



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba



Charter Research 2020-2021

Summary report

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.



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Background

This report presents a summary of results from research with Social Security Scotland clients, staff and partners. The research was designed to provide data for a range of measures in the 2020-21 Charter Measurement Framework. The Charter Measurement Framework is a co-designed list of measures. It shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are getting on with delivering the commitments in Our Charter.

This was the first time annual bespoke research was carried out with clients, staff and partner organisations for the Charter Measurement Framework. The research took place in summer 2021. Alongside the findings from the Client Survey, it forms a key source of data on people's experiences of Social Security Scotland.

The research involved interviews with 35 clients from our Client Panels; a survey completed by 92 staff on the People Panel (50% response rate); a focus group with 5 Client Experience staff; and a survey sent to 92 partner organisations contacts received 13 responses.

A People's Service

We are here to help you get everything you are entitled to



Staff attitudes reflect Our Charter

- Client interviewees who spoke to staff said they made them feel comfortable and treated them with kindness. Staff were described as polite, sensitive, respectful and friendly, as well as being patient and empathetic.
- Some said that staff were open and honest which helped to build a sense of mutual trust. A few said they felt confident to talk openly with staff and to contact Social Security Scotland again in future.
- The majority of interviewees said staff listened to them and understood their needs.
- Some favourably compared their experience with Social Security Scotland staff to previous experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions.
- A few interviewees had mixed experiences with staff. Some said that whilst they had been treated well by staff, they were unhappy about other aspects of their interaction. Examples included long call waiting times, dealing with an automated service at the start of a call, and poor sound quality on the call itself.

Experiences of discrimination

- Client interviewees said they had never felt any discrimination at any point during their experience with Social Security Scotland.
- Staff respondents were asked to rate their ability to deliver a service free from discrimination. Almost all (96 per cent) said they felt confident or very confident in their ability to deliver a service without discriminating against others.
- Staff that said they felt confident about delivering a service without discrimination talked about this being due to Our Charter providing a clear set of values to work to. Others said training, developing self-awareness of their behaviours, and getting guidance from colleagues and managers had helped them.



When asked about discrimination, client interviewees said they had felt welcomed and trusted by staff.



Clients find staff knowledgeable and approachable

- The majority of client interviewees said staff were knowledgeable, helpful, able to answer their queries and gave them the information they were looking for.
- A couple of client interviewees said they wanted more information about Social Security Scotland's benefits or other support but were not offered this by staff. One said a new member of staff had been unable to answer their question when they phoned.
- Interviewees that had spoken to staff about a decision felt staff explained it clearly and compassionately. A few felt the decision was not clear and they did not fully understand it.
- Some felt unable to challenge decisions. They cited going through a bereavement or anxiety around contacting Social Security Scotland as reasons for this.
- One had a negative experience when they asked for their Best Start Grant School Age Payment decision to be looked at again after their re-determination. The interviewee described the experience as stressful and said they did not know what to expect from this process.



Most client interviewees described straightforward decisions on their applications and felt they understood the decision.

Some client interviewees said it was not always clear which application the letter was about. A couple said they received a payment before getting their decision letter and felt this was confusing.

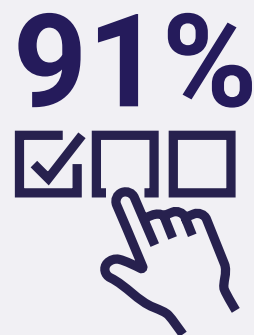


They were able to tell me to apply for Best Start Foods. I didn't know anything about that and when I phoned someone was able to tell me I was eligible.
Client interviewee

I calculated the Funeral Payment I received, and I should have gotten more help. At that point I was just relieved that the payment came through.
Client interviewee

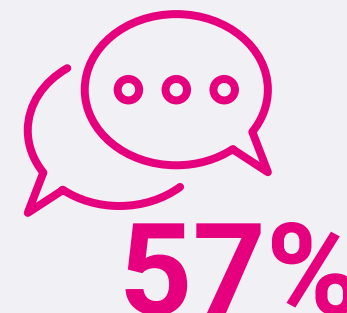
Staff knowledge and training

- Around three quarters (74 per cent) of staff respondents who do or will work with clients agreed or strongly agreed that they knew about a range of advice and advocacy services for clients. Over half (60 per cent) said they knew how to refer clients to those services.
- Just less than half (47 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they knew enough about the appeals process to explain it to clients.
- Staff commented that training, ongoing learning and the availability of guidance had helped them feel knowledgeable when supporting clients. They also said guidance could be improved as it was incomplete, out-of-date or difficult to navigate.
- 92% of staff respondents who don't engage directly with clients said they felt confident or very confident about their job knowledge and skills. Professional experience and training and support from managers and colleagues made them feel confident in their job.
- A few respondents mentioned it would be helpful to have more in-depth training to understand how Social Security Scotland operates and what different teams do.



Almost all staff respondents who work with clients said they felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to support clients.

Over half of staff respondents who do or will work with clients said they knew enough about the re-determinations process to be able to explain it clearly to clients.



Support for staff

- Most staff respondents said they had good or very good support from their line manager (96 per cent) and that they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong (98 per cent).
- Almost all (92%) said they felt supported or very supported to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their needs.
- Around two fifths (38 per cent) of respondents said they had additional needs or requirements during the last year. Almost all (91 per cent) of those who had additional needs told someone about it.
- Needs included:
 - equipment to aid working from home
 - caring responsibilities
 - health and wellbeing.

99%

of staff that completed the survey said they had felt supported at work during the last year.



What staff respondents said about the support they have been given:

I can be honest and open with colleagues around me. People have reached out when they felt I was maybe not ok, or just not my usual self.

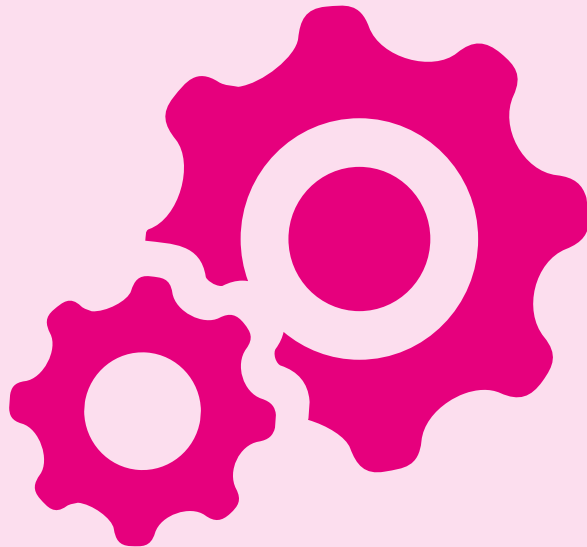
A culture of genuine care is evident across my department.

The training I received when I started and the support I get from colleagues and bosses makes me feel confident to deal with anything.

I have been grateful to have reasonable adjustments. I have been able to work flexibly and take frequent breaks.

Processes that Work

We will design services with the people that use them



Processes work well

- Client Experience staff participants felt the re-determinations process had been reasonably smooth from a staff perspective. They felt good about being able to help clients during a re-determination. However, they said internal systems sometimes made the process more complicated for staff in practice.
- Across benefit types common reasons for re-determinations were clients not meeting the eligibility criteria and a lack of evidence to demonstrate eligibility.
- Decisions had been changed in instances where: staff had overlooked an evidence attachment; there had been a misunderstanding about a client's financial situation; and when clients started to receive qualifying benefits soon after submitting their application.
- Reasons for upholding a decision included clients not meeting the eligibility criteria for the benefit and where a client had applied outside of the application window.

How the service is working

- Nine of the eleven partner organisation respondents who support clients said that looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland with or for clients was easy or very easy. Ten rated going through the application process with or for clients as easy or very easy.
- What Social Security Scotland did well when delivering the service:
 - benefit application process was quick and easy.
 - provided up to date and accessible information about the service, especially in relation to the roll out of new benefits.
- What Social Security Scotland could have done better when delivering the service:
 - improve advertising and raise awareness of the service and benefits.
 - speed up delivery of the service by rolling out all disability benefits.
 - more presence in the Highlands and other rural areas.



10 out of 12

partner respondents rated the service as good or very good.

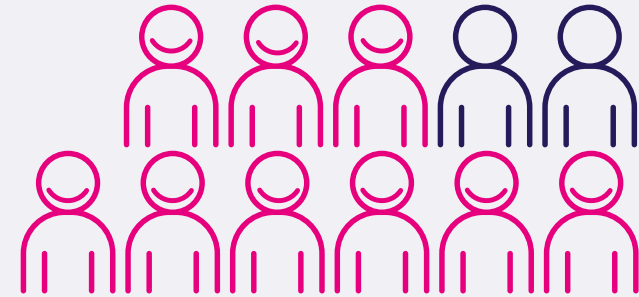
What Social Security Scotland did well and can do better:

Easy literature and easy claiming process.
Partner organisation respondent

More advertising of the benefits available as not all clients are aware.
Partner organisation respondent

Services are accessible

- Most client interviewees said it was easy to access information about Social Security Scotland's services. They said:
 - the website was informative and easy to use.
 - it was helpful to access information through Social Security Scotland's social media channels.
 - letters were easy to understand and the language and layout was simple.
- One interviewee expressed difficulty with understanding the information in guidance, letters and application forms and felt this was a barrier to accessing Social Security Scotland's services.
- Clear, accessible information on the website and the ability to apply online were given as positive examples of accessibility by partner respondents.
- Two partner respondents rated the service as not at all accessible. They mentioned examples where clients they were supporting had been digitally excluded from the service.
- Some staff respondents commented that the service was accessible and inclusive for clients, but others thought aspects of the service could be improved.



9 out of 11

partner respondents thought the service had been accessible for clients.

What people said about the accessibility of the service:

The website and online form are really user friendly. It's laid out in a really simple straightforward way so that there's nothing confusing about it.
Client interviewee

The process surrounding communicating with clients whose first language isn't English could be better.
Staff respondent

A Learning System

Using feedback
to improve performance



Additional support for clients

- Some client interviewees said email was their preferred communication method and would make it easier for them and others to interact with Social Security Scotland. Staff made similar comments.
- Client interviewees also suggested improvements to the online application process including: web chat support for completing the form; embedded guidance in the form itself; a reference number after submitting; and an online portal for updating their information and checking eligibility.
- A few client interviewees and staff respondents wanted clients to have clearer information on eligibility and key application dates. Some client interviewees also suggested additional support for particular groups such as targeted communications and extra information for elderly people and people whose preferred language is not English.

You Said: We Did

- Client Experience staff participants said client feedback and complaints had led to changes to the website and updates to the telephony script with a shorter message and no duplication of information.
- Some partner organisation respondents said their feedback had been acted on. Two said they didn't know how to give feedback and one felt theirs had not been acted on.
- Staff respondents talked about providing suggestions to improve the client experience, such as reviewing information to improve benefit take up. Other examples included improvements to data security and staff working patterns.
- Some staff respondents were unsure whether their suggestions had led to an improvement. A few said their suggestions had not been actioned because there is a 'backlog' of improvements which take priority, or because they felt that the suggestions were not taken on board.

Acknowledgement of mistakes

- One client interviewee mentioned an example where Social Security Scotland had made a mistake. The interviewee had been overpaid and was sent a letter stating that this had happened in Social Security Scotland's error. The interviewee felt this action was open and honest.
- Client Experience staff participants mentioned other instances where Social Security Scotland had made mistakes including giving the wrong advice to a client and overlooking evidence with an application. In both examples, Social Security Scotland admitted the mistake and apologised to the client.

The client said they would have appreciated being told the honest truth on day one that 'unfortunately you're too late to apply'. But instead they had been encouraged by staff to keep pursuing a different resolution.
Client Experience staff participant

It was all detailed in a letter. It said that I'd been paid twice, and it clarified that it was an error on the part of Social Security Scotland. I just thought it was really well handled because obviously mistakes do happen.
Client interviewee

A trustworthy organisation

- Nine out of twelve partner organisation respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is an open organisation and an honest organisation.
- Most client interviewees felt Social Security Scotland had been open with them by providing clear information about processes and timescales and regular updates on applications. One interviewee felt Social Security Scotland was open because they explained why they were doing certain things, alongside the what and the how.
- A few client interviewees felt there were times where Social Security Scotland could have been more open and clear about things. One interviewee said that it had been difficult to communicate with Social Security Scotland during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Other interviewees felt there could be more awareness raising about Social Security Scotland's services and benefits, particularly for those without access to the internet.

I have found them open, honest and willing to engage in my dealings/ training events (both as a deliverer and as a recipient) with them.

Partner organisation respondent

I think because COVID happened sometimes it was a lot harder to communicate in the past year.

Client interviewee

They are very open, honest, transparent in what they're doing. They treated me as a person, not as a number and kept me informed at the right time.

Client interviewee

If I didn't have Carer's Allowance I wouldn't have known that Social Security Scotland existed. And to me the fact that people don't know about it, that's the biggest barrier.

Client interviewee

Working with other organisations

- Nine out of thirteen partner organisation respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland worked well with their organisation in 2020-21 through meetings, events and general communication.
- In future they wanted:
 - more regular and consistent updates, particularly for any changes to the service.
 - more publicising and advertising of Social Security Scotland's service.
 - information on benefit take up.
 - formal updates on any feedback that they provide through stakeholder groups.
- Some partner respondents were wholly positive in their comments about their experience, commending staff and the service. Others felt there was more to be done to improve partnership working through more regular and consistent communication.

Other feedback

- Client interviewees expressed appreciation for benefit payments and described how these had made a positive difference to their lives.
- A few client interviewees said they were pleased to take part in this type of research. They felt the research provided a chance to share their experiences and express their views.

I think it's great that you're looking to make sure that the services being offered are fair, are reasonable and respectful. So anything that I can do with that. This is pretty much what I expected and I'm really happy to be a part of it, because I think if people know how much their efforts are appreciated by clients like me then it can only make them feel better to find out that they did really well.

Client interviewee



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Contact us

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