



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba



Social Security Panels research - Opening hours

Summary report

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.



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Background

From November to December 2021, Client Panel and Experience Panel members were invited to take part in a survey about the location and working times of Social Security Scotland staff. The Client Panels are made up of Social Security Scotland clients from across Scotland. Researchers speak to panel members to find out what people's experience of Social Security Scotland has been like. The Experience Panels were established in 2017 to help design a social security system that works for the people of Scotland. Members have experience of at least one of the benefits delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions that have or will come to Scotland.

The survey asked how often respondents would need to contact Social Security Scotland outside the current opening hours of 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

This report presents a summary of the results. This survey builds on research conducted with Experience Panels in 2018 ahead of Social Security Scotland opening. Findings from other questions about the working location of Social Security Scotland staff have been published in a separate report.

In total, 525 panel members took part in the survey (a response rate of around 10%).

The results only represent the views of the panel members who took part in the survey. Results shouldn't be interpreted as being representative of all Social Security Scotland clients.

Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland

Respondents were asked to say how often, if ever, they would need to get in touch by phone, web chat or having an appointment with an adviser in their local area outside the current opening hours. The slots we asked about were:

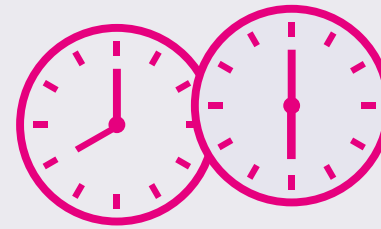
- before 8am, between 6-7pm, after 7pm
- Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays.

Overall, most respondents said they would 'rarely' or 'never' need to contact Social Security Scotland outside of the current opening hours. This was the case for all suggested times and days across each of the possible contact methods.

A sizeable minority of respondents said they would 'sometimes' need to contact Social Security Scotland in each slot outside of the current opening times. This ranged from around 10% to 30% across all contact methods respondents might use to get in touch.

Saturday was the slot that respondents most often said they would 'sometimes' need to get in touch.

Only a small proportion of respondents said they would need to contact Social Security Scotland 'all' or 'most of the time' for any slot outside the current opening hours.



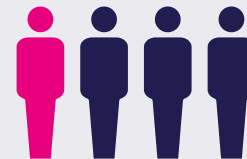
75%

At least 75% of respondents said they would 'rarely' or 'never' need to get in touch during most of the slots outside current opening hours.

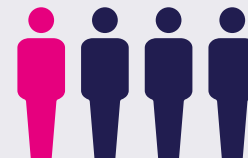
The proportion who said they would 'sometimes' need to contact Social Security Scotland on Saturdays was:



One in three for phone (31%)



One in four for web chat (24%)



One in four for appointments with an adviser in their local area. (23%)

Need for extended hours all or most of the time

- Between 2% and 8% of respondents said they would need to contact Social Security Scotland 'all' or 'most of the time' in any slot outside the current opening hours.
- For each of the ways to get in touch, the 6-7pm option was the most commonly needed.
- The proportion needing each slot 'all' or 'most of the time' was generally similar across different groups of people. This suggests that the existing opening hours across each contact method are largely suitable for most respondents regardless of demographic characteristics.

The proportion who would need to get in touch between 6pm and 7pm 'all' or 'most of the time' was:



8%
for phone



7%
for web chat



5%
for appointments
with an adviser in
their local area

Key themes from respondent comments

- Respondents were asked if there was anything they wanted to tell us about when they need to get in touch with Social Security Scotland. Around 35 respondents left comments about why additional opening hours might be helpful for clients.
- The most frequently mentioned theme related to additional hours in the evenings and at weekends. Respondents said these could help clients who work or have caring responsibilities during current hours.
- A small number of respondents said it was important to be able to contact staff at all times or 24/7.
- A few respondents said that if they received a communication about their benefits on a Friday or Saturday, they might feel anxious if they had to wait until Monday morning to speak to staff.
- Some respondents said that an option to get in touch in emergency situations would be helpful.

Due to my personal circumstances (caring responsibilities) it is not always possible to make calls etc. during normal working hours, so having the option of speaking to someone in the evenings or at weekends would be helpful.

Client Panel respondent

It now needs to be available to fit current patterns, shifts, 9am to 5pm, weekends. We all live 24 hour patterns.

Client Panel respondent

I hope that I would never need to get in touch with Social Security Scotland urgently out of hours but it would be useful if there was an emergency option.

Client Panel respondent

Next Steps

Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will continue to work with the Client and Experience Panels to make sure the social security system works for the people of Scotland.

The results from this research have been shared with senior managers who deliver the telephony, web chat, and Local Delivery service to clients. Social Security Scotland will review the findings and decide whether any change in opening hours is needed at this stage. We will also consider repeating this research in the coming years to monitor whether opening hours are meeting clients' needs. The research team will keep panel members informed of any decisions or further research about opening hours through our regular newsletters.



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Social Security Scotland
Agnes Husband House
17 South Union Street
Dundee
DD1 4BF

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