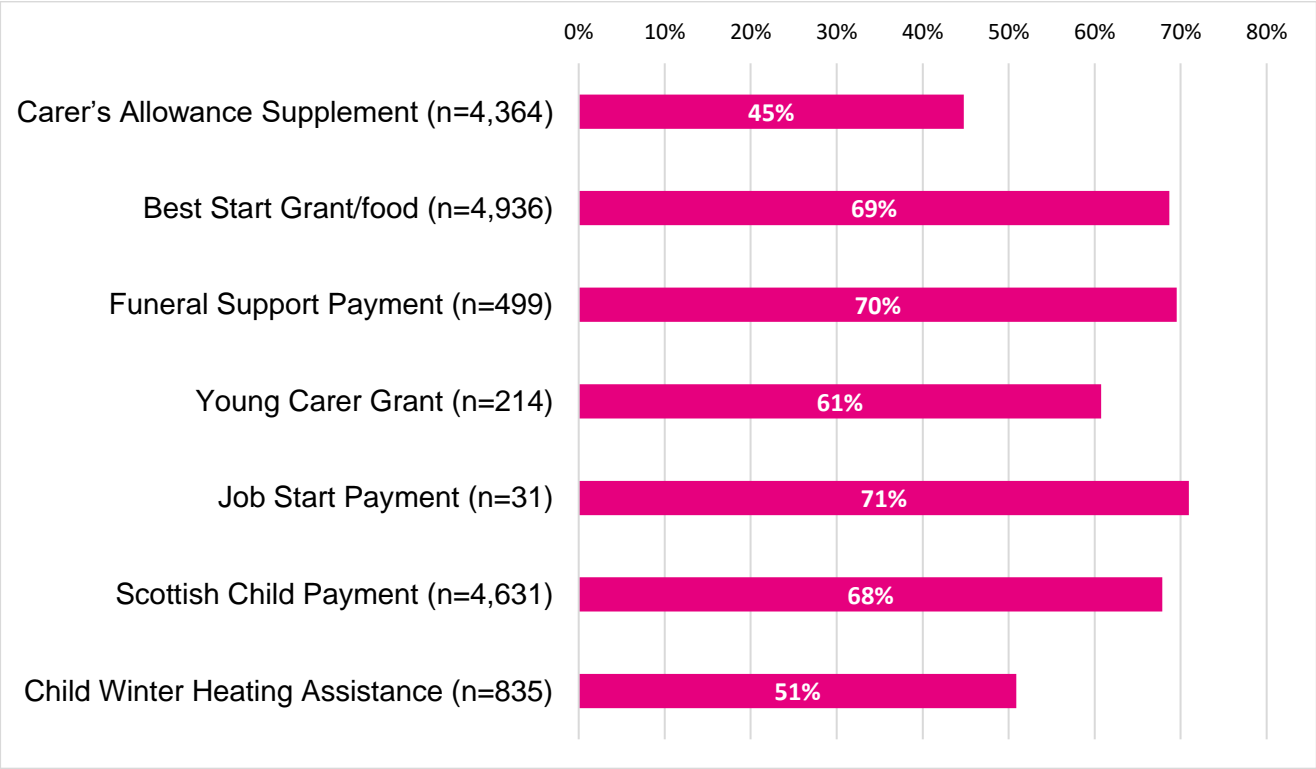
5. Getting information and advice

This section explores respondents’ experience of getting information and advice from Social Security Scotland about benefits or services provided. It includes findings on the ease with which respondents found doing this, and their views on the communication choices available.

5.1 Whether and how respondents had sought information and advice

Respondents were asked if at any point they had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about the benefits or services provided. Just under three-fifths of respondents (56%) said they had. Again, there was a clear disparity between respondents who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance and those who had applied for another benefit, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Whether respondents had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits/services by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit



Some demographic groups were more likely to report having looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services, including; women (58% compared to 46% of men), and younger respondents (for example, 63% of respondents aged 16 to 44 years compared with 46% of those aged 45 and older).

Respondents who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland reported doing so most commonly via the internet (58%). Around four-in-ten (38%) had used an online form on the Social Security Scotland website to get in touch, and around three-in-ten (30%) had contacted the phone helpline (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: How respondents looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland¹³
All respondents who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland; Column percentages

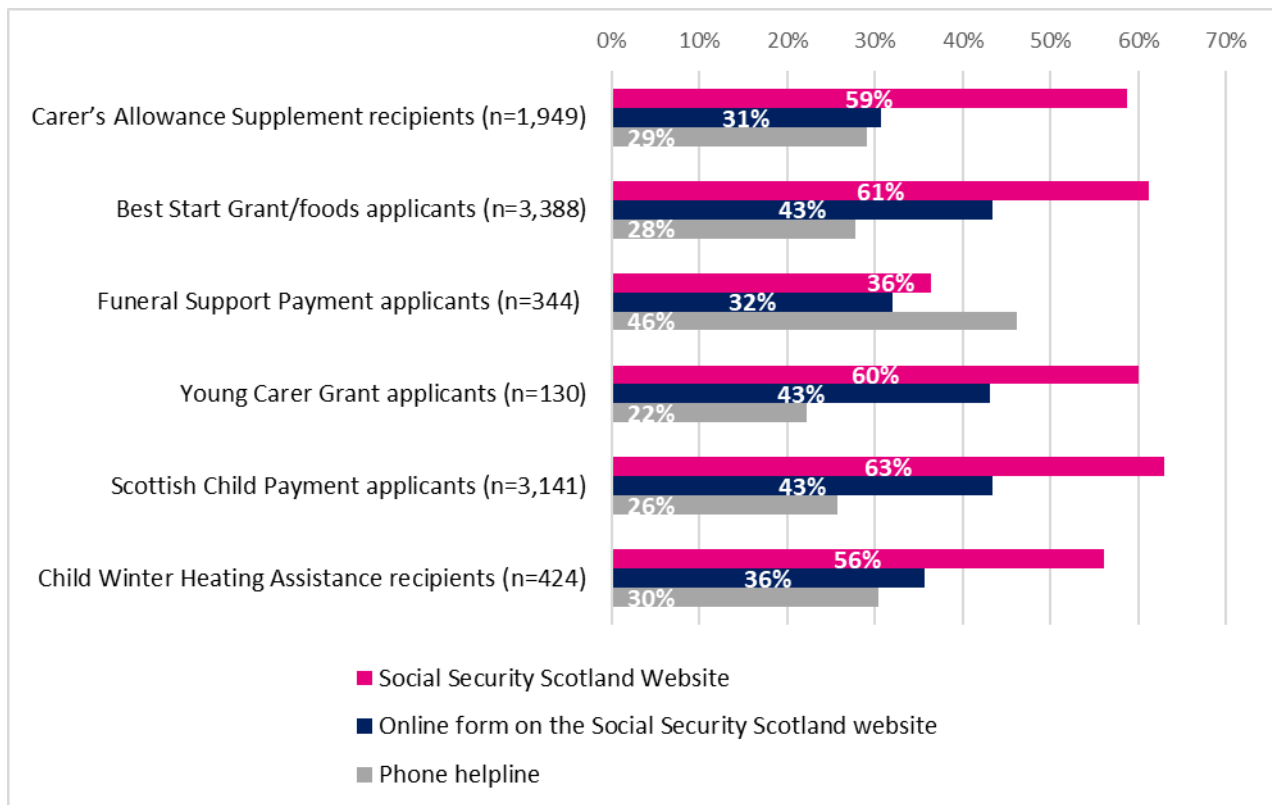
Response options	All respondents (n=4,699)
Website	58%
Online form (on the Social Security Scotland website)	38%
Phone helpline	30%
Webchat ¹⁴	5%
Postal service	3%
In person	2%
Other	1%

Figure 5.2 shows the proportion of respondents with different benefit experiences using each of the three most common methods of finding out about benefits and services provided. Respondents with experience of applying for Funeral Support Payment responded differently to the sample as a whole; this group were more likely to have used the phone helpline (46%, compared to the sample mean of 30%), and less likely to use the Website (36%, compared to the sample mean of 58%). Otherwise, those with experience of applying for or receiving other benefits responded reasonably uniformly.

¹³ Respondents could select more than one answer where applicable so figures presented do not sum to 100%.

¹⁴ Webchat response option was only included in the second round of survey fieldwork, as this method of contacting Social Security Scotland was not available at the time of the first round of fieldwork.

Figure 5.2: How respondents looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland by benefit experience¹⁵
All respondents with experience of each benefit who had looked up or made contact



Age was a key indicator of how respondents looked up or make contact with Social Security Scotland. Use of online methods (website and online form) were highest amongst respondents aged 16-24 (64% and 43% respectively), decreased with each older age band, and were lowest among over 65s (29% and 22% respectively). Conversely, the youngest aged group were least likely to look up or make contact with Social Security Scotland via the phone helpline (23%) and the oldest age group were most likely (46%). The association between experience of Funeral Support Payment and a difference in contact methods, noted on the page above, is likely driven by age¹⁶.

Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to look up or make contact with Social Security Scotland via the website (42% compared to 60% of white respondents), and more likely to use the phone helpline (47% compared to 25% of white respondents). There was no clear difference in age between these two groups.

5.2 Experience of getting information and advice

Those who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services were generally positive about their experience of doing so. Most respondents said making contact for this purpose was 'very easy' or 'easy' (87%). Around one-in-twenty found it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' (5%). A further 9% said it was 'neither easy nor difficult'.

¹⁵ Job Start Payment is not included in this breakdown as there were fewer than 25 respondents with experience of Job Start Payment had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland.

¹⁶ Amongst those who provided their date of birth (n=9,100), the average age at time of survey completion for those with no experience of Funeral Support Payment was 40 years, considerably younger than those with experience of Funeral Support Payment whose average age was 57 years.

Nearly nine-in-ten respondents said they had enough choice about how they communicated with Social Security Scotland (89%), how Social Security Scotland communicated with them (88%), and that they got the support (information or advice) they needed (89%), as Table 5.2 shows.

Table 5.2: Views on communication choices and support received

All respondents who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland; Row percentages

Thinking about when you looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland, how much do you agree or disagree...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Can't remember/ Don't know
I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland (n=5,777)	89%	6%	3%	2%
I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me (n=5,736)	88%	7%	3%	2%
I got the support (information or advice) I needed (n=5,764)	89%	6%	4%	1%

Some divergence was seen between benefit experience and views on communication choices and support received, as shown in Table 5.3. Those with experience of benefits not requiring an application (Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance) were less likely to agree with each of the statements regarding communication choices and support received, compared with other benefits.

Table 5.3: Views on communication choices and support received

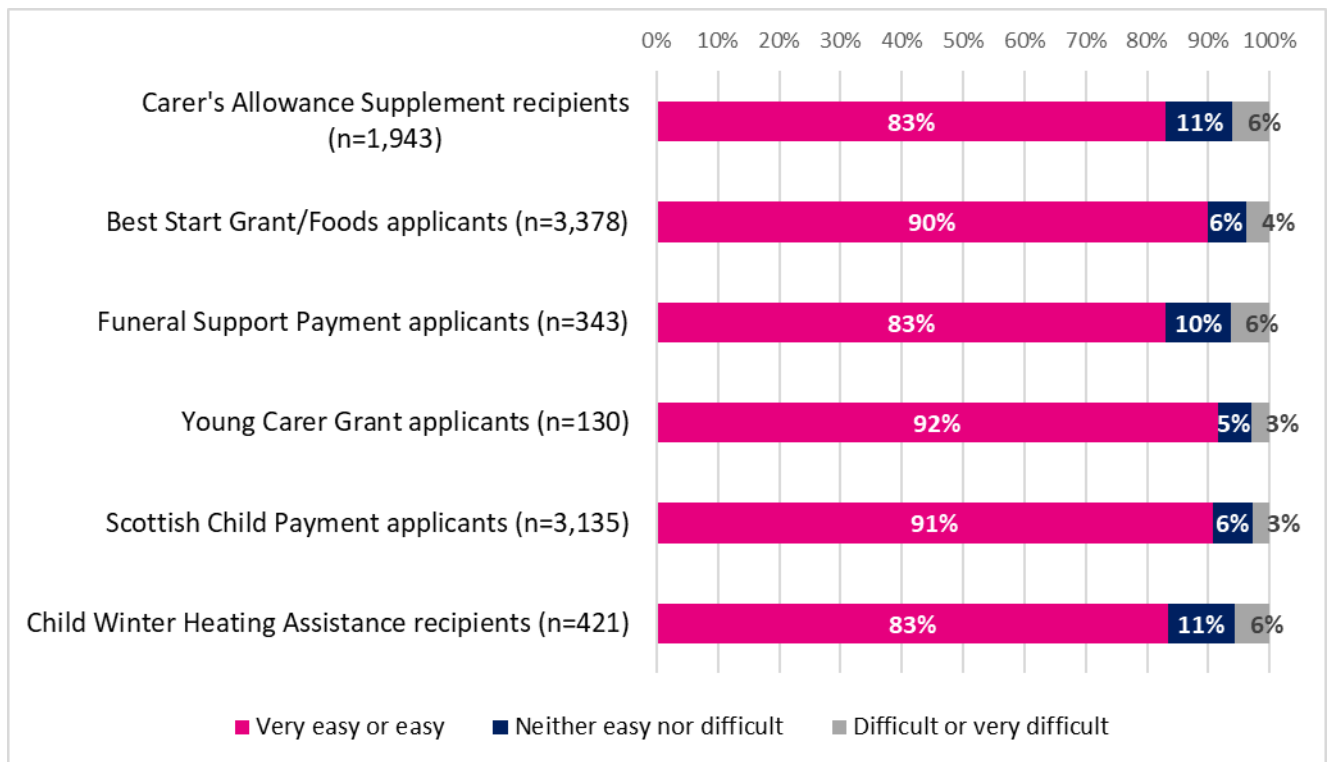
All respondents who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland; Row percentages

Benefit experience	I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland	I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me	I got the support (information or advice) I needed
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=1,943)	86%	85%	88%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=3,378)	91%	91%	91%
Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=343)	86%	90%	89%
Young Carer Grant applicants (n=130)	92%	92%	91%
Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=3,135)	92%	91%	91%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=421)	87%	85%	89%

Just over four-in-five (83%) respondents who had experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement, Child Winter Heating Assistance, or Funeral Support Payment said it was easy to look up or make contact with Social Security Scotland. This was slightly lower than for those with experience of Best Start Grant/Foods (90%), Scottish Child Payment (91%), and Young Carer Grant (92%) (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: How easy or difficult respondents found looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had looked up or made contact



A majority of respondents in each benefit group were also positive about the range of communication choices they had and the support received. However, the benefit groups who were least likely to say it was easy to look up or make contact with Social Security Scotland (those with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement, Child Winter Heating Assistance, or Funeral Support Payment) were less likely to agree with the statements about the range of communication choices they had and the support received, compared to other benefit groups (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Views on communication choices and support received by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit who had looked up or made contact;
Proportion in each group agreeing with statement; Column percentages

Benefit group	I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland	I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me	I got the support (information or advice) I needed
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=1,891-1,918)	86%	85%	88%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=3,333-3,356)	91%	91%	91%
Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=331-341)	86%	90%	89%
Young Carer Grant applicants (n=129-130)	92%	92%	91%
Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=3,093-3,121)	92%	91%	91%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=420-423)	87%	85%	89%

Some demographic groups were less positive about their experience of looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland than others. For example, groups less likely to say they found this easy included:

- respondents with a long-term health condition (83%, compared to 89% of those with no condition)
- those aged 55 and over (77%, compared to at least 89% in all other age groups)
- men (82%, compared to 88% of women)

Results in full and for other demographic groups are provided in the '[Supplementary document: tables and methods](#)'.

Respondents with a long-term condition and those aged 65 and over were also less likely to answer positively about the range of communication choices available. For example, 86% of those with a long-term condition agreed they had enough choice about how they communicated with Social Security Scotland. This figure increased to 91% of respondents with no condition.

5.3 Comments about getting information and advice

Respondents who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland were given the chance to say more about their experience¹⁷.

1,107 responses were given. Just over half of these were positive, and around three-in-ten were negative.

Many positive comments expressed brief overall satisfaction:

“Easy to use”

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Very friendly staff.”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“Everything fine”

Female, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“very easy to do”

Female, aged 45-54, Young Carer Grant and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“1st class service from a department who clearly had my interest at heart”

Male, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Very quick service.”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

Respondents also mentioned finding information clear and easy to locate, or having a good experience contacting and getting advice from staff. Many comments about staff also complimented their helpfulness and friendliness. A number of respondents favourably compared getting information and advice with Social Security Scotland to doing so with the Department for Work and Pensions:

¹⁷ ‘Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of getting information or advice from Social Security Scotland?’

"Great service provided customer service was very straight forward and helpful"
Female, aged 35-44, Funeral Support Payment and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"When I phoned for help and advice I got it no problem at all."
Male, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"As always polite, friendly, professional, very helpful and approachable. Thank you :-)"
Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"A much easier, less stressful route than dealing with the Department of Work and Pensions."
Male, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The communication was great, and phone calls I received after applying helped, the gentleman who contacted me was very informative and very nice to speak to."
Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Can't fault the service I received, very helpful and explained the process step by step. The outcome was great and was contacted regularly as soon as I had an update"
Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"The service and communication can't be faulted! Extremely helpful and thoughtful as well."
Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I think the customer service agents were very helpful . Each time I have phoned in. explaining things to me and very patient with me"
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant, and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Website was informative and easy to use."
Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Very easy to contact which makes a change from DWP. Very friendly and helpful, overall very happy 😊"
Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

However, as in the overall comments covered in Section 3.4, some respondents felt like they did not have enough information or awareness about Social Security Scotland's role, services and benefits that they may be eligible for. A number of respondents suggested more advertising and targeted campaigns:

"Not enough information about other possible entitlement when you receive one, you have to find this out yourself"
Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“Not enough information about other possible entitlement when you receive one, you have to find this out yourself”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“I think there should be a way for more new parents to be told about Social Security Scotland and what they could be entitled to. I was mostly made aware by my midwife and my family member. I feel that those on benefits or that are eligible could be possibly made more aware.”

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“I missed the sure start baby grants as this information is not freely available...the money could have helped me get the stuff my kids needed extremely upset that midwife's etc did not tell me about these benefits or the job centre or the citizens advice when I was struggling and using food banks”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“It was not easy to gain access to that information as someone who has never applied for any sort of benefit before, I feel personally it was rather difficult to gain access to what I was in wasn't entitled to”

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“It was sheer luck that I found out about the payments from a nursery twitter post. There was apparently one we could have been entitled to when my daughter was younger but we had no idea. Everything is too complicated.”

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

“I knew this service was being devolved but had no idea this was now in effect. There has been no TV adverts or media info that I was aware of to inform me of this change.”

Female, aged 65+

“I had been entitled to Carers Allowance for years before I applied. If a friend had not informed me, I still would not know anything about it.”

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“I would never have known of this help unless I had seen an article in the paper. I had also looked after my dad till he died previously. I then took over looking after my mum long before I saw the article about financial help available.”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Common themes mentioned in the negative comments were the helpline waiting time and voice messages not being responded to, as well as issues with the call back system. Some also mentioned the same issue with webchat. Contextual data (gender identity, age, and benefit experience) added to the supporting quotes after their selection, shows that many were given by those with experience of applying for Best Start Grant/Foods and/or Scottish Child Payment. These comments are supported by findings presented in Social Security Scotland's most recent [Insights publication](#), which shows that the wait time for client calls to Social Security Scotland relating to Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment were considerably longer than for other benefits¹⁸:

¹⁸ Average call wait time, 4 July 2020 to 29 March 2021 (minutes: seconds): Best Start Grant 14:21, Scottish Child Payment 15:30, Carers Allowance Supplement 02:50, Child Winter Heating Assistance 07:42, Funeral Support Payment 02:14, Job Start Payment 03:10, Young Carer Grant 03:41

"I had over an hour to wait to get through to speak to someone"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I have spent many hours trying to contact yourselves through online chat and telephone and have never gotten through. I understand with Covid there are less staff but of all the companies etc I've called yours has been the worst by far."

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"The time it has taken to talk to anyone online or by phone is really long I have waited over an hour in queues before speaking to anyone"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I had problems with the webchat to clarify the information sent by you on letter (it kept on dropping). After losing a whole morning trying to contact you through webchat as the waiting time on phone line was enormous I ended up spending 1 hour and 27 minutes until I got someone to answer the phone and finally got it clarified."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Long wait to speak to anyone on the phone. Once I waited in excess of 40 minutes."

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The time it has taken to talk to anyone online or by phone is really long I have waited over an hour in queues before speaking to anyone"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Excessive call waiting times. The callback function is broken."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"When I phoned and there was a waiting time of 50mins I was offered a ring back which was explained to me that the advisor would try 3 times at 10min intervals. I got one call back which I missed which was away around an hour and a half after my initial call but received a voicemail telling me to re-phone and start again. This added another 50mins to my wait time."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Some respondents said they received inaccurate or inconsistent information from staff or through Social Security Scotland webpages:

"Difficulty in getting advice on benefit entitlement and also given wrong advice"

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Each representative I spoke to gave me differing information, so misleading"

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Website is giving incorrect timelines"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I spoke to 2 different people in the webchat who were providing contradictory information between them which was very disappointing and frustrating."

Male, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"There is not a lot of information on who is eligible for grants etc. Sometimes I read it

"Difficulty in getting advice on benefit entitlement and also given wrong advice"

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

and think I will be eligible then get directed to another page and then it seems like the information can be contradictory."

Aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The person I spoke to was unable to give me information. She did not know about the benefits - in fact I had to tell her about it. Very unsatisfactory. My questions were not answered. Very poor for information. In fact I was disgusted at the lack of knowledge."

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Some respondents made the request for different types of communication with Social Security Scotland with several saying they preferred information to be sent out to them by post instead of having to access it online:

“Found it difficult as was told to do everything online but then didn't get any information back then tried post before getting through via phone.”

Female, aged 16-24, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

“My broadband was not working, would prefer information sent out by post, feel that not everyone has internet”

Female, aged 55-64, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“If you send a letter to house it will be very easy for the people like me who don't use much internet”

Male, aged 45-54, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“When it all had been done at the very start via phones and letters is was so much easier. I cannot work a computer I'm 43 years old but really really doing this internet is impossible.”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

“With the help of Citizens Advice Bureau Scotland I got the advice I needed quickly and efficiently. Without their help, I think it would have been more difficult for myself.”

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

6. Experiences with staff

This section presents findings on how respondents who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff felt about their experience.

6.1 Whether respondents had been in contact with staff

Respondents were asked if they had been in contact with a member of Social Security Scotland staff in-person or over the phone, including through an interpreter.

Around four-in-ten respondents (41%) said they had been in contact with a member of staff. This figure varied notably by benefit experience. Almost half of those who said they had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit reported contact with staff (49%), compared to a little more than a quarter (28%) of Carer’s Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients.

Looking at individual benefits, respondents who had applied for Funeral Support Payment were most likely to have been in contact with staff (77%). There was little difference between respondents who had applied for Best Start Grant/Foods (50%), Young Carer Grant (49%), or Scottish Child Payment (47%) applicants.

Demographic groups who more frequently reported contact with staff included:

- minority ethnic respondents (49% compared to 40% of white respondents)
- those living with a long-term health condition (45% compared to 38% of those with no condition).

6.2 Views on contact with staff

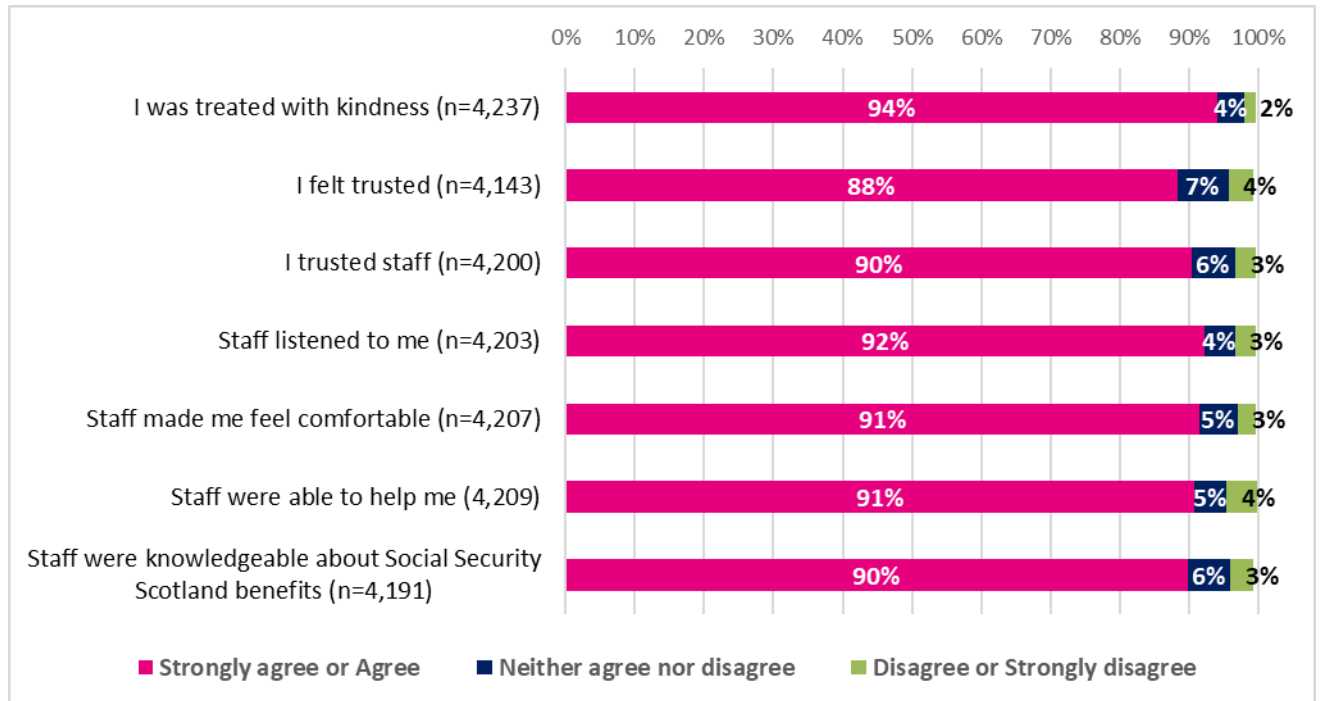
More than nine-in-ten respondents who had been in contact said their overall experience with staff was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (93%). Just 3% rated their experience with staff as poor or very poor.

Table 6.1: Overall rating of experience with staff
All respondents who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff; Column percentages

Response option	All respondents in contact with staff (n=4,263)
Very good	65%
Good	28%
Neither poor nor good	5%
Poor	2%
Very poor	1%

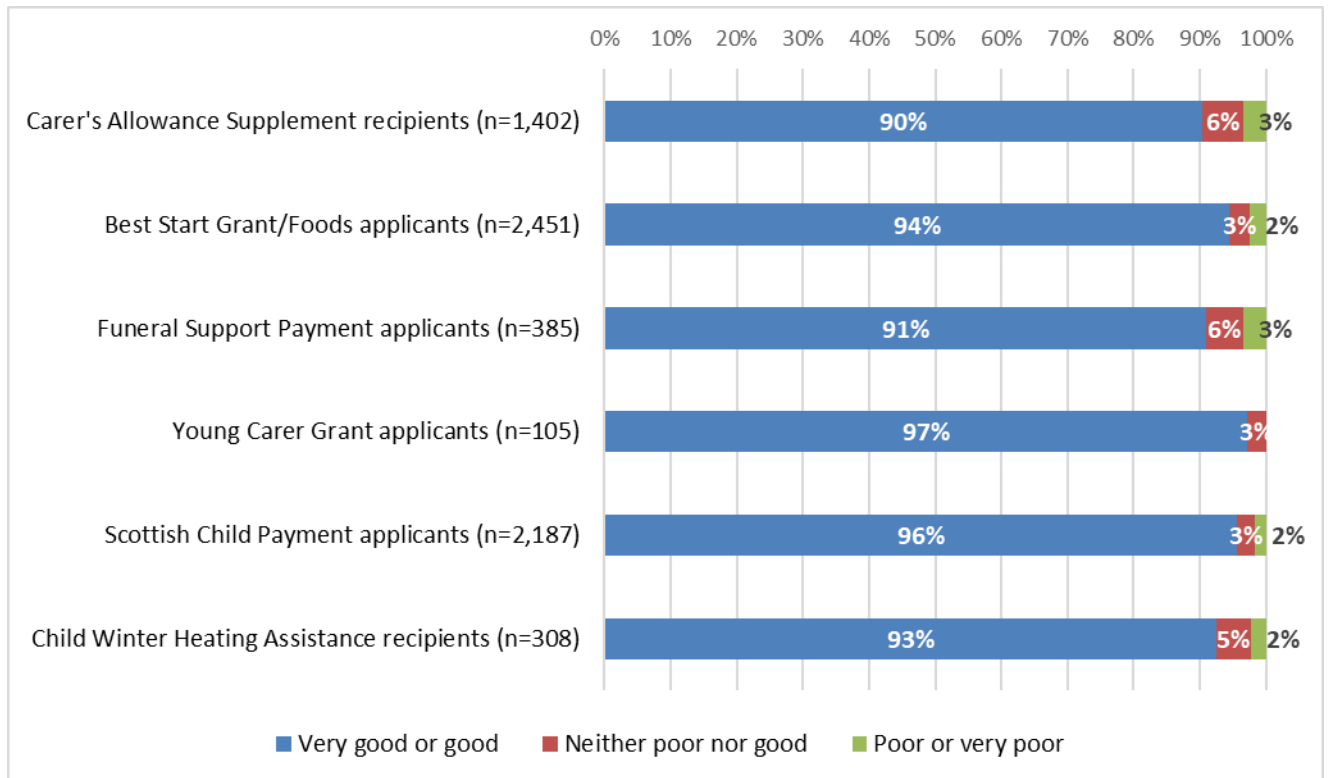
In related questions about their experience, 94% of respondents said staff treated them with kindness (see Figure 6.1 below). Around nine-in-ten also said staff listened to them (92%), made them feel comfortable (91%), and were able to help them (91%).

Figure 6.1: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland staff
All respondents who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff



Respondents were very positive about staff regardless of their benefit experience. For instance, 90% of those with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement described their experience as 'very good' or 'good', as well as 94% of Best Start Grant/Foods applicants, and 96% of Scottish Child Payment applicants (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Overall rating of experience with staff by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff



Responses to follow up questions were also similar across benefit experiences. The only notable difference was that Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients were less likely to say 'I felt trusted' (84%, compared to 89-96% among other groups) and 'I trusted staff' (87%, compared to 92-97% among other groups), as shown in Table 6.2.

Young Carer Grant applicants were particularly likely to reflect favourably on interactions with staff. However, the relatively small number of respondents in this group should be taken into account.

Table 6.2: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland staff by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been incontact with Social Security Scotland staff; Column percentages

Proportion agreeing with statement:	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=1,372-1,394)	Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants (n=2,386-2,434)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=301-306)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=103-105)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=2,147-2,182)	Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=301-306)
I was treated with kindness	91%	96%	95%	96%	96%	95%
I felt trusted	84%	91%	89%	96%	93%	89%
I trusted staff	87%	92%	92%	97%	94%	93%
Staff listened to me	90%	94%	93%	97%	95%	92%
Staff made me feel comfortable	89%	93%	92%	96%	94%	91%
Staff were able to help me	90%	91%	90%	99%	93%	92%
Staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits	88%	92%	89%	93%	93%	90%

Men were slightly less likely to rate their experience with staff as 'very good' or 'good' (89%) compared with women (93%). A smaller proportion of men also agreed the statements:

- I was treated with kindness (90%, compared to 95% of women)
- I felt trusted (84%, compared to 90% of women)
- Staff made me feel comfortable (87%, compared to 92% of women)
- Staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits (87%, compared to 91% of women).

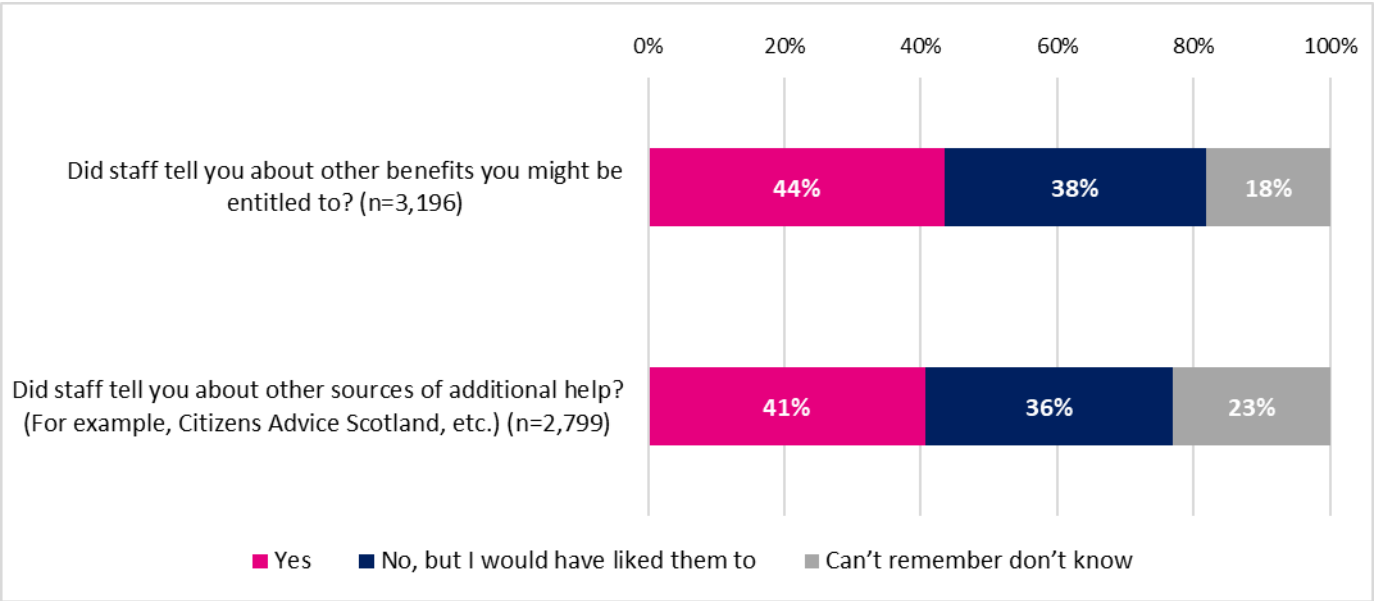
No clear differences were observed between other demographic characteristics.

6.3 Information and advice provided by staff

Respondents who had been in contact with a member of staff were asked whether they were told about other benefits they might have been entitled to. More than four-in-ten (44%) respondents said this was the case. However, slightly less than four-in-ten (38%) said that they would have liked to have been told about other benefits by staff but were not. This issue was also raised in some of the open-text comments in this part of the survey (see Section 6.4 below). These results do not tell us whether staff considered likely eligibility or other factors when choosing whether to provide further advice.

A similar pattern also emerged when respondents were asked if staff told them about other sources of help that might be available too, as outlined in Figure 6.3. Of those who did receive pointers towards other sources, the most common suggestions respondents noted were: Citizens Advice Bureau (54%), welfare rights such as the local council (32%), money help (for example Money Advice Service) (30%), housing support (27%) and foodbanks and similar services (17%).

Figure 6.3: Whether respondents were told about other benefits or sources of help
All respondents who had been in contact with staff¹⁹



Respondents who said they were told about other benefits or sources of additional help were much more likely to rate their overall experience with staff positively. Almost all (99%) of those who were told about other benefits they might be entitled to described their experience with staff as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. This figure fell to 81% for respondents who said they would have liked to have been told about other benefits but were not (see Table 6.3). A similar disparity was also evident with regard to being told about sources of additional help.

¹⁹ This table excludes respondents who answered ‘No, not applicable’ in regard to whether staff told them about other benefits or sources of additional help.

Table 6.3: Relationship between being told about other benefits/sources of help and overall rating of experience with staff

All respondents who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff; Row percentages

Whether told about benefits/other sources of support	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
% of those told about other benefits (n=1,385)	99%	1%	0%
% of those who would have liked to have been told about other benefits but were not (n=1,218)	81%	11%	8%
% of those told about other sources of additional help (n=1,131)	99%	1%	0%
% of those who would have liked to have been told about other sources of additional help but were not (n=1,014)	79%	12%	9%

6.4 Comments about experiences with staff

Respondents who had been in contact with a member of staff had the chance to provide further comment on their experience²⁰.

877 responses were given. Nearly two thirds of the comments were positive and around one-in-five were negative.

Most comments about staff mentioned their helpfulness and friendly or professional manner which helped respondents feel comfortable and fairly treated. Many respondents also spoke of the efficiency and ease of dealing with staff, of getting information that they needed, and finding staff reliable in their knowledge and help. As in other sections, a number of respondents favourably compared their experiences with staff at Social Security Scotland with the Department for Work and Pensions:

“Everybody was very helpful and supportive”

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

“Staff were knowledgeable and handled my query in a professional and timely manner.”

Male, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Staff were courteous and easy to understand”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

²⁰ ‘Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with our staff?’

"Everybody was very helpful and supportive"

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"Prompt advice, kindly given. Promised a call back and got it when i was told it would be."

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I had to call the helpline twice and each time the staff were very helpful and polite"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Staff were very polite and treated me like a human unlike the dwp. It felt good to be treated with respect."

Male, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"You guys are 100% better than the DWP phone lines. I mean more like 100,000% better. Thank you."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Very nice and kind, trying to help out as much as they could. Very understandable, very helpful. Made me feel on my ease while I was talking or asking stuff. Very soft spoken, take their time to explain or help you out and make things easier for you, by looking in the things to be more helpful. Lots of times they come with more information or things to help me out than I knew myself. Made me feel comfortable about my situation. Told me about more things that I could get as in benefits."

Male, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Very helpful, didn't feel intimidated. Sometimes asking for help can be seen as what people call scroungers. I was treated as a person needing help couldn't have been treated better."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The staff I have spoken to were happy in their work, friendly to me and extremely helpful. The organisational culture is clearly very positive and supportive. Completely different experience from the slightly threatening and quite scary dealings I have had with other benefits agencies."

Female, aged 45-54, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant, and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Most negative comments were about not getting adequate help from staff. These included where a staff member made an error, did not have the right knowledge or information to help, or was unable to give an update on an application. Several respondents felt staff should receive further training:

"Staff should be more aware of procedures. They were quite taken aback when I made them aware of my knowledge of the procedures. The information that I was given by the managers was incorrect. From my previous working experience in finance procedures I knew that the information was incorrect and this was eventually proved right."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"My impression is that they are poorly trained and don't even know who to contact if they are unsure about anything."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Staff should be more aware of procedures. They were quite taken aback when I made them aware of my knowledge of the procedures. The information that I was given by the managers was incorrect. From my previous working experience in finance procedures I knew that the information was incorrect and this was eventually proved right."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Staff on the phone are incompetent and frustrating to deal with... Training much needed for the staff who work on the phones!"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Any time I spoke to a member of staff over the phone they seemed to be inundated with questions from people about things that they had no idea why they were happening. I would be told there was a note on my file etc to then have to call back about the exact same thing happening as before and the next person have no record of me ever contacting, frustrating to say the least."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"They weren't much help at all. Once I finally spoke to someone she told me she didn't know how much longer I'd be waiting to hear about my application despite it already being 4 months of hearing nothing."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Staff couldn't find our original documents which we sent back in early 2020, staff couldn't help us and we made numerous calls about it but to no avail, very disappointed"

Male, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"She displayed very poor knowledge of carer's allowance Scottish supplement and how and when it would be paid. I felt I was telling her about the benefit. She came across as very unhelpful and uninterested."

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Several respondents were dissatisfied with staff attitude and their treatment:

"Not all were polite. Felt like I was doing something wrong when speaking to them. When you have had a bad day the last thing you need is someone speaking down to you."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"very rude, unhelpful and can't be bothered attitude from staff. Passed from person to person without any help at all"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant, and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"When I called Social Security Scotland to change my address the worker did not have a friendly manner and I thought his tone and attitude was inappropriate that it seemed he was being judgmental that I was on benefits, just from his tone and manner of speaking to me"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"dealing with dry, uncaring, and very curt staff made phone calls a angst ridden, dreadful experience"

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"I felt that the lady I spoke with tried to belittle me. I myself was once a professional and I

"Not all were polite. Felt like I was doing something wrong when speaking to them. When you have had a bad day the last thing you need is someone speaking down to you."
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient
only act on behalf of a minor not for benefits myself. In all I did not find it a pleasant experience."
Female, aged 55-64

As seen in the comments presented in Section 5, the time taken to speak with staff or to receive information or updates on an application was cited several times in negative comments:

"When I tried phoning was way too long for answer"
Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"The staff took 6 weeks to reply to my application for a funeral support grant. The crematorium only gave me 3 weeks to pay"
Female, aged 45-54, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"The wait time to speak to staff is excessive 1hr + wait times"
Female, aged 35-44

"I've contacted the web chat and called on 4 occasions now and only on the last contact do I feel like someone is going to take ownership for my application - I keep being told 2 weeks and have now waited 6 months"
Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

Most mixed comments combined negative and positive comments, such as complimenting staff while expressing dissatisfaction with the process or outcome. Other mixed comments related to having a good experience with some staff but not others:

"They were all lovely, but no one could give me an exact update on my query."
Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"The man I spoke to on the phone was so helpful after over an hour wait it was refreshing to speak to someone who was so nice. He was understanding that communication wasn't great in regards to informing people about their application"
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"The advisor I spoke with on the phone was very efficient, polite and helpful and did look into my enquiry. However on live chat it was different while the advisor was polite and prompt with responses I recieved what appeared as an automated read of screen response, this did not give me any information that I didnt have already."
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"It wasn't all members of staff I spoke with about four over the last week. The last two I spoke to were amazing the previous two had a lack of understanding and the first one did not get back to me in enough time"
Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods, Scottish Child Payment, and Funeral

"They were all lovely, but no one could give me an exact update on my query."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant
Support Payment applicant

"The first member of staff I spoke to was definitely not as helpful as the second person I spoke with, I think there needs to be consistency and no matter who you speak with you should get the same answer and the same amount of help."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I spoke with 2 staff members at 2 separate times. The first guy claimed he would "chase up" my application as I hadn't heard anything back at all. This staff member actually didn't do anything he said he would, so after another 6 week wait, I found out he hadn't done anything. But the second staff member I spoke to, I wish I'd gotten her name now, because she was incredible! She made it her goal to sort everything for me & had it all done in 1 day! She even called me back to let me know it had been done!"

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I think it very much depends on the individual you get to speak to. Some are very human and helpful and some less so"

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Supporting the findings discussed above, several comments requested greater effort from staff to let clients know about other benefit entitlements or information that might be relevant to their circumstances. It must be noted here that the open text question regarding experiences with staff comes immediately after the question regarding being told about other benefits and sources of help, and so it may not be surprising that some respondents mentioned this here:

"Being referred to additional information would be beneficial."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Should help with other benefits especially if not applied before, you don't know!"

Male, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Can give more information about the benefits which you are eligible for thanks."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"If they could tell us more about what other benefits we can get"

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

7. Applying for Social Security Scotland benefits

This section presents findings on how respondents who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit found the experience.

7.1 Applying for benefits and success rate

61% of respondents said they had experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit – at least one of Best Start Grant/Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Job Start Payment, or Scottish Child Payment²¹. Around one-in-four (25%) respondents applied for one benefit, and a little over one-in-three (35%) applied for two or more.

The proportion applying for each was:

- Best Start Grant/Foods – 53%
- Funeral Support Payment – 5%
- Young Carer Grant – 2%
- Job Start Payment – 0.3%
- Scottish Child Payment – 44%

Around nine-in-ten respondents who applied for Funeral Support Payment (91%), Young Carer Grant (90%), and Job Start Payment (93%) were successful in their application. The success rate was lower for respondents who applied for Best Start Grant/Foods (79%) and Job Start Payment (81%) (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Application success rate
All respondents who had applied for each benefit

Benefit	Proportion of applicants who were successful
Best Start Grant/Foods (n=4,884)	79%
Funeral Support Payment (n=500)	91%
Young Carer Grant (n=212)	90%
Job Start Payment (n=31)	81%
Scottish Child Payment (n=4,591)	93%

Overall, across all benefits, around one-in-five (21%) respondents were unsuccessful with one or more applications made. However, most respondents (95%) were successful with at least one application.

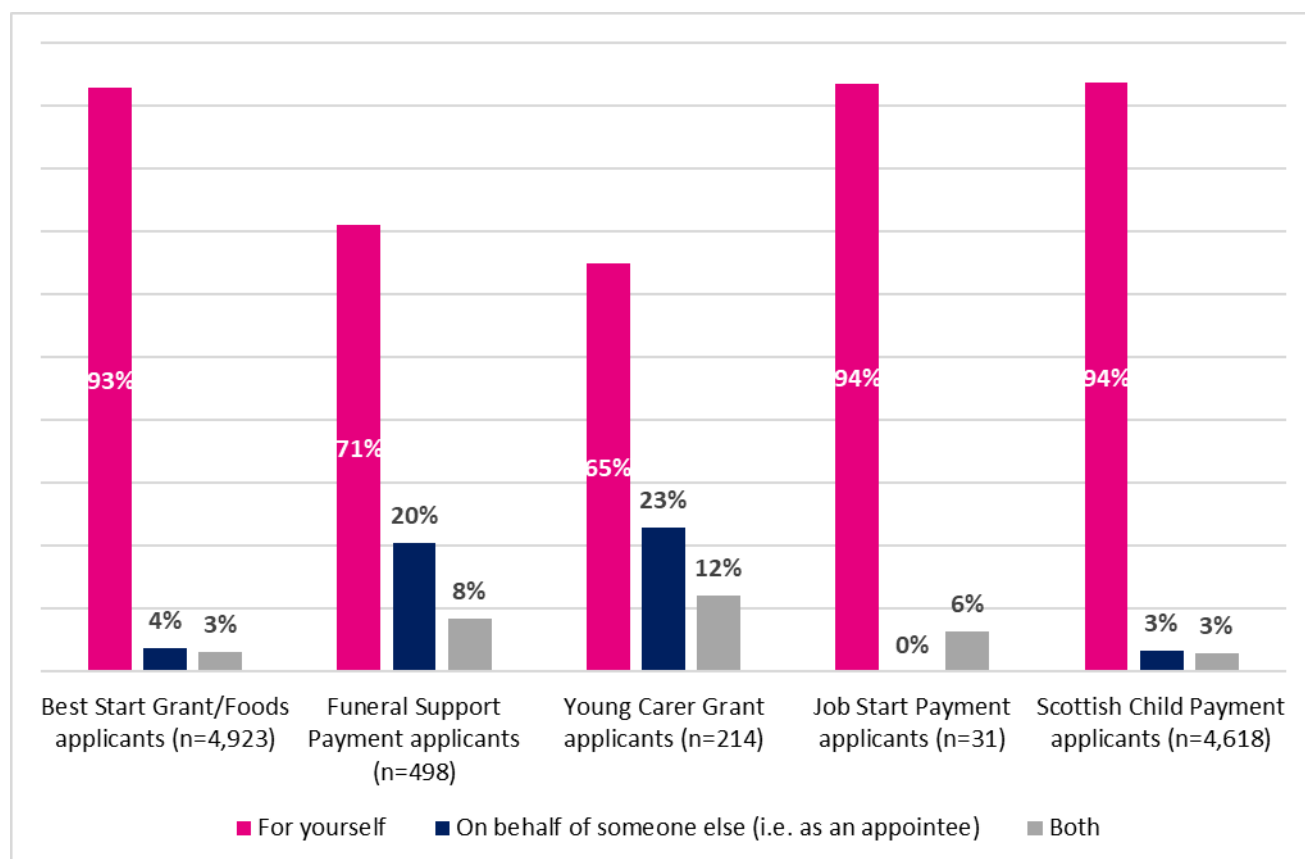
The findings presented in the section below relate only to respondents who had applied for a benefit. Anyone who had only received Carer's Allowance Supplement and or Child Winter

²¹ The proportions applying for any and each benefit shown in section 7.1 relate to all 10,575 respondents, including a small number who skipped the benefit experience questions. The benefit experience of respondents is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.

Heating Assistance did not answer these questions. The [‘Supplementary document: tables and methods’](#) outlines the benefit experience of survey respondents in more detail. Most respondents said they had applied for themselves (91%). Around one-in-twenty (6%) had applied on behalf of someone else (i.e. as a carer or an appointee) and a small proportion (3%) said they applied for both themselves and someone else.

Respondents with experience of applying for Funeral Support Payment or Young Carer Grant were much more likely to have experience of applying for someone else, as shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Who respondents applied for, by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit



The likelihood of having applied on behalf of other people²² varied by demographic characteristics. This was more commonly reported by groups including:

- men (22%, compared to 7% of women)
- respondents aged 55 or older (28% compared to 8% of respondents aged 16-54).

7.2 Application method

Respondents most commonly reported applying for benefits online (89%); far fewer applied via phone (16%), postal application (7%), in person (0%), and via webchat (0%). Respondents could select more than one option to capture complex interactions or multiple applications where relevant.

²² This could be exclusively or as well as applying for themselves.

There was a clear difference in the way in which Funeral Support Payment applicants completed their application(s). Less than half (45%) of this group completed an online application, whereas nearly three-in-five (58%) applied over the phone. However, around nine-in-ten respondents who had applied for other benefits did so online (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Application methods used by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit; Column percentages

Method used to apply	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=4,927)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=501)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=213)	Job Start Payment applicants (n=31)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=4,627)
Online	93%	45%	89%	100%	94%
Phone	11%	58%	12%	10%	10%
Post	7%	14%	12%	#	6%
In person	0%	2%	0%	#	0%
Webchat	0%	0%	-	-	0%

7.3 Date of most recent application

Respondents were asked when they had made their most recent application. 90% gave the year (from 2018 to 2021), with most also specifying the relevant month. 10% of benefit applicants said they could not remember when their most recent application had been, preferred not to say, or skipped the question.

Around half (51%) of respondents who had applied for a benefit said their most recent application was during 2020, and a third (33%) in 2021 (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.3: Year of most recent application

All respondents who had applied for at least one benefit; Column percentages

Year	All benefit applicants (n=6,327)
2018	1%
2019	6%
2020	51%
2021	33%
'Can't remember/don't know', 'prefer not to say' or skipped question	10%

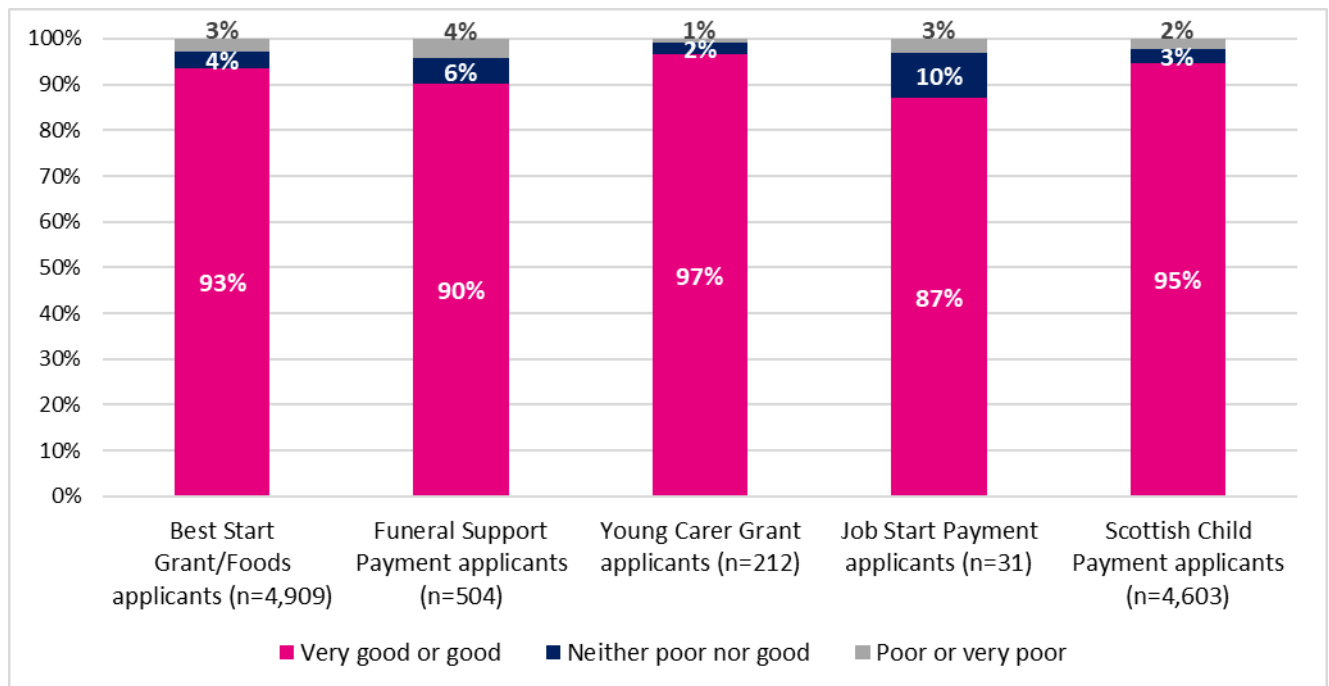
7.4 Views on application process

More than nine-in-ten respondents (93%) who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit said their experience of the application process overall was 'very good' or 'good'.

Figure 7.2 presents the findings broken down by benefit experience. It shows a positive experience across the board, though those with experience of applying for Young Carer Grant, and Scottish Child Payment provided particularly positive feedback.

Figure 7.2: Overall rating of application process by benefit experience

All respondents who had applied for each benefit



A substantial majority (at least 90%) of respondents in each demographic sub-group described the application process as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. These results can be seen in full in the [‘Supplementary document: tables and methods’](#).

Over nine-in-ten respondents who had applied for a benefit said that the application process was clear (94%), and a similar proportion felt that they were only asked relevant questions (92%) (see Table 7.4).

A smaller proportion of respondents said their application was handled in a reasonable time frame (85%), whilst around three-quarters (76%) agreed they got enough progress updates. Lack of updates was also a common issue highlighted in open-text comments in this section of the survey (see Section 7.7).

Table 7.4: Views on application process

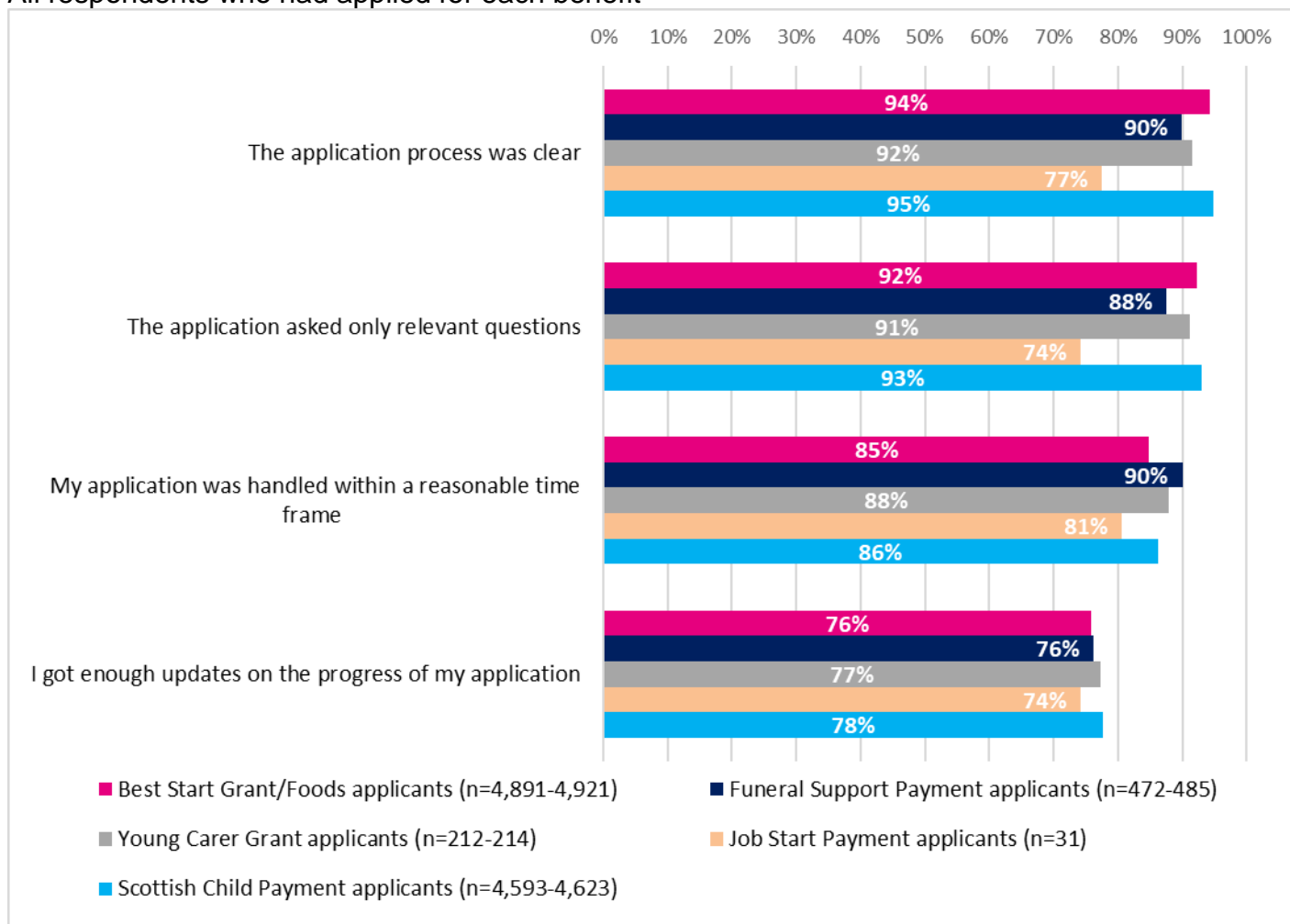
All respondents who had applied for at least one benefit; Row percentages

Thinking about when you applied...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Can't remember / Don't know
The application process was clear (n=6,402)	94%	3%	2%	1%
The application asked only relevant questions (n=6,353)	92%	4%	1%	3%
My application was handled within a reasonable time frame (n=6,373)	85%	6%	7%	1%
I got enough updates on the progress of my application (n=6,353)	76%	11%	11%	2%

Respondents who had applied for Job Start Payment were less likely than those who had applied for other benefits to agree that the application process was clear (77%) and asked only relevant questions (74%), however this is a small sample size (n=31) and so should be interpreted with caution.

Compared with those with experience of Carer’s Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant/Foods, or Scottish Child Payment, Funeral Support Payment applicants were less likely to agree that that the application process was clear (90%) and asked only relevant questions (88%). However, conversely, this group was also most likely to say that their application was handled within a reasonable time frame (90%), as shown in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3: Views on application process by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit



Respondents aged 55 were more likely to say their application was handled in a reasonable time frame (92%, compared to 86% of respondents aged 16-54). However, otherwise there was no clear variation in the level of agreement with the four statements by demographic characteristics.

7.5 Following-up applications for updates or to make changes

Around a third of respondents who had applied for a benefit said they made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about the progress (32%) or result (32%) of their application(s). One-in-ten (11%) had been in touch to change details after the result of an application.

Around half of respondents who had applied for Job Start payment (52%) were most likely to report following up with Social Security Scotland for a progress update on their application (see Table 7.5). This aligns with the finding discussed above that such respondents were also least likely to agree they got enough progress updates from Social Security Scotland, and that the application was handled within a reasonable time frame.

Table 7.5: Whether respondents followed up their application for progress updates or to change details, by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit; Column percentages

Did you contact Social Security Scotland to...	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=4,853-4,915)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=413-479)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=205-213)	Job Start payment applicants (n=29-31)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=4,567-4,613)
Find out about the progress of your application(s)	35%	35%	29%	43%	31%
Find out the result of your application(s)	33%	32%	30%	52%	32%
Change details after the result of an application	12%	8%	10%	30%	11%

7.5 Comments about applying for Social Security Scotland benefits

Anyone who had applied for any of Best Start Grant/Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Job Start Payment, or Scottish Child Payment was given the chance to comment on their experience²³.

779 responses were given. Nearly half of all comments were positive, and around three-in-ten were negative.

Most positive comments said the application process was straightforward, clear and easy. Several mentioned getting help from staff, and some were thankful for updates they received:

²³ 'Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience applying for Social Security Scotland benefits?'

"Staff have always been very helpful and friendly when i have had to contact. Always kept updated on applications."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Was a straightforward application. I've fortunately never found myself claiming any benefits before so was unsure on how it works but it was straightforward."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Everything was perfect and so easy which is really great as it is a stressful time so it was good that the application was straightforward and staff were amazing and helpful."

Female, aged 25-34, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"It was very easy to apply and staff was very good I am really happy thanks."

Male, aged 45-54, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"My experience has been really good and without any hassle."

Female, Scottish Child Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Funeral support staff were excellent and made the process clear"

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Really qualified staff"

Male, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"It was very simple & quick. The updates are greatly appreciated."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Very easy application form, got a text explaining how long it would take to hear back about the result. Which was handy knowing it was going to be a few months instead of having to call frequently for updates."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The forms were so easy and quick to fill in. Just a few details about myself and everything was checked out on their end. Also, didn't take too long for a decision to be made. Very positive experience."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The process was easy, simple and not overly complicated like many DWP applications. I was kept informed of how long the process would take. There were no delays in receiving confirmation of application or receipt of payment. Overall a very good experience in applying for and receiving this benefit."

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I find the whole experience so easy the questions aren't too technical with big words it's just simply laymen's terms straight to the point easy to answer and understand"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

The largest group of negative comments were about the time taken for a decision to be made on an application. This will also be covered in Section 8 of this report. Several comments regarding a long wait for a decision also referenced the lack of updates while waiting:

"Still not received a decision regarding Scottish Child Payment. 4 months for a decision is absolutely disgraceful."

Scottish Child Payment applicant

"It took over three months to even find out and after that I was rejected. Why should I wait three months."

Male, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"After applying for the Scottish child payment I didn't hear anything at all. I know I would have to wait until at least February 2021 but even now I have not heard from anyone whether I was successful or not."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Wasn't contacted when my application didn't get processed due to no communication between teams. My application took 5 months to finally get processed"

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"No updates whatsoever on applications. Very long wait time for an outcome on applications. No help in the interim."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Applying wasn't easy to do, I had to wait months and months and months to be accepted and staff on the phone could only tell me that my application wasn't picked up at all yet even after 30 days, I only got paid from February 2021 when I applied back in October 2020. So I should have got all that back dated but I didn't. This is a good idea but the applications and the time it takes is ridiculous. And I missed out on money cause of it."

Male, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I still have not heard about the Scottish child payment but applied on the first day it opened would have expected to hear either way by now"

Aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I applied for Scottish Child Payment back in January, received a message in February to wait for the decision. Still haven't heard back 4 months later or received payment."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I've been sending off my application for the best start foods that I get letters saying I'm entitled to get since my son was born and he's now turning 3 in November but I never hear anything back unless it's another letter informing me that I am entitled to it but I gave up after sending it off about 3 times in the post"

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Some respondents commented that they found an application process unclear or had technical issues with an online application. Others also said that there was insufficient guidance on how to complete an application:

"Very complex, hard to understand, not easy to complete, very time consuming, not enough information how to complete, don't explain enough how to complete certain questions"

Male, aged 45-54, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"Online form can be very difficult to fill in"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Very complex, hard to understand, not easy to complete, very time consuming, not enough information how to complete, don't explain enough how to complete certain questions"

Male, aged 45-54, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"I had big issue on the website to update my documents. I couldn't submit it and an error message was appearing on the website."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The online application was a bit difficult as the form would take me back to the start when I had clicked to complete it"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Some issues around clarity of the online form/ language used/ poorly explained (BSF, SCP). Clickable (?) buttons that open pop up boxes with definitions of terms or explainers may be useful."

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"It was frustrating that I had to provide a lot of evidence that was already provided through universal credit. It would be better if these systems were connected."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Felt that the questions on the application weren't well thought through and made it difficult"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"When applying online and over the phone the system wouldn't accept it. Then had a postal application that when got sent back went to back of queue. Ridiculous service the whole process I had to keep contacting to be told they hadn't received my application."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Some of the negative comments related to unclear, inaccurate, or contradictory communications they received from Social Security Scotland regarding their application:

"Was very hard to get in contact with anyone and emails where mixed messages and where getting told wrong information and then getting told something else."

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"My Scottish child payment process was very muddled. I was being told different dates each time I spoke to someone and even now it doesn't come in when it should. This causes a bit of stress as I rely on it for things."

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I got my payment later than everyone else - they said payment would be backdated then sent email out to say that was a mistake then wouldn't be backdated"

Female, aged 16-24, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I was told I wasn't eligible for the best start food vouchers then a few months later I was sent a letter saying I was but at this point I was due to go back to work so I wouldn't have been therefore I think I may have missed support while on statutory maternity placing me in a worse financial position"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I got told 3 weeks ago that social security payment would be made the following week still"

"Was very hard to get in contact with anyone and emails where mixed messages and where getting told wrong information and then getting told something else."

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

no payment and got a letter to ask to send in more evidence I applied for this away back last year"

Female, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"After I received award letter and information when it will start had another phone call to provide some information and documents."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

A small number of respondents criticised the way in which the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications are combined. The combined application also led to issues with then receiving decisions for both benefits, as was also raised by respondents in later comments about decisions (see Section 9.3):

"I applied for the Best Start Grant in June and was told I was not eligible and to reapply in July. I understand I didn't meet the criteria at that point in time but I was weeks away from being eligible. Why couldn't my application have been approved and the funds released when I was eligible? Rather than have to apply twice? It makes no sense."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"[...] Best Start Grant and Foods should be separate I feel. As I applied for Best Start Grant [...] 2019, then for Best Start Foods when it first became available after this, and had a letter declining application. Upon ringing I was told that was for the grant, which I had not applied for as I understand it's a one off payment. Similarly the same issue arose in [...] 2020 when I applied for the Best Start Foods again (for the pregnancy part) I got a letter declining saying I'd already had the grant payment. I understand it's the system but having this as separate applications would cause less confusion I feel."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I believe I had to apply for the food grant and the Best Start Grant together. I knew I wasn't eligible for the food grant so it seemed silly to apply and it was upsetting to get a letter saying I wasn't eligible. I felt like I had made a fraudulent application even though I knew I wasn't entitled. I also wasn't sure which grant the letter saying I wasn't entitled to referred to so was unclear if I would get the Best Start Grant."

Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

Several respondents suggested an option to monitor the progress of an application or payment through an online webpage:

"I think you should have a page where you can enter details and access your application to see the progress of current application"

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"An app to track progress/dates when payment comes in/what payment is for rather than just coded monies in bank account would be helpful I think"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"There was no confirmation that my application had been recieved. Having an account where could check progress etc would be helpful."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I think you should have a page where you can enter details and access your application to see the progress of current application"

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"should be more information how to check progress"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

8. Receiving payment

This section presents results on respondents' experience of receiving benefit payments.

8.1 Receiving payments from Social Security Scotland

Regardless of their response to other questions, all respondents were asked if they had received any benefit payments from Social Security Scotland. Around nine-in-ten (91%) of respondents said they had, whilst 9% had not²⁴.

Those who had received a payment were asked which benefits this related to. Results largely mirrored the overall benefit experience indicated by respondents elsewhere in the survey (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Benefits received by those receiving payments

All respondents who had received benefit payments from Social Security Scotland; Column percentages

Benefit(s) received	All payment recipients (n=9,528)
Carer's Allowance Supplement	43%
Best Start Grant	38%
Best Start Foods	26%
Funeral Support Payment	4%
Young Carer Grant	1%
Job Start Payment	0%
Scottish Child Payment	46%
Child Winter Heating Assistance	9%

8.2 Overall experience of receiving benefit payments

The vast majority of respondents (94%) said that their overall experience of receiving benefit payment(s) from Social Security Scotland was 'very good' or 'good'. Only 2% described their experience as poor or very poor (see Table 8.2).

²⁴ A small proportion (1%) of those who reported they had received a payment here (n=9,562) did not indicate they had received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance, or applied for any benefit in earlier questions. These respondents have been kept in the analysis of those who have received a payment. This makes little to no difference to the figures reported.

Table 8.2: Overall rating of experience of receiving payments

All respondents who had received benefit payments from Social SecurityScotland; Column percentages

Response options	All payment recipients (n=9,528-9,546)
Very good	70%
Good	24%
Neither poor nor good	4%
Poor	1%
Very poor	1%

A substantial majority (93% or more) of respondents with experience of receiving payments for each individual benefit also described their experience as 'very good' or 'good' (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3: Overall rating of experience of receiving payments by benefit received

All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit; Column percentages

Benefit received	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=4,092)	94%	5%	2%
Best Start Grant (n=3,589)	96%	3%	1%
Best Start Foods (n=2,469)	95%	3%	1%
Funeral Support Payment (n=401)	93%	5%	2%
Young Carer Grant (n=119)	98%	2%	-
Scottish Child Payment (n=4,421)	96%	3%	1%
Child Winter Heating Assistance (n=831)	96%	3%	1%

Ratings were similar across different demographic breakdowns, with over 90% in each key group saying their experience was good. These results can be seen in full in the ['Supplementary document: tables and methods'](#).

8.3 Timing and accuracy of benefit payments

The vast majority (91%) of respondents who had received a payment said they got it when Social Security Scotland said they would. A similar proportion said that they were paid the right amount 'first time' (93%) and, where relevant, the right amount 'every time' (92%).

These figures varied slightly by benefit experience however, as shown in Table 8.4. For instance, the proportion saying they got their payment when Social Security Scotland said they would fell to 89% amongst Best Start Foods recipients and 88% for Young Carer Grant recipients.

Table 8.4: Whether payments were on time and accurate

All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit; Row percentages

Benefit group	Received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would	Received right amount first time	Received right amount every time
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=3,796-4,006)	94%	95%	94%
Best Start Grant recipients (n=3,342-3,567)	90%	92%	91%
Best Start Foods recipients (n=2,419-2,455)	89%	90%	89%
Funeral Support Payment recipients (n=191-373)	92%	93%	90%
Young Carer Grant recipients (n=65-120)	88%	98%	95%
Job Start Payment recipients (n=25)	92%	100%	-
Scottish Child Payment (n=4,337-4,407)	91%	92%	92%
Child Winter Heating Assistance (n=707-797)	92%	93%	92%

Ethnic minority respondents (84%) were less likely to say they had received their payment when expected compared to white respondents (93%). However, this difference was driven by a greater proportion saying they could not remember whether this had been the case (14%, compared to 5% of white respondents).

The likelihood of having received payment on time also differed by age of respondent. For example, 85% of 16-24 year olds said they had received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would, compared to 96% of those aged 55 and over.

8.4 Impact of benefit payments

Respondents were asked about the impact that benefit payment(s) from Social Security Scotland have had for them. On a scale of zero ('not at all') to ten ('a lot'), benefit recipients were asked to rate how much their payment(s) had:

- Helped to make a difference to their life
- Helped them to control their finances
- Helped them to pay for what they needed.

Ratings provided were grouped into low (zero to three), medium (four to seven) and high (eight to ten) categories for the purposes of analysis. Overall most respondents gave a high rating for the impact of receiving payments, as outlined in Table 8.5.

The table also shows the average score given in response to each statement ranged from 7.8 for payments 'helping '[respondents] to control [their] finances' to 8.4 for 'helping to make a difference to [the recipient's] life'.

Table 8.5: Impact of benefit payments

All respondents with experience of receiving payments; Column percentages and average score

Rating of impact of benefit payment in relation to statement from zero ('not at all') to ten ('a lot')	Helped make a difference to your life (n=9,419)	Helped you to control your finances (n=9,331)	Helped you to pay for what you needed (n=9,423)
Proportion saying zero to three	5%	9%	7%
Proportion saying four to seven	21%	26%	21%
Proportion saying eight to ten	74%	65%	72%
Proportion saying ten	57%	46%	54%
Average (mean) rating	8.4	7.8	8.2

The average impact ratings given in response to the three statements were similar across the different benefit groups, as Table 8.6 shows.

Table 8.6: Average impact rating by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit; Average score by row for each statement

Benefit received	How much benefit payments have:		
	Helped make a difference to your life	Helped you to control your finances	Helped you to pay for what you needed
Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=4,010-4,048)	8.5	7.9	8.2
Best Start Grant (n=3,565-3,576)	8.7	8.0	8.6
Best Start Foods (n=2,459-2,465)	8.7	8.1	8.6
Funeral Support Payment (n=341-384)	8.4	7.9	8.4
Young Carer Grant (n=117-120)	8.3	7.4	8.4
Job Start Payment (n=27)	8.5	7.8	8.5
Scottish Child Payment (n=4,407-4,422)	8.6	7.9	8.4
Child Winter Heating Assistance (n=815-825)	8.7	8.1	8.6

The ratings given showed some difference between demographic groups. For example, respondents living with a long-term health condition (77%) were more likely to give a high impact rating than those with no condition (73%) (see Table 8.7). Furthermore, white respondents were more likely to give a high rating for all three statements compared to minority ethnic respondents, as were women compared with men, and respondents aged 16-54 compared with those aged 55+.

Table 8.7: Proportion giving impact of rating of 8-10 by demographic group

All respondents with experience of receiving payments in each demographic group; Row percentages

Proportion providing rating of 8-10 for extent to which benefit payments have:			
Demographic group	Helped make a difference to your life	Helped you to control your finances	Helped you to pay for what you needed
Gender identity			
Man (n=1,593-1,614)	67%	62%	66%
Woman (n=7,482-7556)	76%	66%	74%
Long-term health condition			
With long-term physical/mental health condition (n=2,777-2,820)	77%	67%	74%
No condition (n=5,821-5,861)	73%	65%	71%
Ethnicity			
White (n=7,906-7,986)	76%	67%	74%
Minority ethnic (n=943-954)	61%	55%	58%
Age			
Aged 16-54 (n=1,427-1,478)	76%	66%	74%
Aged 55+ (n=6,685-6,711)	71%	64%	70%

8.5 Comments about receiving benefit payments

Anyone who had received a benefit payment had the chance to offer views on their experience²⁵.

1,699 respondents provided comments. This was the most to any open text question by some distance.

Around three-in-five comments were positive and around one-in-five were negative.

The most frequent theme among positive comments was an appreciation for benefit payments. Some comments were general expressions of thanks. Others mentioned specific benefits and the positive impact payments had on their lives:

“The extra money helps me from going into debt and helps pay some bills”

Male, aged 65+, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“It was a life saver, thanks”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant recipient

“It’s a life line. Greatly appreciated and needed.”

Male, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

“It was a nice surprise and helped me to buy a new cooker outright instead of on finance, as mine had just broken and with having two young children it was a relief from the stress of having to afford one.”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“This is an excellent service and really helped my when my brother died suddenly and had no assets/savings or life insurance. Don’t know what I would have did had I not received this payment, I would have been in a lot of debt.”

Female, aged 45-54, Funeral Support Payment recipient

“Carer’s allowance extra payments and winter payment all make a huge difference when one adult cannot commit to employment due to their full-on caring role.”

Female, aged 35-44, Carer’s Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Over 150 comments came from respondents who mentioned the positive impact payments had on their children. Some mentioned the general benefit that increased income had made to their families. Others specifically mentioned benefits such as Best Start Foods or Scottish Child Payment. A smaller number mentioned the beneficial impact of receiving benefit payments during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“Amazing service provided to those in need and every little helps when you have small children.”

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

²⁵ ‘Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience receiving benefit payments?’

"Amazing service provided to those in need and every little helps when you have small children."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"I am a working single mum of twin toddlers. The payments have helped me to buy essential items like clothes, footwear and all the other things the kids need. Having twins is expensive because they both need the same things at the same time and the outlay is huge. I just wanted to say a massive thank you for all the help you have provided. It has been invaluable."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Foods and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"During the last winter and all through the Covid lockdown we as a family had to shield due to my son's disabilities so electricity cost was a lot higher. With carers top up and winter payments this made it more manageable"

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"The payments meant my children got what they needed, without added worry on how I would pay for bills etc, it was nice to get them clothes and shoes they really needed without the stress of weeks unpaid bills etc"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Payments helped a lot as my partner and I been furloughed for a year and still part am. Helped by our 4 kids especially twins what they need."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Such helpful payments making sure my son had everything he needed to start nursery & able to buy fresh fruit & veg week in week out. The Scottish Child Payments have been a blessing in helping us pay for things the children need as they grow."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"These payments greatly helped/help me a lot, I have twins and the Best Start Grant helped me purchase things for them and stock up on baby milk...Now my kids are 18 months old and the Scottish Child Payments help me a lot especially with nappies as I go through so many."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"The payments have helped massively in regards to buying my child what she needs, including clothes, shoes and activities."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"I'm an unpaid carer and I really appreciate this extra payment, it's helped me to support my elderly, infirm parents through the COVID pandemic"

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The payment came at a time when we really needed it. We recently found ourselves relying on universal credit due to a drop in income from covid and UC didn't even cover all our basic monthly bills. We would have built up a lot more credit card debt to get us through this time if we hadn't received these payments."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Being a single parent of three it helped so much from paying bills to feeding kids to getting clothes/ footwear sometimes getting out when we could"

"Amazing service provided to those in need and every little helps when you have small children."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment recipient

"We are extremely greatfull for the help given. My partner recieves the carers supplement. Between that and the child winter payment I received it has made such a huge difference to our lives and being able to care for our children. Thank you."

Female, aged 25-34, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Lockdown has been much harder on unpaid carers than the general population and this extra money made a huge difference."

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The extra payments have been a real help especially with covid."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Respondents also made positive comments about the ease, accuracy or timing of payments:

"I could not fault the service and accuracy."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The dates given are very accurate and this makes budgeting on a low income a lot easier. It makes such a difference in buying items my partner needs like clothing and bedding for example."

Male, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"What they said they would do they kept to their word and payments were received."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Always on the time frame you are told"

Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Payments were prompt & received as and when I was told."

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Just it has all been quick, easy and painless. Really good communication online on the website and social media."

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Some respondents who received Carer's Allowance Supplement felt the benefit recognised their value as carers:

"As an unpaid carer sometimes I feel I don't contribute as I can't work the carer supplement shows me the Scottish Gov. values me. That's worth a lot to me!"

Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Payments always paid in to bank account with no problem. It was a change and a lovely surprise actually being 'thanked' for all the work us carers do."

Female, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"As an unpaid carer sometimes I feel I don't contribute as I can't work the carer supplement shows me the Scottish Gov. values me. That's worth a lot to me!"
Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"We are extremely grateful for your help, being a carer is difficult and also financially demanding so your help means a lot. It helps a lot, not only financially but also psychologically as it shows that you care about disabled children and their carers and that means a lot to our family."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"The extra money made me feel more valued as a carer."
Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Among negative comments, two clear themes emerged as the most commonly mentioned: unhappiness with payment amounts, and with payment timings or long waits for payments. Several also mentioned a lack of, or inaccurate communication regarding their payment issues:

"Just the length of time I had to wait without money. I waited months."
Female, aged 25-34, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Far too little money."
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I wish payment was twice a month"
Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods recipient

"Never sure when it is to be paid"
Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"It would have been a surprise payment if I hadn't been told by a friend who had also applied for the Best Start Grant to keep an eye on my bank account. I received a letter by post several days after my account had been credited. In addition to a letter, I feel an email should have been sent at the same time as payment was made."
Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant recipient

"I'm surprised you think that £230 every six months is a life changer"
Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Carer's Supplement should be paid more frequently and should be more."
Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"i was quoted Feb 22nd for my first SSC payment then March 15th and got nothing until April 12th and no backdated payment"
Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Carer's allowance does not stretch to cover a lot of expense, and often doesn't adequately cover level of care, eg 2 persons"
Aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Payments did not always come through for best start foods. Only the first payment came through on time. No communication about why this was happening. Had to contact myself

"Just the length of time I had to wait without money. I waited months."

Female, aged 25-34, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient
to find out when card would not work in shops."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"It takes so long to hear back I've either had to borrow money to buy things for the kids or the kids go without and I never know when I am getting payments so it's harder to budget"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"The carers supplement is always paid months late."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

Some other comments given in this section of the survey referred to issues with eligibility. As in other sections of the survey, these issues generally related to age and income thresholds. The concerns raised about Carer's Allowance Supplement were often outside the jurisdiction of Social Security Scotland:

"Carer's allowance stops when I receive my state pension, which is shortly. However, I still have caring responsibilities for my daughter. A bit unfair!"

Male, aged 65+, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"It's a shame they stop at 6. Wish it was 16 as they still need clothes, food etc after the age of 6, more so than ever as they grow quick and eat more"

Female, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Again wish I could keep getting it but can't cause my child is now 6"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Although any money is greatly received it's disheartening it's only for under 6 as I have other children. This means that the money should be spent on the youngest however it's used on all 3"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Just that it is disappointing as a mature student I cannot receive carer's allowance."

Female, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"Only received child payment for 2 months then my son turned 6 so payment stopped even though our circumstances hadn't changed."

Female, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment recipient

Mixed comments tended to be quite wide ranging. Several comments showed appreciation for the payment but dissatisfaction at the amount. Some others referred to an initial issue which had then been resolved:

"Very grateful, but still inadequate."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The payments make a huge difference to what we can afford to buy for our child. The only thing I would say is for the best food payment I think it should be more than £17 for over 1 year olds."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Very grateful, but still inadequate."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Thankful for the extra £10 a week . But in all honesty £10 these days does not go far"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"The payments make a huge difference to what we can afford to buy for our child. The only thing I would say is for the best food payment I think it should be more than £17 for over 1 year olds."

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment recipient

"It is a great experience but the benefit is very low to make an impact"

Male, aged 45-54, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"I did have some payment problems but was sorted quick enough."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"My food start payment was stopped for a bit,I had to make contact to ask why.. It was eventually fixed and I have had no problem since"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment recipient

"Very straight forward only a little hiccup 1. when they had taken a digit wrong in my mobile no. and I was only aware when I called & asked for an update on my application. 2. there was a delay in payment due to amount it hadn't been dealt with properly for passing payment - but no harm was done & was very quickly rectified."

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment recipient

9. Application decisions

9.1 Views on and agreement with decisions

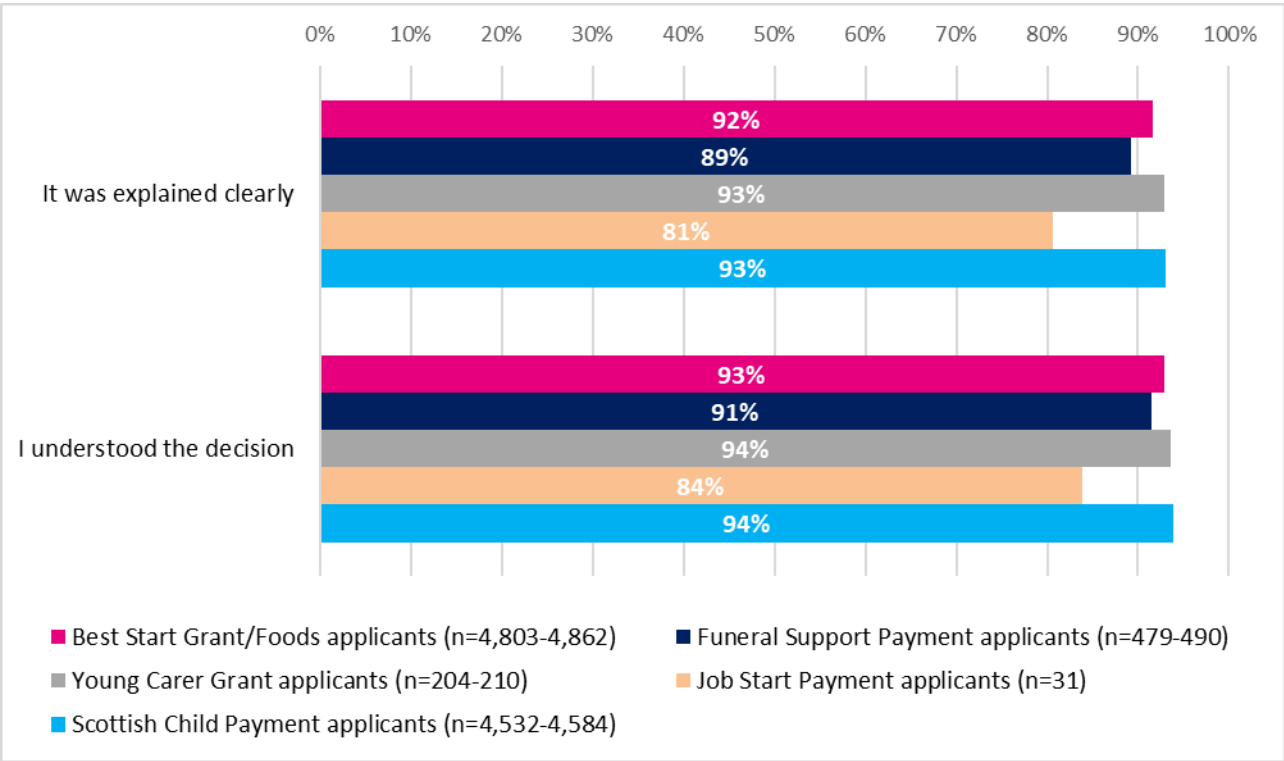
Respondents who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit were asked a series of questions relating to their experience of receiving a decision on their application.

Around nine-in-ten respondents agreed that the decision on their application was ‘explained clearly’ (92%). A similar proportion said they ‘understood the decision’ (93%).

The vast majority of respondents (95%) said they agreed with the decision made on their application(s) for a benefit. This means that one-in-twenty (5%) disagreed.

Figure 9.1 shows results across different benefits. Job Start Payment applicants were least likely to say their decision was explained clearly and they understood it, although the relatively smaller number of respondents in this category should be considered when interpreting apparent differences between groups.

Figure 9.1: Views on application decisions by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit



Young Carer Grant applicants were most likely to say they agreed with the decision, as shown in Table 9.1, but agreement was very high amongst all benefit experience groups.

Table 9.1: Agreement with application decisions by benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for each benefit; Column percentages

Benefit applied for	Yes	No
Best Start Grant/Foods applicant (n=4,870)	95%	5%
Funeral Support Payment applicant (n=491)	94%	6%
Young Carer Grant applicant (n=210)	99%	1%
Scottish Child Payment applicant (n=3,872)	96%	4%

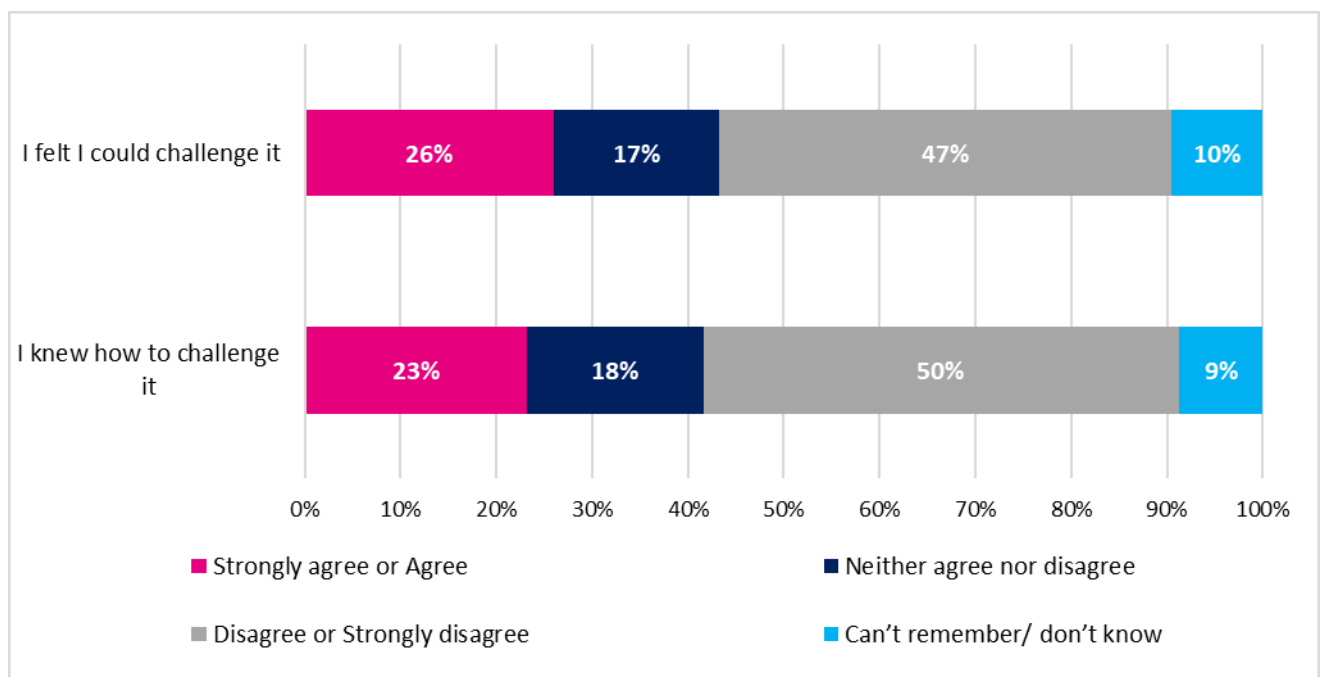
Agreement with application decisions was very similar across demographic groups. However, men were less likely to say that the decision was explained clearly (88%, compared to 92% of women), and that they understood the decision (89%, compared to 94% of women).

9.2 Challenging decisions

Those who disagreed with a decision were asked some follow-up questions to explore their experience in more depth. However, given the relatively small number of respondents who said they disagreed with the decision on their application, the results presented below should be interpreted with caution.

Only around one-in-four respondents who disagreed with the decision on their application agreed that they 'knew how to challenge it' (23%) and 'felt [they] could challenge it' (26%) (see Figure 9.2). Similarly, only 26% of those who disagreed with a decision said they did challenge it.

Figure 9.2: Whether respondents knew how and felt able to challenge decisions
All respondents who disagreed with an application decision



9.3 Comments about application decisions

Anyone who had applied for any of Best Start Grant Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Job Start Payment, or Scottish Child Payment was asked to comment about their experience with an application decision²⁶.

Although all recipients of the survey invite should have reached a decision stage for an application or have received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance, a number stated that they had not yet received a decision. It is possible these comments might refer to another more recent application. Equally, some people who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance and applied for a benefit may not have had their application decision at the point at which the sample was drawn for the respective survey fieldwork rounds. These comments were marked as neutral unless they included other factors such as frustration at a long wait or not being able to get an update.

483 responses were made. Around a fifth of comments were neutral, and an equal proportion of around two fifths were positive and negative.

Most positive comments expressed that the whole process was clear, straightforward and that receiving the benefits had made a difference the respondent's life. Other positive comments mentioned that staff were helpful and had good knowledge of Social Security benefits and processes:

²⁶ 'Is there anything else you would like to tell us about a decision made on your application for a Social Security Scotland benefit?'

"The decision was very good and fair."

Male, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I was just happy to get the help"

Male, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"It was very straightforward. No hassle."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I would say that the whole process was smooth and understandable and the communication straightforward which it makes the difference when I got the payments."

Male, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The application was incredibly straight forward and the process was all done in the correct time stated."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Very happy with the service and application process. The Scottish child payment is a great top up to help out with the cost of raising my child especially after suffering some financial hardship due to the pandemic. From what I've heard from friends and family too, it's really made a difference."

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Everything was so easy from start to finish. Staff were empathetic and had very good knowledge. It's really good that Scotland are making changes to the benefits system as the money is well needed as children are expensive because they constantly grow & never stop eating. I am very grateful for the help I have received."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I felt the whole process was handled by staff very friendly and efficiently"

Female, aged 45-54, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant, and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"I was treated with dignity and respect by all members of staff. The financial help made a difference to how I could cope with things. Thank you."

Female, aged 65+, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"It was clear and explained well."

Female, Scottish Child Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I found your service clear and very efficient in your response to myself."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Several respondents spoke of difficulties challenging the decision, including not knowing how to challenge or that this was possible:

"I tried to challenge it and got nowhere"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Couldn't challenge due to no reply"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I tried to challenge it and got nowhere"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I don't know how to challenge the decision or appeal the decision."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I had to look up lots of information and seek help from the others who had a similar outcome via social media and online in order to challenge the decision as I received no advice nor no info as for the steps I could take in order to receive the payment and/or appeal the decision"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I did not know I could challenge decisions"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I was never told the outcome so had no idea I had to challenge it."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Most negative comments mentioned similar communication issues to those raised in respect to the application process: long waits, and not receiving or being able to get updates:

"It took 3 months to make it"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Had to apply on a few occasions as after months I didn't hear any news"

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Chased numerous times and still heard nothing"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Not enough updates"

Aged 16-24, Young Carer Grant applicant

"I could and should have been kept informed throughout its processing in addition to acknowledging the application's submission"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"There was some confusion as I had received a letter to say I was not entitled then a couple days later received another that said I was"

Female, Aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"Not received best starts food payment since FEBRUARY"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I would like to know what the decision is? I just got a message saying a decision wouldn't be made until after 15th Feb but I'm still waiting to hear the outcome 3 months later!"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I still don't know my decision after 5 months"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"No decision has been communicated 7 months after the application was submitted."

Male, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

Also, again eligibility criteria was a common theme mentioned in negative comments,

particularly around age thresholds for Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant. Some also begrudged not being aware of benefits sooner:

"The Scottish child payment I don't think should be started then stopped again when a child is 6 it should continue"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods, Scottish Child Payment, and Young Carer Grant applicant, and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"A while ago I tried to apply for a school payment for my son but because he was starting P1 early, his birthday cut off was missed. This was frustrating because I hadn't known about any sort of payment before this time.."

Female, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"The only thing I have to say is, the payment should be available for all children. Poverty doesn't stop when a child reaches the age of 6. In fact things are more expensive for older children."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The Scottish child payment should not end at 6yrs old, I actually need more help the older my child gets not less."

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I missed out on the grant (up to 3 1/2 years) by a month or so for my eldest because of a wait to receive our first UC payment and not being advised of the payment by anybody. I only came across the information by chance. It was disheartening"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I would have liked to have been informed earlier because the child over 6 years old did not have this service, I did not know."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"My only issue is that I will lose this benefit soon when my child turns 6 and I am not sure how I will manage now without it as I struggled without it before."

Female, aged 16-24, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

10. Barriers

All respondents were asked if they had faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland. This section presents the results on how many said they had experienced barriers, and whether those affected sought help.

10.1 Experience of barriers

7% of respondents said they had experienced some sort of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland.

The proportion was similar for those who had applied for at least one benefit (7%, n=6,397) and those who had only received Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance (6%, n=3,699).

Experience of facing barriers was also similar by benefit experience, as Table 10.1 shows.

Table 10.1: Whether respondents faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit; Row percentages

Benefit experience	Yes	No
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=4,347)	6%	94%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicant (n=4,909)	8%	92%
Funeral Support Payment applicant (n=497)	9%	91%
Young Carer Grant applicant (n=213)	7%	93%
Job Start Payment applicant (n=31)	#	#
Scottish Child Payment applicant (n=4,605)	6%	94%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=828)	6%	94%

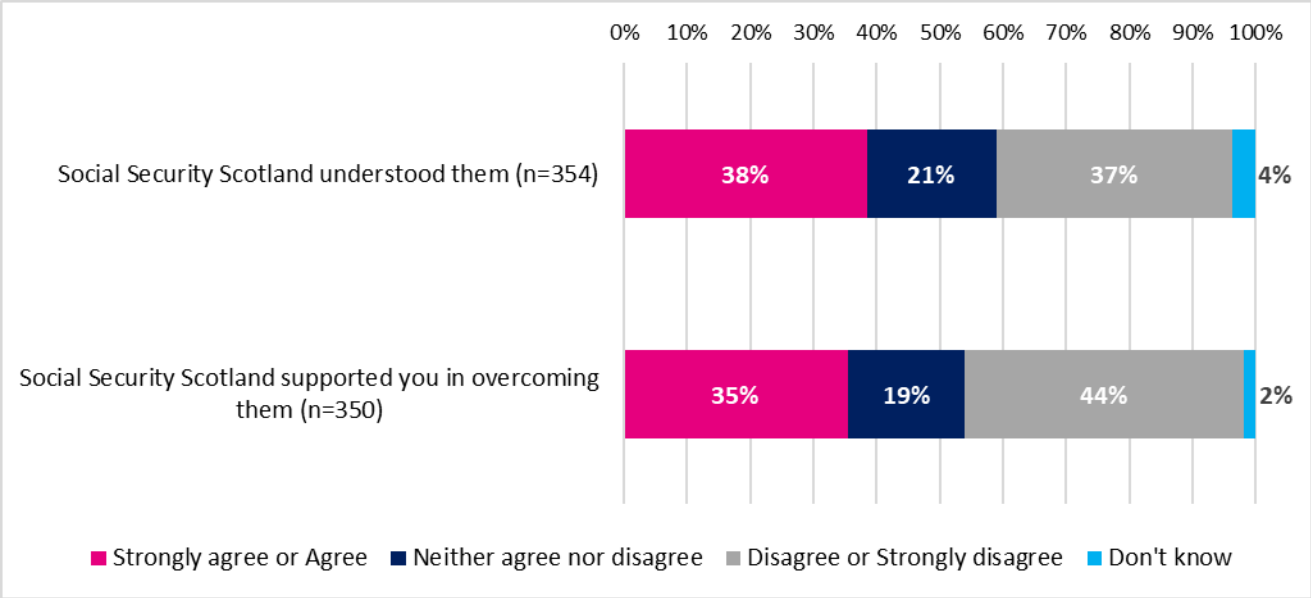
Experience of barriers was similar across most demographic characteristics. However, just under one-in-ten (9%) of those living with a long-term physical or mental health condition said they had experienced barriers, compared to 5% of respondents with no condition.

10.2 Tackling barriers

Just over half (53%) of those who experienced barriers said they told Social Security Scotland about them.

Where respondents had told Social Security Scotland about the barriers they experienced, around two-in-five agreed that Social Security Scotland ‘understood them’ (38%). A similar proportion said Social Security Scotland ‘supported [them] in overcoming them’ (35%), as shown in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2: Whether respondents who reported barriers felt they were understood and supported to overcome them
All respondents who reported barriers to Social Security Scotland



10.3 Comments about barriers

Respondents were given the chance to comment on any barriers they face in general or encountered in their experience with Social Security Scotland²⁷. This opportunity was presented to all respondents regardless of their answer to the closed question about whether they had experienced barriers (discussed above).

Of the 1,039 responses, 316 were neutral. This left 723 substantive comments, a little over half of which were negative and slightly more than a quarter positive.

Most positive comments were of a brief and general nature, relating to the absence of any issues, clear information, helpful staff, or good overall experience:

“Never had any issues in any shape or form so very happy”

Female, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“No barriers, very streamlined process.”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“No barriers, full transparency.”

Male, aged 25-34, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“I have not come up against barriers. I was treated fairly with the utmost dignity and respect.”

Female, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Treated with dignity and respect with very helpful staff – thanks”

Female, aged 65+, Funeral Support Payment applicant

“No barriers, information was very clear!”

Female, aged 65+

“No barriers, staff were very helpful and understanding.”

Male, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

“I faced no barriers from SSS, everything was explained and the result was I got the help I needed in a very short time.”

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

“No barriers - forms straightforward and treat claimants with dignity.”

Female, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

“Clear, supportive and straightforward”

Female, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Everything is very clear no barriers at all”

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

Negative comments varied greatly, as respondents interpreted ‘barriers’ widely. Many issues mentioned elsewhere reoccurred here, including staff treatment, being unable to get the

²⁷ ‘Is there anything you want to tell us about barriers you face and your experience with Social Security Scotland?’

required help, or lack of updates. Most prominent was mention of helpline and application decision waiting times:

“The only barrier experienced that made life difficult was the waiting time for phone calls to be answered.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“The only barrier was how long the whole process took and that I had to fix the issue where the money was paid to the funeral director when I had given a revised instruction to pay the money to me.”

Female, aged 35-44, Funeral Support Payment applicant

“Timeframe is the biggest barrier - no clue when you receive an outcome”

Male, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“The waiting time to speak to someone is horrendous”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“Only the time waits on phone calls”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“waiting for applications took too long”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

“I was left with no food for two days when I use my best start card on the week before I receive my bursary. There was no way they could help I was crying on the phone and they girl didn’t seem to care”

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods, Scottish Child Payment, and Funeral Support Payment applicant

“Lack of trained staff lack of never being able to speak to the same person twice constantly transferred from person to person having to constantly explain the same thing over and over leaving you with the impression you were getting nowhere”

Male, aged 35-44, Carer’s Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

“There’s just not enough help for people claiming for 1st time. They just presume you should know it all.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

““System error” preventing BSG payout seems to have been going on for almost 4 months now. Unacceptable. Not a single update on progress during that time.”

Male, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“The waiting time to speak to someone is horrendous and again, you go on and check the website and you are greeted with information overload. End up wanting to give up even applying for what i am entitled to.”

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

Not knowing about Social Security Scotland services and what benefits one might be eligible for also commonly came up frequently as a barrier:

"My only issue was that the Department of Work and Pensions didn't tell me you existed. You could make yourself more visible."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I didn't know about them. That was the main barrier."

Female, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Know what services and help is available."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Needs better advertising I only found out by chance"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Not knowing what I can apply for"

Aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Just not knowing about them all."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The Health Visitor told me about the Scottish Child Payment. Unfortunately I could have heard about it sooner if I had other sources of support. Social Security Scotland would have known I was eligible to apply."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Knowing I was entitled to the payment in the first place. I was out of work looking after my husband for a year before I found out I was entitled."

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"N/A other than not knowing about Carers Allowance sooner."

Female, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"did not know of Child Winter Payment. Needs more info for people to know of these."

Female, aged 45-54

"Not know what I am entitled to to help my family"

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Lack of Knowledge of what is available and what you can apply for is the barrier. Unless you know the system and what you are entitled to it is difficult"

Male, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

A number of respondents raised written or verbal language barriers, or struggling with not having enough digital literacy or internet access:

"I find reading and navigating the site difficult. It can be easier phoning but the phone lines are rarely available when I am free."

Gender identity answered 'In another way', aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"The biggest obstacle that I faced is the lack of understanding of the English language when contacting you or if you did contact me"

Male, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I've got bad speech and because of that they cannot understand me"

Male, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I find reading and navigating the site difficult. It can be easier phoning but the phone lines are rarely available when I am free."

Gender identity answered 'In another way', aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"You offered correspondence in British Sign Language - I do not think I got any."

Aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Some things are quite lengthy to read and as I suffer from Dyslexia I find it difficult to read through just once. It takes several read-throughs to understand."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I struggle with using the Internet. I've had to learn how to use the Internet."

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"Feel that most forms of communication are rooted for online use. I am not able to use these services."

Female, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant

"I cannot reach someone to speak to you quickly and also there is a handicap my English is very weak"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant, and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

"It is difficult to communicate with Social Security or any organization because my English is not strong"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"The interpreter no understood clearly"

Male, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Other negative comments related to policy around eligibility, particularly, but not exclusively, regarding Scottish Child Payment. This also included around the income cap for Carer's Allowance, which is determined by the DWP but impacts eligibility for Carer's Allowance Supplement:

"I am disappointed that the child payment will stop when child turns six"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"Raising the age for child payment would be better and help a lot of people. I only received for one of my children for 2 weeks before she turned 6."

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The only barrier for myself would be the age limit on the child payment fund"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I really don't understand the weekly amount of £128 allowed to earn to claim Carers Allowance. I look after my dad to keep him at home saving a hospital bed, yet I get penalised for doing so. Very unfair system."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"To help carers would be to scrap the £120 a week limit"

Male, aged 35-44, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I am disappointed that the child payment will stop when child turns six"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I have to keep reducing hours at work do to pay rises taking me to the threshold for carers allowance now as I only work 12 hours ive lost my working tax credit so now losing money each month"

Female, aged 35-44, Young Carer Grant applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

11. Discrimination

This section presents results on respondents' experiences of discrimination when dealing with Social Security Scotland, including what issues were faced and whether respondents reported problems.

11.1 Experience of discrimination

Respondents were asked if they felt they had been discriminated against at any point during their experience with Social Security Scotland. Around one-in-fifty (2%) said they had experienced discrimination, with a further 3% selecting the 'prefer not to say' response option (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1: Whether respondents faced any discrimination when dealing with Social Security Scotland

All respondents; Column percentages

Experience of discrimination	All respondents (n=10,488)
Yes	2%
No	95%
Prefer not to say	3%

The proportion who had experienced discrimination was very similar across most benefit groups (see Table 11.2).

Table 11.2: Experience of discrimination by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; Column percentages

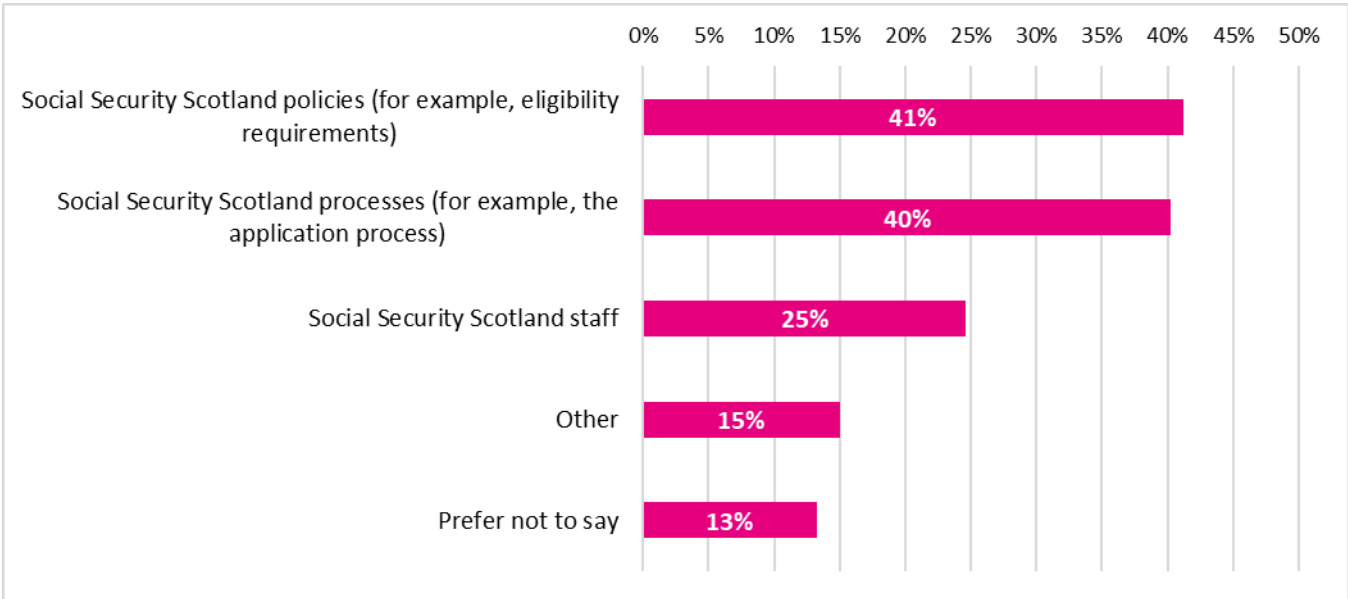
Benefit experience	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=4,342)	2%	96%	2%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicant (n=4,920)	2%	96%	3%
Funeral Support Payment applicant (n=501)	3%	95%	2%
Young Carer Grant applicant (n=213)	#	94%	#
Job Start Payment applicant (n=31)	#	#	-
Scottish Child Payment applicant (n=4,612)	2%	96%	2%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=828)	3%	96%	2%

Results were broadly similar across key demographic breakdowns. They are outlined in full in [‘Supplementary document: tables and methods’](#) available alongside this report.

11.2 Nature of discrimination

Respondents who had experienced discrimination were asked who or what they felt was discriminatory towards them. They could select more than one option if they wished. The most commonly highlighted sources were Social Security Scotland ‘processes’ and ‘policies’ which were both selected by around two-in-five respondents (41% and 40% respectively). Around one-in-four (25%) said that the source of the discrimination they experienced was Social Security Scotland staff (see Figure 11.1).

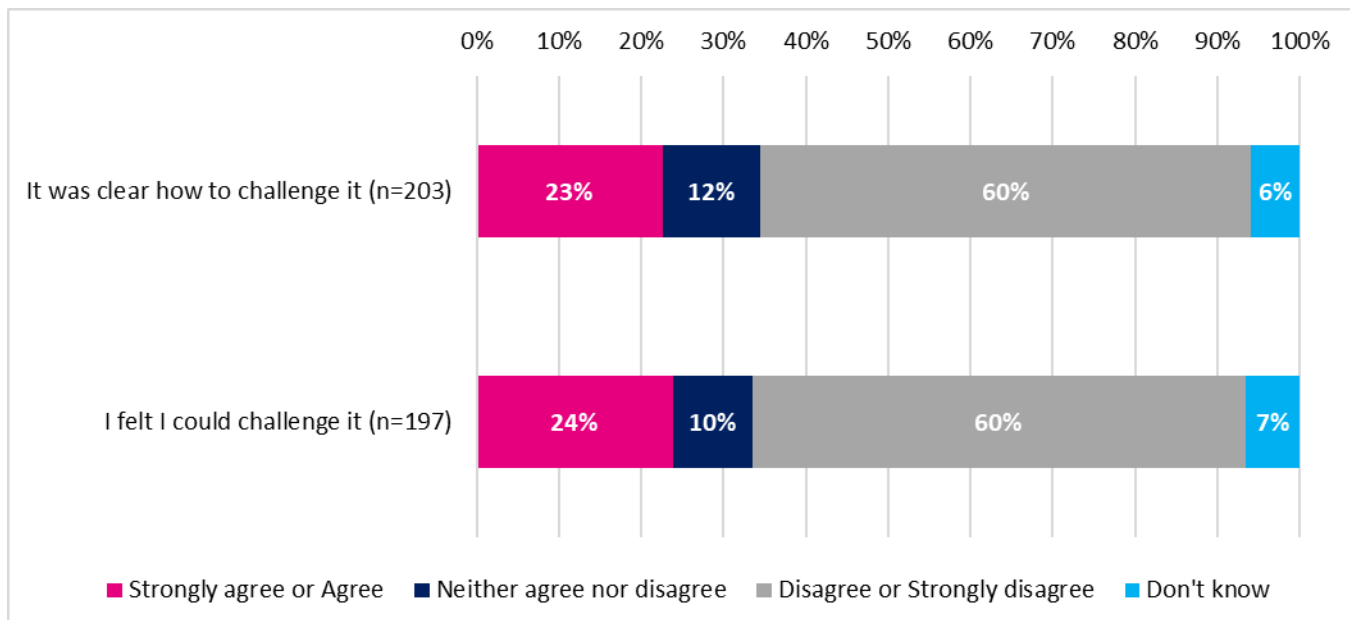
Figure 11.1: Who or what respondents felt discriminated by
All respondents who said they had experienced discrimination and answered question about the source (n=211)



11.3 Tackling discrimination

Around three-in-five of those who felt they had been discriminated against disagreed with the statements ‘it was clear how to challenge it’ and ‘I felt I could challenge it’ (both 60%). Just under one-in-four (23% and 24% respectively) agreed with these statements, as Figure 11.2 outlines.

Figure 11.2: Whether respondents knew how and felt able to challenge discrimination
All respondents who said they had experienced discrimination



Regarding the discrimination they faced, around two-in-three of those with a long-term physical or mental health condition disagreed that 'It was clear how to challenge it' (68%) and 'I felt I could challenge it' (68%), compared to 51% and 49% respectively amongst those with no such condition. This was also the case for white respondents who experienced discrimination; around two thirds (64%) disagreed that 'It was clear how to challenge' the discrimination they faced, and 'I felt I could challenge it' (63%) compared with 19% and 25% respectively amongst minority ethnic respondents.

Less than three-in-ten respondents said they told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination they faced (28%), whilst around one-in-ten (11%) selected the 'prefer not to say' option. This means the most (61%) said they did not report the discrimination they had experienced.

Those who reported their experiences of discrimination (n=55) were asked if Social Security Scotland took the action needed. A little over a quarter of these respondents (27%) said that Social Security Scotland took the action needed, and 73% said that Social Security Scotland did not.

11.4 Comments about discrimination

Regardless of their answers to the related closed questions, all survey respondents were given the chance to comment on discrimination in connection to their experience with Social Security Scotland²⁸.

251 substantive comments were given, of which around half were positive and around two-in-five were negative.

Most positive comments expressed good overall experiences or satisfaction, including with staff:

“Completely satisfied.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“A very inclusive service.”

Male, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“No, I can think of no problems I have had or questions not answered fairly and honestly.”

Male, aged 55-64, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Absolutely none whatsoever. The worker listened to what I had to say and took it on board.”

Female, aged 35-44, Funeral Support Payment

“I have never felt discriminated by Social Security Scotland”

Female, aged 25-34, Carer’s Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

“I did not feel discriminated against everyone was very friendly & helpful.”

Gender identity answered ‘In another way’, aged 65+, Carer’s Allowance Supplement recipient

“Staff were very friendly and helpful not a bad word to say about them”

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“I’m disabled and find difficulty in understanding sometimes. Everything was explained well and I was treated great.”

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

“Everything was very good and respectful”

Female, aged 35-44, Scottish Child Payment applicant

A large proportion of the negative comments were about disagreement with eligibility requirements, particularly in relation to thresholds on income and child age:

²⁸ ‘Is there anything you want to tell us about discrimination and your experience with Social Security Scotland?’

"I think the earnings limit is set too low given the cost of living in today's society and everywhere I look I see people who make no effort to work/contribute getting rewarded for nothing yet my earnings entitle me to basically nothing. I feel pushed down and unappreciated by the Scottish Government for being working class."

Male, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I did feel that it was unfair that I did not qualify for the Best Start School payment since my only income is Carer's Allowance."

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Felt discriminated against because I'm a full-time worker - which meant I wasn't entitled to the best start food grants"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I felt discriminated against as for one month it looked like we were on a high earning so looked as though we were not eligible. Missing out on 3 months worth of payments could have helped our daughter massively, I was never made aware of having to reapply when income decreased"

Female, aged 25-34, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I think that by only allowing families to receive child payment for children under 6 is discrimination kids 6 and over are still children and are no different to those under 6 they still feel hunger and pain the same"

Female, aged 25-34, Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I believe all children under 18 should receive support, why younger child is more valuable than older? All children grow and develop with different age"

Female, aged 35-44, Best Start Grant/Foods and Scottish Child Payment applicant

"I think the eligibility requirements are unfair and discriminatory by supporting low income families only. No other benefits available unless you meet the low income criteria."

Female, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

Most remaining negative comments related to experiences considered unfair, of feeling generally mistreated as a benefit claimant, or issues with general process:

"My daughter was discriminated against due to her age and situation - there was obviously no process for staff to follow and we were simply ignored."

Female, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant

"I'm disabled. Disabled people are scum, aren't they? What can I say?"

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"When I got a response I had actually forgot what I had contacted them about as it took about 5 months for a reply."

Male, aged 45-54, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I think you either need to stop telling us about fairness, dignity and respect or allow your staff to deliver it."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

A small number of respondents mentioned language, although there was a mix of positive and negative comments on this topic:

"It was fantastic that you mentioned British Sign Language - I felt you knew that Deaf people communicated in a different way. The reality was I needed my signing social worker's assistance to apply."

Aged 55-64, Best Start Grant/Foods applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"It's not really geared to help people with difficulty in understanding"

Man, aged 55-64, Funeral Support Payment applicant and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Even that my English is not that good at all, I never felt that while talking to someone on the phone, was made to feel comfortable."

Man, aged 35-44, Child Winter Heating Assistance and Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

As with the Barriers section (Section 10) and elsewhere in the survey, respondents mentioned disagreement with some eligibility factors external to Social Security Scotland. Factors such as no longer being eligible for Carer's Allowance – and therefore the Carer's Allowance Supplement – once receiving a state pension, were considered discriminatory. Some other comments for this question were directly about experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions or beyond Social Security Scotland. Across the whole survey, there were very few comments relating to processes or policies outwith Social Security Scotland's administration which actually noted this fact:

"Inherent age discrimination in policy regarding Carer's Allowance Supplement. Carer activity does not cease at State Pension age. If intended to supplement benefit received where carer activity is undertaken, fails to do so beyond State Pension age."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"There might come a point when State Pension is payable and as a result I might lose Scottish Carer's Supplement due to the Department of Work and Pensions' rules on overlapping benefits which is unfair to say the least. A person should not lose Carer's Allowance as soon as State Pension starts."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"If getting old is discriminatory then yes once I received state pension the carers benefit money stopped."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"In the UK system I feel discriminated against because of age and caring for an elder person."

Female, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"I failed my Personal Independence Payment assessment because the Department of Work and Pensions did not take my doctors letters into account."

Aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"If getting old is discriminatory then yes once I received state pension the carers benefit money stopped."

Male, aged 55-64, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"Inherent age discrimination in policy regarding Carer's Allowance Supplement. Carer activity does not cease at State Pension age. If intended to supplement benefit received where carer activity is undertaken, fails to do so beyond State Pension age."

Female, aged 65+, Carer's Allowance Supplement recipient

"The form that had to be filled in was horrendous, over 40 pages long. There was a question asking if your child had a short life span. I felt as though I had to justify my child's condition. My son was born with this condition. DLA"

Female, aged 55-64, Child Winter Heating Assistance recipient

12. Single benefit experience

This section presents top level results for respondents who had experience of just one benefit (be that experience of applying for Best Start Grant/Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, or Scottish Child Payment, or receiving Carer's Allowance Supplement or Child Winter Heating Assistance). A total of 5,593 respondents (53%) experienced just one benefit. This approach allows for exploration of views which are not influenced by the conflation of experiences with multiple benefits. Please note however, that for some benefits the number who only experienced these benefits is only a small proportion of all who experienced them. This is particularly the case for Best Start Grant/Foods (20%) and Scottish Child Payment (16%) applicants.

12.1 Overall experience

The proportion who rated their experience as 'good' or 'very good' was lowest amongst Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (88%) and highest for those with experience for applying for Young Carer Grant (99%) (see Table 12.1).

Table 12.1: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience. All respondents with single experience of each benefit; Column percentages

Single benefit experience	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=3,137)	90%	9%	2%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=972)	91%	5%	4%
Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=333)	90%	7%	3%
Young Carer Grant applicants (n=102)	99%	1%	-
Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=759)	94%	4%	2%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=203)	88%	9%	3%

Table 12.2 shows results for the more detailed questions on respondents' overall experience with a single benefit. Agreement was lowest among Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients for the statements that Social Security Scotland is an 'honest' (71%) and 'open' (58%) organisation; this is lower than among all respondents who received Child Winter Heating Assistance (see Table 3.4).

Table 12.2: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience. All respondents with single experience of each benefit

Strongly agree or agree that...	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=2,901-3,063)	Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants (n=951-965)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=297-323)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=747-758)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=99-102)	Child Winter Heating Assistance applicants (n=172-197)
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	85%	91%	90%	90%	95%	81%
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	86%	90%	89%	91%	96%	81%
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	85%	91%	92%	91%	96%	82%
I understand what Social Security Scotland does	78%	85%	83%	87%	84%	71%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	63%	76%	77%	78%	79%	58%
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland	79%	85%	85%	86%	85%	72%
Social Security Scotland did not waste my time	86%	88%	90%	91%	95%	82%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	75%	84%	87%	85%	89%	71%

12.2 Experience with staff

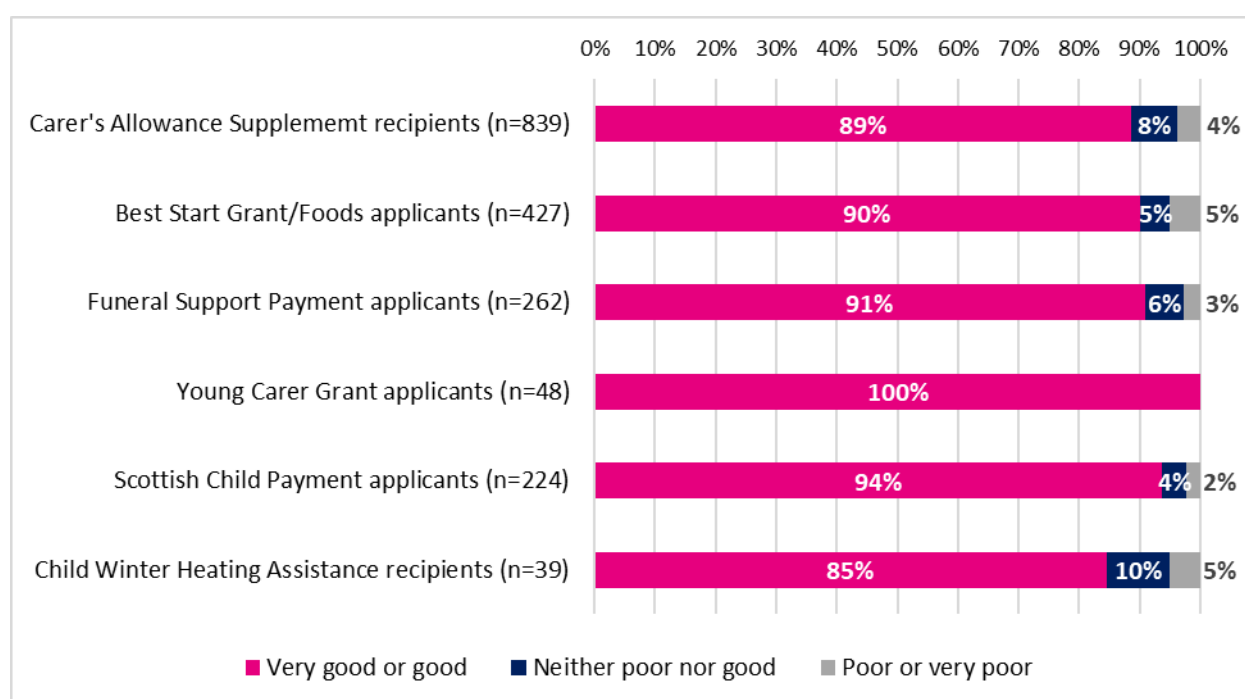
Unsurprisingly, respondents who did not apply for a benefit were less likely to have been in touch with a member of Social Security Scotland staff. Yet, fewer than three-in-ten who had only experienced Scottish Child Payment (29%) had been in touch, whereas nearly eight-in-ten (79%) of those who only applied for Funeral Support Payment had been.

Table 12.3: Whether respondents had been in contact with staff. All respondents with single experience of each benefit

Single benefit experience	Yes	No
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=3,176)	26%	73%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=973)	44%	56%
Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=335)	79%	21%
Young Carer Grant applicants (n=102)	47%	53%
Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=768)	29%	71%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=203)	19%	81%

All (100%) respondents who only applied for Young Carer Grant described their overall experience as 'very good' or 'good', as well as 94% of respondents who only applied for Scottish Child Payment (see Figure 12.1). Around nine-in-ten who only experienced Best Start Grant/Foods (90%), Funeral Support Payment (91%) or Carer's Allowance Supplement (89%) rated their experience of staff as 'very good' or 'good', though this was the case for slightly fewer respondents who only received Child Winter Heating Assistance (85%).

Figure 12.1: Overall rating of experience with staff by single benefit experience
All respondents with experience of one benefit, who had been incontact with staff



Looking at more specific questions regarding interactions with staff, Young Carer Grant applicants were particularly likely to reflect well. However, the relatively small number of respondents in this group should be taken into account. Amongst other benefit groups which required an application, those with experience of Best Start Grant/Foods were less likely to agree with the statements, compared with those who only experienced Funeral Support Payment or Scottish Child Payment. For example, 85% with experience of Best Start

Grant/Foods agreed that staff were able to help them, compared to 91% and 90% in the other groups respectively (see Table 12.4).

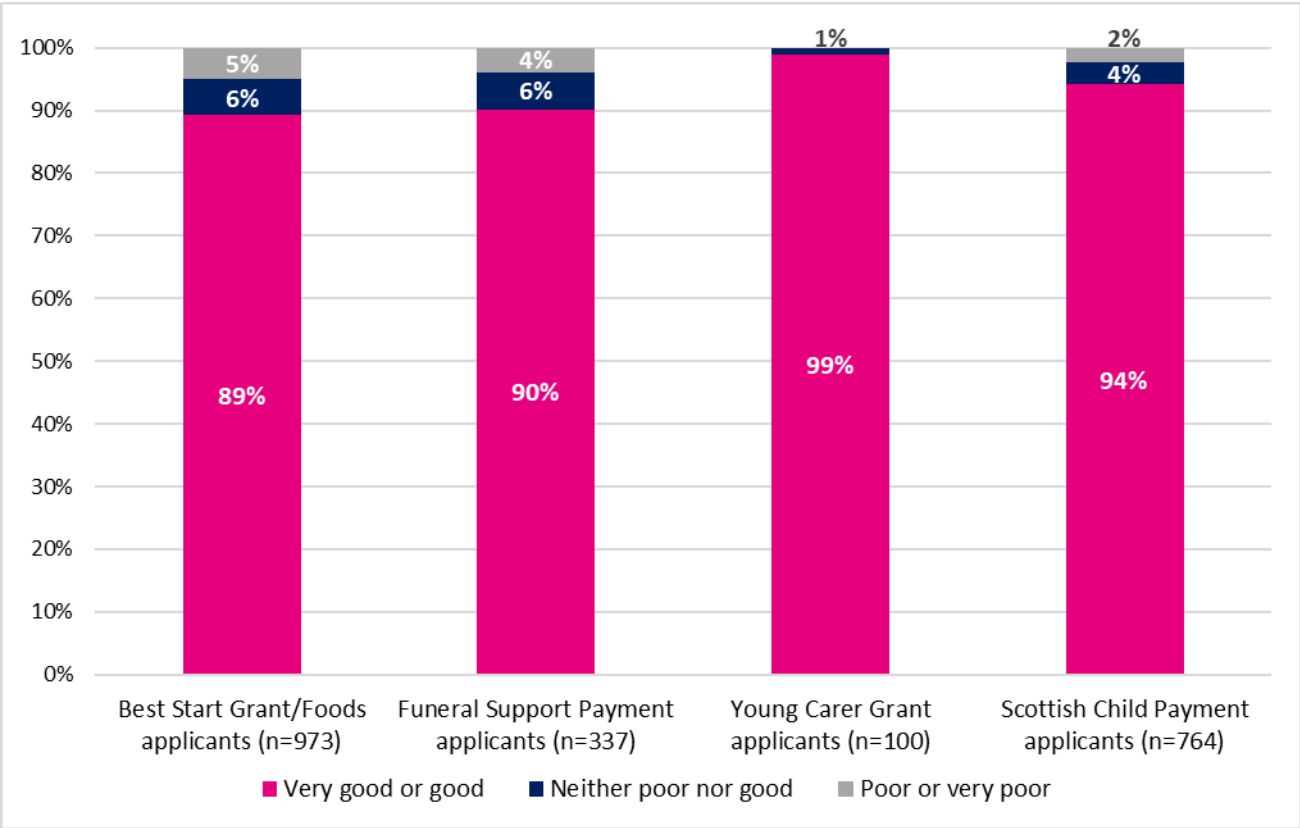
Table 12.4: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland staff by single benefit experience. All respondents with experience of one benefit who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff

Proportion agreeing with statement:	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=816-832)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants (n=407-419)	Funeral Support Payment applicants (n=238-257)	Young Carer Grant applicants (n=46-48)	Scottish Child Payment applicants (n=220-224)	Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=38-39)
I was treated with kindness	89%	93%	96%	100%	95%	90%
I felt trusted	79%	87%	89%	100%	92%	79%
I trusted staff	84%	87%	92%	98%	92%	89%
Staff listened to me	89%	89%	93%	98%	93%	84%
Staff made me feel comfortable	86%	90%	91%	96%	92%	84%
Staff were able to help me	90%	85%	91%	100%	90%	82%
Staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits	86%	87%	89%	92%	90%	79%

12.3 Applying for Social Security benefits

Around nine-in-ten (89%) respondents who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods said the application process was ‘very good’ or ‘good’, similar to those who only applied for Funeral Support Payment (90%). Those only applying for Young Carer Grant, and Scottish Child Payment provided even more positive feedback.

Figure 12.2: Overall rating of application process by single benefit experience. All respondents who had applied for one benefit



12.4 Receiving payment

Respondents who only received Carer’s Allowance Supplement (95%) were most likely to say that they received their payment when Social Security Scotland said they would. A high proportion of this group also said that they received the right amount first time (95%) and every time (95%), as did Young Carer Grant recipients (99% and 97% respectively). Those who only received Best Start Foods were significantly less likely to say that they received their payment when Social Security Scotland said they would (69%), received the right amount first time (73%) and every time (72%), as shown in Table 12.5. The results shown for Best Start Foods can partly, though not wholly, be explained by a higher proportion of these respondents answering ‘Can’t remember/don’t know’ (18-20%, compared with around 5-10% in most other cases). This group is also a very small proportion of all who received a Best Start Foods payment, and so should be interpreted with caution.

Table 12.5: Whether payments were on time and accurate
All respondents with experience of receiving payments for one benefit only.

Only received	Received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would	Received right amount first time	Received right amount every time ²⁹
Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=2,682-2,855)	95%	95%	95%
Best Start Grant (n=235-413)	85%	93%	84%
Best Start Foods (n=82-85)	69%	73%	72%
Funeral Support Payment (n=97-266)	92%	93%	88%
Young Carer Grant (n=31-80)	85%	99%	97%
Scottish Child payment (n=1,142-1,184)	90%	92%	92%
Child Winter Heating Assistance (n=100-189)	90%	93%	79%

Overall, the large majority of respondents who received payment(s) for one benefit said that it was a 'good' or 'very good' experience. For instance, for most benefits 93-95% of recipients said this, as well as 99% of those who only received Young Carer Grant. Again however, those who had only received Best Start Foods gave less favourable feedback on this experience (see Table 12.6).

Table 12.6: Overall rating of experience of receiving payments by single benefit received

²⁹ The lower end for the sample sizes of each benefit are all attributed to "Received right amount every time" as more respondents answered "not applicable".

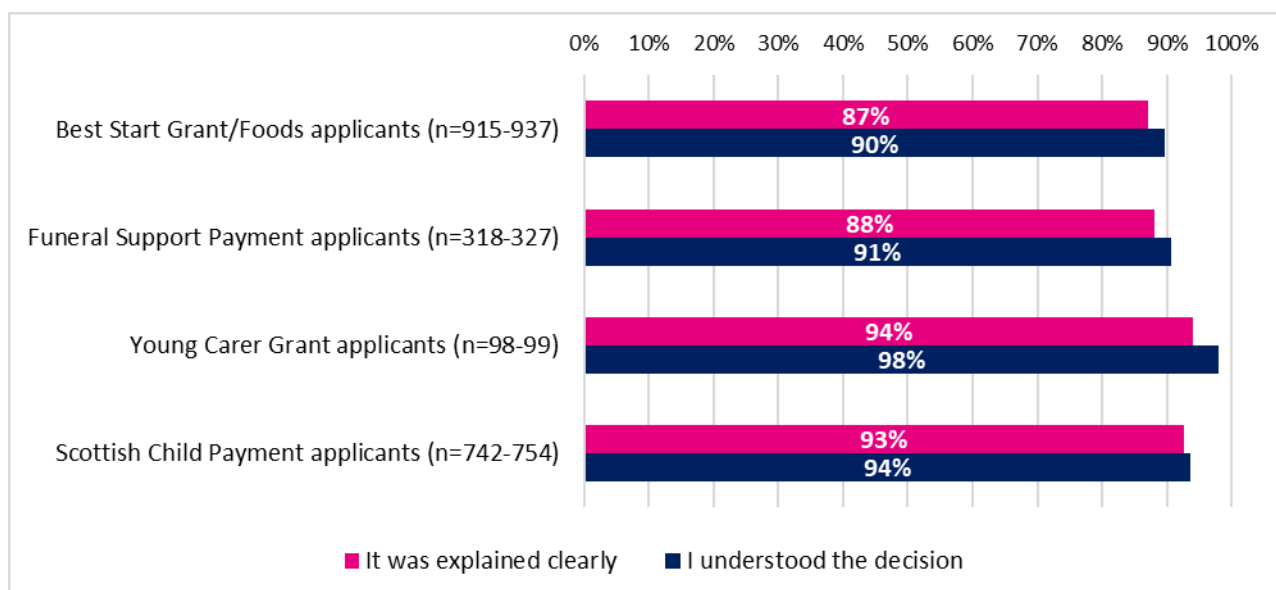
All respondents with experience of receiving payment for one benefit

Single benefit received	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=2,926)	93%	5%	2%
Best Start Grant (n=418)	93%	5%	2%
Best Start Foods (n=86)	80%	12%	8%
Funeral Support Payment (n=293)	93%	5%	2%
Young Carer Grant (n=79)	99%	1%	-
Scottish Child Payment (n=1,185)	95%	4%	2%
Child Winter Heating Assistance (n=204)	93%	4%	2%

12.5 Application decision

Those who only applied for Young Carer Grant (94%) and Scottish Child Payment (93%) were more likely to say that their decision was explain clearly, compared with those who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods (87%) and Funeral Support Payment (88%). This pattern was also evident regarding whether the respondent understood their decision, as shown in Figure 12.3.

Figure 12.3: Views on application decisions by single benefit experience
All respondents who had applied for one benefit



12.6 Barriers

There was some disparity in the likelihood of experiencing barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience. Around one-in-twenty of those who only experienced Scottish Child Payment (4%), Young Carer Grant (4%), Child Winter Heating Assistance (5%) and Carer's Allowance Supplement (6%) said that they experienced barriers. However, around one-in-ten of those who only experienced Funeral Support Payment (9%) and Carer's Allowance Supplement (10%) said that they did (see Table 12.7).

Table 12.7: Whether respondents faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience

All respondents with experience of one benefit; Row percentages

Single benefit experience	Yes	No
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients (n=3,160)	6%	94%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicant (n=968)	10%	90%
Funeral Support Payment applicant (n=331)	9%	91%
Young Carer Grant applicant (n=101)	4%	96%
Scottish Child Payment applicant (n=761)	4%	96%
Child Winter Heating Assistance recipients (n=201)	5%	95%

13. Change over time

As set out in Section 2, this report includes data collected over two separate fieldwork rounds, the first in Aug/Sep 2020, and the second in May/June 2021. This allows us to explore, within limited parameters, whether any change in responses is evident across the two time periods. This is represented as a difference in responses between these two fieldwork cohorts. To control for variation in experience based on benefit, comparisons will be made between fieldwork cohorts for those who had only experienced Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=2,290 in the 2020 cohort, n=895 in the 2021 cohort) and Best Start Grant/Foods (n=513 in the 2020 cohort, n=465 in the 2021 cohort).

Comparisons over time cannot be made for those who experienced Scottish Child Payment, Child Winter Heating Assistance, or Job Start Payment as these benefits were not launched until after the 2020 fieldwork period. Neither can they be made for experiences with Young Carer Grant or Funeral Support Payment given the low number of respondents who only experienced these benefits in both fieldwork cohorts.

13.1 Change in overall experience over time

There was little difference in the overall rating given by those who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement in the 2020 fieldwork cohort and 2021 fieldwork cohort. However, those in the 2021 fieldwork cohort who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods were marginally more likely to assess their overall experience as 'good' or 'very good' (93%), compared to those in the 2020 fieldwork cohort (89%).

Table 13.1: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort. All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods

	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=2,264)	90%	8%	2%
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=873)	89%	10%	2%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=512)	89%	6%	5%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=460)	93%	5%	2%

Looking at the more specific questions relating to overall experience, broadly, respondents who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement from the 2020 fieldwork cohort were more

likely to agree with the statements than those from the 2021 fieldwork cohort. For example, around four-in-five (79%) of those in the 2020 fieldwork cohort agreed with the statement 'I understand what Social Security Scotland does', compared to around three quarters (74%) from the 2021 fieldwork cohort (see Table 13.2).

Conversely, respondents who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods from the 2020 fieldwork cohort were less likely to agree with the statements than those from the 2021 fieldwork cohort. For instance 82% from 2020 agree that 'I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland', compared to 87% from 2021.

Table 13.2: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort. All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods

Strongly agree or agree that...	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=2,115-2,228)	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=786-838)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=501-511)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=450-455)
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	85%	84%	90%	92%
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	87%	85%	89%	91%
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	85%	85%	90%	93%
I understand what Social Security Scotland does	79%	74%	86%	85%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	63%	62%	74%	78%
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland	80%	75%	82%	87%
Social Security Scotland did not waste my time	86%	84%	86%	90%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	76%	74%	82%	86%

13.2 Change in experience with staff over time

Respondents who only experienced either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods from the 2020 fieldwork cohort were less likely to say that their experience with Social Security Scotland staff was 'good' or 'very good', and more likely to rate as poor or very poor, as shown in Table 13.3. The difference was greater for the Best Start Grant/Foods applicants comparison.

Table 13.3: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland staff by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort. All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff.

	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=546)	88%	8%	5%
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=293)	90%	8%	2%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=215)	87%	6%	7%
Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=212)	93%	3%	3%

There was a clear difference in the views expressed to more specific elements of contact with staff between respondents who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods from the 2020 and 2021 fieldwork cohorts. For example, those in the 2021 cohort were more likely to agree with the statements: 'Staff were able to help me' (91%, compared to 80% from 2020), 'Staff listened to me' (94%, compared to 85% from 2020), and 'I trusted staff' (91%, compared to 83% from 2020).

The difference was less stark when looking at respondents who only received for Carer's Allowance Supplement from the 2020 and 2021 fieldwork cohorts, although conversely, for most statements those in the 2020 fieldwork cohort were marginally more likely to agree (see Table 13.4).

Table 13.4: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland staff by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort. All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff.

Proportion agreeing with statement:	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=534-541)	Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=281-291)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=206-214)	Best Start Grant/Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=201-207)
I was treated with kindness	89%	89%	91%	96%
I felt trusted	80%	78%	85%	89%
I trusted staff	85%	83%	83%	91%
Staff listened to me	89%	89%	85%	94%
Staff made me feel comfortable	86%	88%	86%	93%
Staff were able to help me	90%	88%	80%	91%
Staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits	87%	84%	85%	90%

13.3 Change over time in experience of the application process

This section compares views of the application process for those who only experienced Best Start Grant/ Foods, given that Carer's Allowance Supplement does not require an application.

Respondents who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods from the 2020 fieldwork cohort were less likely to say that the application process was 'good' or 'very good' (87%, compared to 92% from the 2021 fieldwork cohort) and more likely to rate as poor or very poor (7%, compared with 3% from the 2021 fieldwork cohort).

13.4 Change over time in experience of receiving payments

A high proportion of respondents from both fieldwork cohorts who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement said that they received their payment when Social Security Scotland said they would, the right amount first time, and right amount every time, as shown in Table 13.5. However, among those who only applied for Best Start Grant/Foods, those in the 2021

fieldwork cohort were less likely to agree with each of the statements. This though was mainly due to the fact that a greater proportion of those in the 2021 fieldwork cohort answered 'Can't remember/don't know'.

Table 13.5: Overall rating of experience with receiving benefit payments from Social Security Scotland, by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort. All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/ Foods.

Benefit group	Received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would	Received right amount first time	Received right amount every time
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=1,908-2,035)	95%	95%	96%
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=774-820)	93%	95%	93%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=263-397)	88%	93%	88%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=357-398)	84%	88%	85%

13.5 Change over time in experience of barriers

There was very little difference in the experience of barriers across the two fieldwork cohorts in both benefit groups; a little over one-in-twenty (6%) of those who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement in both fieldwork cohorts had experienced barriers, and around one-in-ten of those who only applied for Best Start Grant/ Foods in the 2020 (10%) and 2021 (9%) fieldwork cohorts (see Table 13.6).

Table 13.6: Whether respondents faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland by single benefit experience and fieldwork cohort
All respondents with single experience of either Carer's Allowance Supplement or Best Start Grant/Foods.

Benefit experience	Yes	No
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=2,279)	6%	94%
Carer's Allowance Supplement recipients 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=881)	6%	94%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2020 fieldwork cohort (n=509)	10%	90%
Best Start Grant/ Foods applicants 2021 fieldwork cohort (n=459)	9%	91%

14. Next steps

The survey results provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients. The results will be used alongside other evidence to populate the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) which reports on Social Security Scotland's performance. The findings will also support Social Security Scotland's continuous improvement. They have also highlighted areas where more research may be useful to further explore clients' experiences, views and expectations.

We're also planning for the future of the survey. The intention is for the survey to be issued on a rolling basis to all applicants following a decision on an application. Invites will also be sent annually to people receiving recurring benefits.

We will also consider lessons learned from the initial round of the survey and whether any changes are required for future versions. [Please get in touch](#) with any feedback, comments or suggestions you have on this report or any aspect of the survey.

Annex A: Client Panels - characteristics of members

As outlined in Section 2, just over 2,900 Social Security Scotland clients signed up to the Client Panels through the first two rounds of the Client Survey. An overview of the demographic characteristics of Panel members is provided in the tables below.

Table A1.1: Gender identity of Client Panels members
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Gender identity	Proportion of members
Man	19%
Woman	80%
In another way	0%
Prefer not to say	1%
Skipped question	1%

Table A1.2: Age of Client Panels members
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Age group	Proportion of members
16-24	3%
25-34	26%
35-44	32%
45-54	15%
55-64	12%
65+	4%
Skipped question / missing data	9%

Table A1.3: Ethnicity of Client Panels members
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Ethnic group	Proportion of members
White	84%
Minority ethnic	12%
Prefer not to say	2%
Skipped question	2%

Table A1.4: Proportion of Client Panels members with long-term physical or mental health conditions
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Health status	Proportion of members
With long-term physical/mental health condition	35%
No condition	60%
Prefer not to say	5%
Skipped question	1%

Table A1.5: Sexual orientation of Client Panels members
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Sexual orientation	Proportion of members
Heterosexual	87%
Gay / lesbian / bisexual	4%
In another way	1%
Prefer not to say	6%
Skipped question	1%

Table A1.6: Proportion of Client Panels members identifying as ‘trans’
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Whether identify as ‘trans’	Proportion of members
Yes	1%
No	95%
Prefer not to say	3%
Skipped question	2%

Table A1.7: Geographic spread of Client Panels members
All Client Panels members; Column percentages

Urban or rural area	Proportion of members
Urban	87%
Rural	12%
Partial or non-matching postcode	0%
Skipped question	1%

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.

© Crown copyright 2021

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report by Client Survey respondents do not necessarily represent those of Social Security Scotland, the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

ISBN: 978-1-80201-568-3

ISSN: 2045-6964