



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba



Social Security Scotland Recruitment Research

Background



Social Security Scotland was set up in 2018. Its job is to deliver benefits in Scotland. Some of them are benefits that are being moved to Scotland from the UK Government's Department of Work and Pensions.



In 2019, Social Security Scotland published a [Charter](#). The Charter focuses on providing a distinctly Scottish approach to social security. One that is founded on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

These principles extend to the treatment of Social Security Scotland's employees.



This report asks whether Social Security Scotland's recruitment practices are in line with its stated principles.

About the research

Social Security Scotland wanted to hear about the experiences of people who have applied for roles in the agency.

They chose Ipsos MORI, a global market research company, to carry out this research between:



2018- 2020

The research asked:



Are recruitment and 'onboarding' processes accessible and supportive?



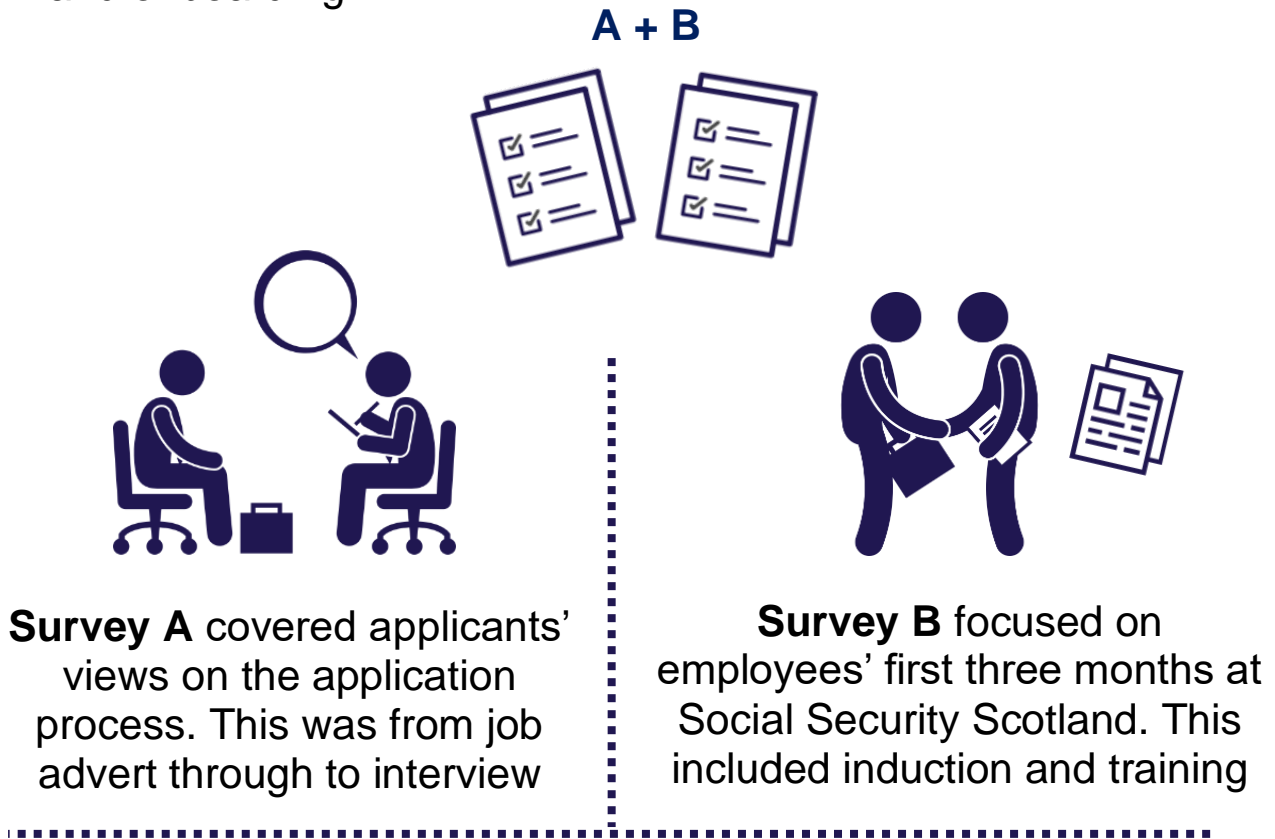
What changes could be made to improve them?



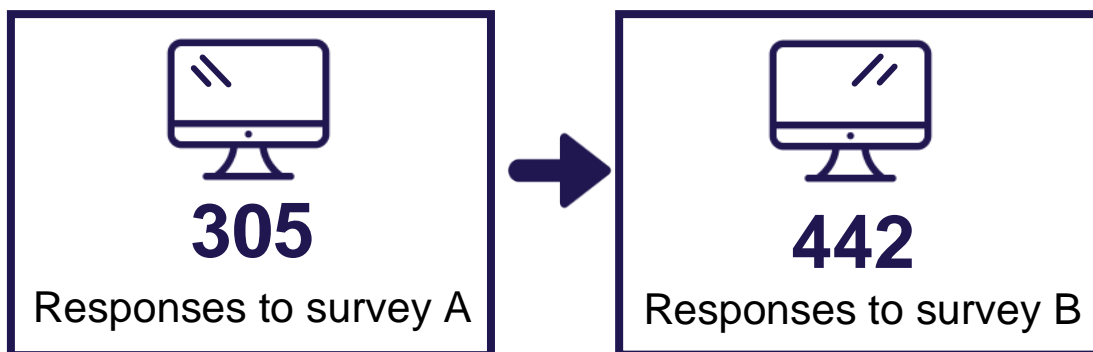
'Onboarding' is the process of introducing an incoming member of staff to the organisation. This includes introducing them to their co-workers and their new role.

Surveys

Two online surveys (A + B) asked questions about recruitment and onboarding.



There were a total of:



On average, every **3 in 5** (60%) employees invited to complete either one, or both surveys, did so.

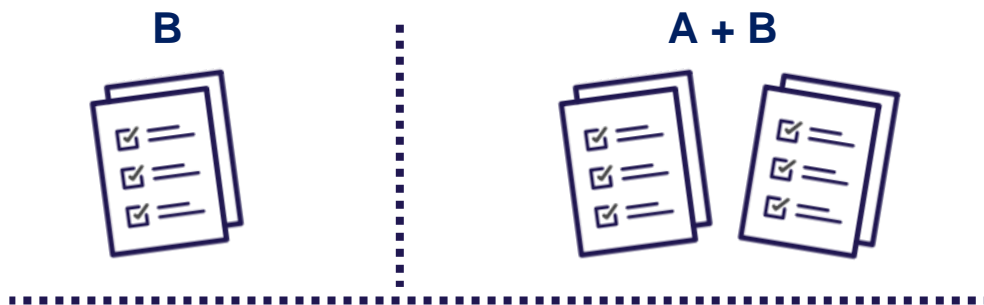


Who was included?

The surveys were open to all employees who had joined Social Security Scotland between:



Those who joined between Sep-Dec 2018 and Jan-Mar 2019 completed survey B **only**. Everyone else completed surveys A and B.




At the end of the surveys, respondents were asked if they would like to take part in a follow-up interview.



30 telephone follow-up interviews were carried out in total, with participants from each of the rounds.

30

Employees with a broad range of characteristics were involved. These include:

 <p>Gender identity</p>	 <p>Ethnicity</p>	 <p>Highest qualification</p>
 <p>Needed reasonable adjustments to their working environment</p>	 <p>Have a physical or mental health condition</p>	 <p>Previously worked in the Civil Service.</p>



People who were less positive in the survey were more likely to be asked to take part.

People not included in the survey or follow-up interviews were those who:



Had started but not finished an application



Were unsuccessful in their application

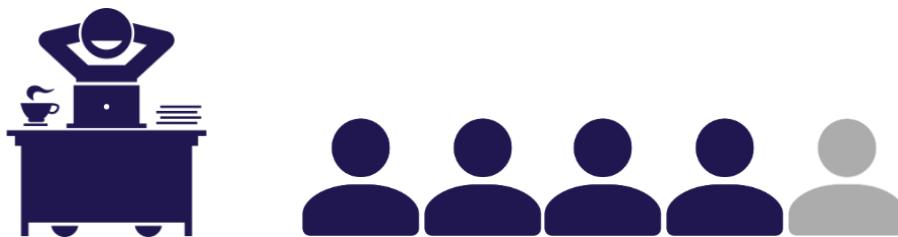
Research findings

Recruitment

Overall experience

Overall, respondents were positive about their experience of applying for a job at Social Security Scotland.

4 in 5 (79%) found it to be a straightforward process.



Almost 9 in 10 (87%) respondents who already worked in the Civil Service said the process of applying for a job was straightforward.



However, **fewer than 8 in 10** (75%) respondents who had not worked for the Civil Service agreed it was straightforward.

This difference may, in part, be due to employees' previous experience of Civil Service style applications and interviews.



“If I had not already been a temporary member of staff in Social Security, ...I may have struggled to be accepted for the job as the criteria and STARR format were hard to master.”



Almost all respondents (97%) said they were treated fairly and with respect through the application process.



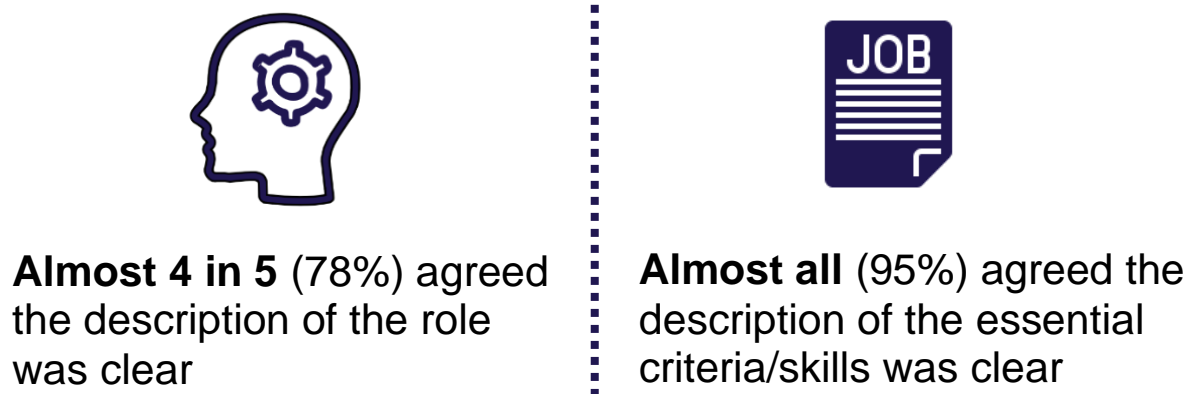
Almost all respondents (95%) said they would likely recommend others to apply for a role at Social Security Scotland.

Job adverts

Respondents were asked about the job advert they saw for their role.



Respondents were broadly positive about the job advert they had seen.



Respondents already working in the Civil Service before they applied were more likely to say the role description was very or fairly clear. (90% compared to 71%).



Almost all (97%) agreed with the statement ‘The job advert(s) made the role sound like something I could apply for’.



Around 2 in 10 respondents contacted someone at the organisation to ask questions about the job role after seeing it advertised.



This was done via a range of communication methods:



4 in 10 (40%)
by telephone



Almost 4 in 10
(38%) by email



Over 2 in 10 (21%)
asked in person



3 in 10 (29%) of respondents with a Civil Service background asked questions about the job, compared to **over 1 in 10** (14%) without.



Among those who did ask questions **9 in 10** were satisfied with the response they received.

Job application

Respondents were asked about the form they filled out to apply for their role at Social Security Scotland.

Almost all respondents (97%) completed an online application form:



over 9 in 10 (94%) said they were happy with this method



most respondents (88%) considered the application form was easy to use



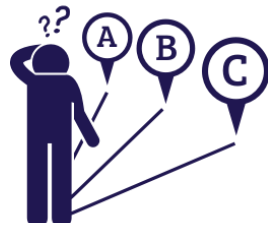
“The online application form was fairly intuitive, and I liked that you could save part way through and return - as it took me several attempts to be happy with my final submission”

Respondents were similarly positive about the information provided on how to fill out the online form. **9 in 10** said it was clear.



Online tests

1 in 3 (33%) of respondents to Survey A were invited to complete an online test as part of their recruitment. These tests were used to assess a candidate's:



decision making



and thought processes



Those who had been asked to complete a test were largely positive about it.



Those who did raise concerns reported feeling the test did not assess skills they would need for their job.



Other concerns related to feelings of time pressure and stress.

Interview

Respondents were asked about their experience of interviewing for their job at Social Security Scotland. This was to assess how:



accessible and supportive
they had found the interview



how it could be
improved



Almost all employees had been invited to take part in a formal interview.



Around **8 in 10** respondents (81%) felt they had been given 'just the right amount' of information before the interview.



More than **9 in 10** (92%) agreed 'It was clear what the questions in the interview were asking'.

Almost **9 in 10** (87%) also agreed that the interview was in a suitable location.



Some interviewers had not seen applicants' CVs or application forms ahead of the assessment.

Some said this was a positive thing.

Others wanted to have been informed in advance, as they felt it affected how they prepared their presentations.



There was also a view that the level of assessment was higher than appropriate for the job role.

Views about the interviewers were generally very positive.



“The interviewers created informal but respectful conversation which made me feel comfortable to answer the questions, engage in conversation and show my personality.”

ONBOARDING



This section covers the experiences of new joiners. This is from being offered a role, to the days leading up to their first day.

Time between job offer and starting date

Respondents were asked about the period of time between their job offer and starting at Social Security Scotland.



Almost 5 out of ten (45%) were satisfied with the length of time they waited. This is almost equally proportionate to those who were dissatisfied (44%).



More than half (55%) of respondents said they were satisfied with the amount of communication they received between being offered a job and starting their role. **1 in 3** (33%) were dissatisfied.

Those who joined Social Security Scotland from another Civil Service job were more likely to say they were satisfied with their wait period.

Employees who joined from outside the Civil Service explained that long wait periods caused problems. Especially when negotiating notice period with previous employers.



Where they were unemployed, delays could cause:



anxiety as participants were not able to plan ahead



and worries about the security of the job offer

“When you are trying to make big life decisions and do the best for your future and your family, it's not ideal having to wait so long”

“The length of time the process - from application to start date - was far too long.”

“Employment is dire in 2020, and for some people, like myself, having to wait months for a decision on a start date was very stressful. It can be the deciding factor between having to use the Welfare System or staying at a job which is temporary and dependent on funding.”



Those who found this period less stressful tended to be those who:



had regular contact through the process



whose line manager was in touch before their first day



Participants in the final round of interviews were most positive about pre-start date communication. There was a sense that communication had been managed well in the context of the pandemic.

Terms of employment



Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their terms of employment.

Levels of satisfaction were very high across all five waves of the survey. **9 out of 10** (92%) said they were satisfied, with a **small minority** (2%) saying they were dissatisfied.





Respondents were also asked about their first salary payment. **Most** reported they had received their first salary payment as expected, and in the right amount.

For those who did experience problems, this could lead to difficulties with:



mortgage repayments



or reliance on credit cards

“I had to use credit cards to get to work due to my payroll not being set up correctly - this lasted 3 months”

“I did not receive my correct salary for 3 months and as such have had issues with my mortgage etc, not good enough for a 21st century organisation”



Resources and Reasonable Adjustments

Respondents were asked about their experiences of getting the resources they needed to do their job. **7 in 10** agreed that Social Security Scotland had put in place everything they would need to do their job. **2 in 10** disagreed.



Respondents were particularly positive about essential equipment arriving at their homes quickly. This was for those who had joined after the COVID-19 lockdowns.



Among those who disagreed, the most common issues were around:





One factor affecting whether or not resources were in place was disability status.



Those who said they had long term physical or mental health conditions were 10% less likely to agree that everything they needed was in place.

Survey respondents were also asked about their experiences of seeking reasonable adjustments to their work equipment.



Almost **1 in 5** respondents had asked for reasonable adjustments.



7 in 10 agreed these adjustments had been put in place.



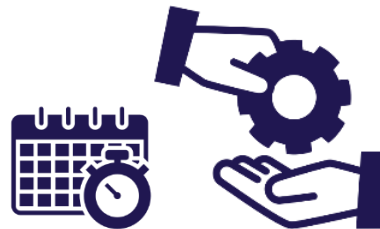
This figure improved over time. Almost **6 in 10** respondents agreed in round one of the survey. This rose to **9 in 10** in the final round.

Support

Respondents were asked about their experiences of starting work at Social Security Scotland. This included being asked if they were provided with enough:



information before their start date



support over the first three months

Across the five rounds **7 in 10** respondents agreed they were given enough information. The proportion agreeing increased over time.



Respondents who were employed by the Civil Service before joining Social Security Scotland were more likely to agree with this statement (**7 in 10** compared to **6 in 10**).

Just over half thought their role was different to what they had expected.





More senior employees reported being very involved with the development of their roles during the first few months.

For the most part, they reported enjoying the autonomy this gave them.

However, other respondents would have preferred their role to have been clearer from the application stage.



Induction and training

8 in 10 employees reported they received an induction and training during their first three months at Social Security Scotland.



However, this fell to **6 in 10** receiving an induction during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Overall, respondents were more positive about the induction than the training they received.



7 in 10 agreed their induction was informative and relevant to their role



6 in 10 who received training agreed it enabled them to do their job effectively

Those with a degree were less likely to say the induction was informative (**7 in 10**) compared to those who did not have a degree (**8 in 10**).



Views on induction and training changed over time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic respondents satisfaction with induction and training both fell.



In July 2020 **9 in 10** respondents agreed that the induction was informative and relevant to their role. This dropped to **7 in 10** in November 2020.

Similarly, in July 2020 **8 in 10** respondents agreed their training enabled them to do their job effectively, and this fell to **5 in 10** in November 2020.

Research from before the COVID-19 pandemic suggests respondents wanted a standard induction process. This might include:



an induction checklist or pack



the assignment of a 'buddy'



a 'first week plan'



Suggestions for improvement to training tended to come from employees working in operational, rather than senior roles.

The most often repeated request was for more 'on the job' training.

“The training does not prepare one for the reality of the role and all the added dimensions”

“To ensure that the training provided reflects the reality of the job”

“To give at least a week for observing an experienced advisor working cases as the test systems and e-learning are tick box perfect - not giving a clear view of the reality of the processes involved.”

Between July and November 2020 face-to-face learning had to be adapted to remote working at short notice.



It was suggested that shadowing may be a useful way for new colleagues to learn. Also, that this may still be possible while working from home.



“Provide much, much more training on the computer system we process applications on, let us shadow other advisors. While working from home (Covid 19) this could be done by listening in to advisors making/receiving calls whilst they share their screen”



As a result of the pandemic, some employees reported being placed in roles they had not applied for. Some said they still received training for their original role, which was not relevant to the role they were doing.

“The pandemic we are in the midst of has thrown challenges across the board in Social Security Scotland, however, the job I applied for is not the job I have ended up with. Never have I felt so unsure in a job and constantly fretting that I'm doing the right thing.”



A final, specific, issue was that Client Experience colleagues reported being given Client Advisor training that was not directly relevant to their role.

Culture, values and vision

Almost all new joiners reported having the culture, values, journey and vision of Social Security Scotland explained to them when they first joined.



For those who received an induction, they were more likely to agree that these had been explained to them.

CONCLUSIONS

Social Security Scotland aims to have recruitment and onboarding processes that are accessible and supportive.

So to what extent has that aim been met?

What improvements could be made?

Recruitment

Successful applicants were extremely positive about the application and interview process.



RESPECT
TRUST

They felt it was a straightforward process and that they were treated respectfully.



Almost all successful applicants would recommend to others that they apply for a job at Social Security Scotland.

However, elements of the process were more challenging for people who had not previously worked with the Civil Service.

They were less likely to:



find the overall process straightforward



find the job description in the advert clear



There is a risk that external applicants are less likely to be successful. This is because they are unfamiliar with Civil Service style applications and interviews.

Onboarding



Social Security Scotland is least effective at supporting future employees in the time between applicants receiving a job offer and their first day at work.



Many respondents were frustrated with the length of the wait and amount of communication during this time.



This led people to be concerned about the security of the job offer. It also created difficulties negotiating end dates with current employers.



Delays and uncertainties disproportionately affect people not in employment, or in temporary employment.

Across the survey rounds onboarding satisfaction was relatively low. However, some improvements were made over time. Employees' experiences during their first three months at Social Security Scotland were largely positive.



New employees were enthusiastic about the welcome and support they received from colleagues



On the whole, reasonable adjustments were put in place to employee workspaces



However, satisfaction was lowest among those with long term health conditions

Views on induction and training were more mixed. Sizeable minorities disagreed that the induction and training they received when starting their jobs was relevant. Or that it had enabled them to do their job.



Overall, Social Security Scotland is meeting its aim of being supportive and accessible to applicants and new employees. It was clear that as an organisation its goal was to treat people fairly and with respect.



It is committed to continuous improvement. The following recommendations would help Social Security Scotland enhance its recruitment and onboarding process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recruitment



Consider whether the language used to describe the role could be clearer, especially for people who do not have a Civil Service background.



Consider whether more guidance and support should be provided throughout the application process. Would this make the process more accessible for people who do not have a Civil Service background?



Make sure applicants know in advance about what the interview will involve. Especially whether or not interviewers have seen their application in advance.

Onboarding

Continue working to ensure that between the following times, progress is as quick and smooth as possible.



job interview and job offer



and the job offer and start date



Whether or not there are updates to give during this time, there should be regular communication with applicants.



Think about having a single point of contact for applicant during this process.



Consider the role the line manager can have in maintaining contact before the start date.



Consider making the buddy system and pre-start date office visits available to all new employees.



Consider providing a welcome pack to new joiners

Consider how face-to-face induction and training experiences can better be replicated for remote working.



Ensure applicants are clear at the recruitment stage what their role will involve, and whether it may change.



Ensure training is as close to the 'on the job' experience as possible.