



Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2022-2023



Exploring this research

Choose how much detail you want to read:

- For findings in one page → 'Findings at a glance' on page 4
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For key findings in a more visual format, a separate [Summary report](#) has also been published.

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Findings at a glance

The research involved interviews with clients and surveys with staff and partners on their experiences with Social Security Scotland in 2022-23. Client participants said staff were helpful, honest and knowledgeable. Staff answered their questions and signposted them to other support. Staff were empathetic and made them feel trusted. Almost all client participants said they had not been discriminated against. Some experienced poor staff manner and unfair treatment to do with communication barriers.

Client participants were positive about contacting Social Security Scotland by phone and web chat, although some experienced long waits. Participants said it was easy to apply and submit information. They said decision letters were clear but could include payment dates and specific reasons for the decision. Those who had their benefit transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions said the process was smooth. A few reported missing letters and payments not arriving as expected after the transfer.

Over half (55%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good. Many experienced long call wait times and difficulty communicating on clients' behalf. Two-thirds (67%) said Social Security Scotland worked well with their organisation. Partner respondents called for more transparency about application processing times.

Most staff respondents (82%) felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job. Training, support from colleagues, and previous experience helped them to feel confident. There were suggestions for improvements to guidance and more training. Most (82%) said support from their line manager had been good or very good.

Some clients and partners had complained about issues or mistakes they experienced. Most were satisfied but others were unsure whether issues had been fixed.

Staff and partner respondents said Social Security Scotland welcomed and acted on feedback, but some felt action was slow or feedback hadn't been listened to.

Executive summary

This report presents results from research with clients, staff and partners about how Social Security Scotland performed in 2022-23. The research was designed to provide data for a range of measures in the 2022-23 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](#).

The research took place from February to June 2023. It involved in-depth interviews with 40 clients from our Client Panels; a survey completed by 1,568 of all staff (36% response rate); focus groups with 6 Client Experience staff; and a survey completed by 101 partners.

The sections below provide the headline findings from each theme of the research. Findings from this report appear in the relevant sections of the [2022-23 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

A People's Service: What people said about their relationship with Social Security Scotland

Client experiences of Social Security Scotland

Client participants said they had been treated with respect and dignity and felt that Social Security Scotland genuinely wanted to help clients. Almost all said they had not been discriminated against, although there were two examples of negative experiences relating to communication barriers.

Some client participants felt Social Security Scotland had been open about things like eligibility and data protection. They said staff had been honest and helpful, even when they couldn't answer clients' questions.

Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland

More than half (55%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good. A similar proportion said that Social Security Scotland is open (51%) and honest (53%). Some said Social Security Scotland had been open about their processes and honest about challenges to the delivery of the service. However, others felt Social Security Scotland could be more transparent about things like application processing times.

Over two-thirds (67%) of partner respondents said Social Security Scotland had worked well with their organisation. Positive experiences of partnership working included: informative engagement events, feeling listened to when participating in stakeholder reference groups, and the approachable and open attitude of staff. Respondents called for updates and information to be shared in a more consistent way.

Staff experiences of Social Security Scotland

Most staff respondents said they were familiar with Our Charter (88%) and that they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service that reflects a human rights-based system (89%). Almost all (93%) felt confident or very confident to deliver a service without discriminating against others.

Staff respondents felt confident about not discriminating thanks to training and internal processes for things like interpretation and translation. Many felt the Charter commitments aligned with their own personal beliefs and were committed to avoiding and challenging discrimination. However, there was concern that issues with some processes and workload pressures were leading to discrimination of clients and staff. Some felt Social Security Scotland's values weren't always applied to staff. Those who didn't feel confident raised the need for further training on Our Charter and discrimination.

Processes that Work: Experiences of using the service

Communicating with Social Security Scotland

Many client participants had contacted Social Security Scotland by phone. Some said their call was answered quickly. Others had to wait but didn't mind this. A couple of participants were unhappy at how long their wait was. A few had used web chat and were positive about this, but said it would be helpful to know their position in the queue while waiting to connect to an adviser.

A quarter (26%) of client-facing partner respondents found it easy or very easy to contact Social Security Scotland on clients' behalf. Over half (53%) found it difficult or very difficult. Wait times on the phone was the most common issue. Some found web chat easy but others experienced delays and didn't always get the help they needed. Partners praised the availability of interpretation but felt staff needed more training on this. They also gave examples of digital exclusion for clients who couldn't access information or applications online. Suggestions for improvement included: benefit-specific phone lines, audio notifications when a web chat adviser becomes available, and a secure email service or dedicated helpline for partners who support clients.

Experiences with staff

Client participants said staff were friendly, polite and helpful. Staff listened, made them feel trusted and treated them with empathy. Participants appreciated that staff were honest even when things went wrong or if there was a delay. Most said staff answered their questions and gave them the information they needed, including signposting to other forms of support. A few participants had less positive experiences to do with poor staff manner and receiving conflicting information from different staff members.

Half (50%) of client-facing partner respondents said their experience of speaking to staff on clients' behalf was good or very good. Some felt that staff were helpful and knowledgeable when dealing with queries. Others felt staff lacked knowledge and training on things like specific benefits and processes.

Applying for a benefit and transfer of benefits

Many client participants said the application process was easy. They felt questions were clear and it was straightforward to provide information and submit the form. Some had received support from Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service when applying and gave positive feedback about this. Some had applied online and felt it was accessible and convenient, but a few experienced difficulties with this.

Client participants who had their benefit transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland were asked about this. Many said the process was smooth and straightforward. They got letters with information about the transfer and emphasised that they didn't have to "do anything". Feedback was less positive where participants experienced issues including missing letters and payments not arriving as expected.

Getting and challenging decisions

There was positive feedback about decision letters from client participants. Many said the letter was clear and easy to understand. Participants who applied for a disability benefit said it was clear which rates had been awarded. A few participants would have preferred clearer information about exact payment dates. Others wanted letters to include more specific information about the reasons for the decision, or the option to receive this information over the phone.

One client participant had challenged their decision and requested a re-determination after their application for Adult Disability Payment was denied. The participant was positive about the overall process and outcome. A few participants said Social Security Scotland should make it easier for clients to request a re-determination. They felt the request form was off-putting and suggested having an online or email option to challenge a decision.

Additional support for clients

Clients, staff and partners made suggestions about additional support Social Security Scotland could put in place to allow clients to more easily use the service. There were many suggestions for additional forms of communication such as email and an automatic call back system. Client participants suggested an online portal to track application progress and updates. Other suggestions included: clearer application guidance, online options to submit a re-determination or change of circumstances, and letters to be clearer if containing important information or if action is needed from the client.

Working for Social Security Scotland

Staff knowledge and skills

Most staff respondents (82%) said they felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job.

Staff who interact with clients as part of their job or will do so in the future (1,043 respondents) were asked additional questions about their knowledge. Three-quarters (73%) rated their knowledge of the social security system in Scotland as good or very good. Most said they knew about support services (69%) and how to refer clients to these (60%).

Training, self-directed learning, support from colleagues, and previous experience had helped staff respondents to feel confident in their skills and knowledge. Some felt they would benefit from more training on things like handling challenging situations and using internal systems. There were also suggestions for guidance to be improved and to be shared in a more systematic way.

Support for staff

The majority of staff respondents (82%) said they'd had good or very good support from their line manager. Respondents said line managers were often approachable and understanding. Some reported feeling trusted to manage workloads and supported with things like professional development and additional needs at work. Regular opportunities to check in had also helped them feel supported. Those who didn't feel supported mentioned issues like poor communication and gaps in line managers' knowledge and experience.

Communication

The majority (82%) of staff respondents felt confident or very confident to deliver a service based on inclusive communication. Support from the inclusive communication team and internal training helped respondents to feel confident. They felt inclusiveness was rooted in Social Security Scotland's culture through things like prioritising plain English and accessible documents. Some felt there was room for improvement as the organisation grows.

Most (80%) staff respondents found it easy or very easy to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs. Many said their communication needs had been met and felt supported by colleagues to communicate in their preferred ways. Some mentioned instances when their communication needs weren't met. This included the use of acronyms and internal systems that are incompatible with assistive technology.

A Learning System: Listening to feedback and making improvements

Openness to feedback from clients, staff and partners

The majority (86%) of staff respondents said they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong in Social Security Scotland. Staff respondents felt strongly about the need to voice suggestions for improvements to ensure clients are receiving the best service possible.

Over half (58%) of partner respondents thought Social Security Scotland is open to feedback. A fifth (20%) thought Social Security Scotland acts on feedback. Partner respondents said Social Security Scotland welcomed and listened to suggestions, but felt action could be slow. Client participants were happy Social Security Scotland encouraged feedback to improve the service.

Experiences of giving feedback

Staff respondents reported a culture of welcoming feedback and felt confident and supported to voice their suggestions. They had suggested improvements to internal processes, guidance and training, and communication with partners who support clients. However, many felt suggestions had been ignored or not acted upon in practice. They raised the need for better communication in response to suggestions and how they will be actioned.

Over half of partner respondents (55%) said they had given feedback. A quarter (24%) said they wanted to give feedback but didn't know how. Some partner respondents had positive experiences of providing feedback, either online or directly to staff, and were pleased about receiving follow up communication from Social Security Scotland. Other partner respondents experienced problems with the feedback process including: issues providing feedback to staff over the phone, delays hearing back from Social Security Scotland or not hearing back at all, and feedback not being actioned.

Improvements based on feedback

Some staff respondents said their feedback had led to improvements to internal processes and policies. This included improvements or changes to accessibility, the time needed to process some cases, and how information is communicated and shared within and between teams. Client Experience staff participants said Social Security Scotland had made improvements to information for clients who move away from Scotland and on processing times in response to client feedback.

A Learning System: Experiences of mistakes and complaints

Client and partner experiences of things going wrong

Some clients, staff and partners encountered problems and mistakes made by Social Security Scotland including errors with communications to clients and problems processing applications.

Some clients and partners complained about problems and mistakes. Client participants said the complaints process was quick and that staff apologised for mistakes. Most who reported problems were satisfied that their complaint or issue had been resolved, but others were dissatisfied or unsure whether their issue had been fixed. A few partners had complained in cases where applications were stuck or delayed and felt a complaint was their only option to escalate the issue.

Staff perspectives on mistakes and complaints

Client Experience staff participants said client complaints were commonly about long waiting times for a decision on their application. Participants had received suggestions from clients to introduce more updates during the application process. Other reasons for complaints included parental responsibility for benefits involving children and delays when reporting a change of circumstances during case transfer. Participants said they were often unable to do more than apologise to clients, but had taken steps to make improvements where complaints identified issues with the service.

Introduction

This report describes the findings from research with clients, staff and partners about how Social Security Scotland performed in 2022-23. The research was designed to provide data for a range of measures in the 2022-23 Charter Measurement Framework.

The Charter Measurement Framework

The Charter Measurement Framework is a co-designed list of measures relating to the commitments set out in [Our Charter](#). Our Charter was developed in 2018 with people with lived experience of the benefits coming to Scotland. In 2019, the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) was also co-designed. It shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are getting on with delivering the commitments in Our Charter. It also helps Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government to continuously improve what they are doing.

The Charter Measurement Framework is published annually alongside Social Security Scotland's annual report and accounts. It contains a comprehensive list of measures of how Social Security Scotland's services are working. Measures that ask for 'examples of' client, staff and partner experiences were used to develop questions for this research. Findings from this report appear in relevant sections of the [2022-23 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

We asked participants across all strands to think about their experiences between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 when providing their responses. However, as some of the research took place after March 2023 we cannot guarantee that all responses referred solely to 2022-23. Some participants may have talked about experiences slightly before or after this period.

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

Research methods

The research was carried out between February and June 2023. A range of methods were used across the three strands of the research.

Researchers conducted 40 in-depth interviews with Client Panel members between February and May 2023. Client Panel members are people who have applied for or received payments from Social Security Scotland. Participants in these interviews are referred to as 'client participants' in this report.

All staff in Social Security Scotland were invited to complete a survey which ran in February and March 2023. 1,568 staff took part, a response rate of approximately 36%.¹ Respondents to the staff survey are called 'staff respondents' in this report.

In June, two focus groups were carried out with 6 members of Social Security Scotland's Client Experience team. This team work on cases where clients challenge a decision, and on complaints, compliments and suggestions from clients. Focus group participants are referred to as 'Client Experience staff participants' in this report.

Finally, a survey was sent to a range of partner organisations. Partners are people who, as part of their job, support clients to use Social Security Scotland's services or collaborate with Social Security Scotland to inform how the service is delivered. The survey ran in March and April 2023 and received 101 valid responses. Respondents to the partner survey are referred to as 'partner respondents' in this report.

Given the volume of data collected from staff and partners, analysis took a proportionate approach. Researchers looked for key themes in open-text comments and then used a proportion of comments to consider these themes in more detail.

Year-on-year trend analysis of quantitative findings from the staff and partner surveys is presented in relevant sections of the [2022-23 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

¹ According to Social Security Scotland's HR data, there were approximately 4,305 staff in Social Security Scotland when the survey was launched in February 2023.

About the participants

Of the 40 client participants, the oldest was 76 and the youngest was 23. More women took part than men and most were white. Over half had a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness. More than half had caring responsibilities. Among the participants there were people who had been granted refugee status to live in the UK. Feedback was collected about most Social Security Scotland benefits available before 31 March 2023 except Young Carer Grant and Winter Heating Payment.

Over half (59%) of staff survey respondents were women. Over a third (38%) were aged 45 or over. Most staff respondents (87%) were white. Around a quarter (28%) said they had a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness. 28% were A-Band staff, 59% were B-band, with around 6% C-band or higher.² Most respondents (82%) were full time staff. Full tables of the respondents' characteristics are at Annex B.

The 6 Client Experience staff who participated in focus groups were a mix of A and B-band staff. Participants were allocated to a focus group based on whether their work focused on re-determinations, internal reviews and appeals or on complaints, compliments and suggestions.

Most partner respondents (91%) said they support clients or potential clients. Around one in ten (9%) said they engaged with the organisation in other ways including:

- membership of a stakeholder reference group,
- attending a Social Security Scotland engagement event,
- sending a query or requesting information or data from Social Security Scotland
- engaging with Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery staff (but not in relation to directly supporting clients).

Around half (47%) of the respondents who said they support clients or potential clients said they had also engaged with the organisation in one or more of the above ways.

² A-band staff are the least senior, with C-band and higher staff being most senior.

1. A People's Service: What people said about their relationship with Social Security Scotland

This chapter aligns with the first section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter. It looks at how clients, staff and partners felt during their experience with Social Security Scotland and whether the organisation upheld its values of dignity, fairness and respect.

1.1. Client experiences of Social Security Scotland

Most client participants said they felt they had been treated fairly by Social Security Scotland and that staff had been supportive. Some participants said Social Security Scotland had a positive culture. Participants felt a sense that Social Security Scotland genuinely wanted to help clients. Some mentioned that they had been treated with respect and dignity. Almost all said they had not been discriminated against by Social Security Scotland processes or staff.

“They treat people with respect and dignity, I remember the motto. That’s very important because that’s how they treat people.” **Client participant**

“All the people I’ve spoken to have tried to reassure me, they’ve been understanding, they’ve put across not to worry, we’ll get in touch. There’s been no discrimination there.” **Client participant**

Two participants mentioned examples of unfair treatment or discrimination relating to communication barriers. One participant said Social Security Scotland’s opening hours made it difficult for clients who work during the day to get in touch and felt this was discriminatory. The participant had been offered a letter through the post but was wary about this as she had experience of letters going missing. The participant said these issues made her feel anxious about future communication with Social Security Scotland.

“I said how difficult it was for me contacting them without a direct number or email. I said they were discriminating against people working the same hours as them. They offered a letter but I hadn’t been getting those so I didn’t think that was a good idea... I’m going to have to contact them at some point in the next couple of months. And to be honest that makes me anxious.” **Client participant**

Another participant said communicating with Social Security Scotland had made her feel stressed. The participant explained that although her first language isn’t English, the client adviser she spoke with hadn’t offered an interpreter.

“It was a bit stressful because I don’t understand English very well and it would be beneficial if they emailed it or if there was an interpreter on the line. That would have avoided the stress.” **Client participant**

During their interviews, client participants were asked if they thought Social Security Scotland was an open and honest organisation. Many agreed and mentioned things like clear information about eligibility and how clients’ data is protected.

“They can’t be any more open or clear about the eligibility, it’s all on the form. They were very helpful, I’ll put it that way.” **Client participant**

“When you’re in the process of applying online they give you information about the data you’re sharing with them and all that type of thing. Privacy and dealing with personal data and that.” **Client participant**

Some participants said that Social Security Scotland staff were honest, even when they couldn’t answer clients’ questions. However, one participant said this caused her to be concerned about staff knowledge and training. One participant said that Social Security Scotland was open and didn’t try to conceal when things went wrong with a process.

“If they couldn’t answer my questions, they said so. They didn’t try to make things up... They were honest, but that honesty highlighted some concerns for me, that some of the staff didn’t have the information they needed.” **Client participant**

“It’s a good experience speaking to Social Security Scotland staff, they are friendly and open... They are quite muddled with their processes but they are honest. It is not like they are hiding anything.” **Client participant**

1.2. Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland

Partner respondents were asked to rate the overall service delivered by Social Security Scotland (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: How would you rate the overall service delivered by Social Security Scotland?

(n=98) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very good	9%
Good	46%
Neither good nor poor	19%
Poor	17%
Very poor	4%
Don't know/not applicable	4%

More than half (55%) of partner respondents rated the overall service as good or very good. Around a fifth (21%) rated it as poor or very poor. A similar proportion (19%) said it was neither good nor poor.

Partner respondents were asked whether they felt Social Security Scotland is an open and honest organisation (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Partner respondent views on openness and honesty
(n=97) All respondents, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know/not applicable
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	51%	37%	4%	8%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	53%	33%	3%	11%

Half (51%) of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is an open organisation. A similar proportion (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation. Around a third said they neither agreed nor disagreed that Social Security Scotland is open (37%) and honest (33%).

In open-text comments, partner respondents praised Social Security Scotland for operating in an open and honest way and for being transparent about their processes. Respondents felt there had also been openness and honesty during stakeholder reference groups. Some felt Social Security Scotland had been honest about challenges to the delivery of the service.

"I received a very open and honest answer to my request for more information [regarding] a process. Other workplaces may not have been so honest and I really appreciate the warmth and honesty in my interaction with our local Social Security Scotland manager. It really was refreshing and reassuring and gave me a positive insight as to how our most vulnerable people will be supported as well going forward." **Partner respondent**

"In my dealings with the [reference group], Social Security Scotland has always been both open and honest." **Partner respondent**

“I have found Social Security Scotland staff to be open and transparent about the issues they are dealing with.” **Partner respondent**

Negative comments were about a lack of transparency on application processing times. In particular, partner respondents were unhappy that the timescales for reaching decisions on Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment applications had changed compared to the original expectation. Additionally, some respondents felt they weren't able to share or receive information openly with Social Security Scotland due to problems with consent when acting on clients' behalf.

“When attending training for benefits provided by Social Security Scotland, the timescales given for decisions were completely unrealistic – and when the benefit has been launched, very far from the truth.” **Partner respondent**

“[Social Security Scotland] are far from open. Sharing information with staff is next to impossible, much to the detriment of the clients.” **Partner respondent**

The survey of partners asked respondents about their experiences of interacting with Social Security Scotland in the ways that they prefer (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3: How easy or difficult has it been to interact with Social Security Scotland in the ways you prefer?
(n=97) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very easy	7%
Easy	23%
Neither easy nor difficult	18%
Difficult	35%
Very difficult	18%

Around a third (30%) of partner respondents said it was easy or very easy to interact with Social Security Scotland in their preferred way. Over half (53%) said it was difficult or very difficult, and one in five (18%) said it was neither easy nor difficult.

In their comments, some respondents were positive about communicating with Social Security Scotland and felt there was a range of “accessible and open” communication methods. Some said it was difficult to communicate in the ways they preferred. Comments were mostly about long waiting times for phone or web chat and problems acting on clients’ behalf. Some said they’d prefer the option to email Social Security Scotland.

“Methods of interacting have always been accessible and open.”
Partner respondent

“Online or email is preferred method – not available.” **Partner respondent**

The survey also asked partners about their experience of working with Social Security Scotland (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: How much do you agree or disagree with the following: Social Security Scotland has worked well with me and my organisation (n=63) Respondents who have worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland, Column percentages

Response options	
Strongly agree	19%
Agree	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/not applicable	3%

Over two-thirds (67%) of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland had worked well with them and their organisation. A quarter (24%) said 'neither', and less than one in ten (7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In open-text comments, respondents said they felt positive about working with Social Security Scotland due to things like: informative stakeholder engagement events; feeling listened to when participating in reference groups; and the approachable and open attitude of staff. They praised Local Delivery staff in particular, highlighting their enthusiastic manner and proactive approach to building relationships with partners.

“Engagement events are always well advertised and I feel well informed from the event.” **Partner respondent**

“The Local Delivery Lead is fully engaged in our local groups and works well with a range of partners to ensure staff and volunteers are knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland payments and work together with Social Security Scotland officers to support their clients.” **Partner respondent**

Some partner respondents had suggestions to improve their relationship with Social Security Scotland. These included: sharing information and updates in a more consistent way; following up on queries after external events; and opportunities to build relationships with Local Delivery staff as standard practice.

“Emails and updates being received are really dependant on what courses you have attended or if you have had a specific enquiry and that person then decides to send information when they have it... it does create information deserts.”
Partner respondent

“I have been fortunate to work with both Local Delivery staff and relationship managers locally but don’t think this is standard practice – it should be.”
Partner respondent

1.3. Staff experiences of Social Security Scotland

Staff respondents were asked about their engagement with Our Charter (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5: Staff engagement with Our Charter
(n=1,564-1,568) All respondents, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I am familiar with the commitments set out in Our Charter	88%	8%	4%
I consider the commitments in Our Charter when I carry out my work	84%	11%	5%

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are familiar with the Charter commitments (88%) and that they consider the commitments in their work (84%). A small proportion said they weren't familiar with the Charter commitments (4%) or didn't consider them (5%).

In their comments, staff respondents were positive about Social Security Scotland's values and principles. Many felt the Charter commitments aligned with their own personal beliefs and said they worked hard to uphold these principles in their behaviour and their work. A small number said although they were familiar with the organisation's values, they didn't have a detailed understanding of specific Charter commitments.

"My beliefs align with Our Charter and I strive to be inclusive and adhere to the Charter in my work and behaviour." **Staff respondent**

"I am not widely familiar with the commitments set out in the Charter, but do regularly look to adhere to the principles of dignity, fairness and respect when carrying out my working role." **Staff respondent**

Staff respondents were also asked questions about delivering a service in line with the human rights-based themes of the Charter (Table 1.6) including how confident they felt to deliver a service without discriminating (Table 1.7). By ‘delivering a service’, we mean the services staff deliver to colleagues, clients and partners and the way they do their jobs across all areas of the organisation.

Table 1.6: In the past year, how confident have you felt to deliver a service that reflects the values of a human rights-based system as set out in Our Charter?

(n=1,563) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very confident	35%
Confident	54%
Not confident	9%
Not at all confident	2%

Table 1.7: In the past year, how confident have you felt to deliver a service without discriminating against others?
(n=1,562) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very confident	48%
Confident	45%
Not confident	6%
Not at all confident	2%

The majority of respondents (89%) said they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service that reflects a human rights-based system. Around one in ten (11%) said they weren't confident. Almost all staff respondents (93%) said they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service without discriminating against others. Very few (8%) didn't feel confident about this.

Staff said training had helped them to feel confident about not discriminating, especially training received as part of onboarding. Many said they felt a personal commitment to not discriminating against others and to challenging discrimination when they see it. Some said internal tools and processes, such as the ability to offer interpretation and translation services to clients, made them feel confident about not discriminating.

“The Charter and its values align with my own personal values, so it is easy to follow. I feel comfortable and feel like I have the tools to challenge discrimination when I see it.” **Staff respondent**

“I feel it was made very clear in training about the Charter: dignity, respect of clients, learning more about discrimination. That has stayed with me, especially that social security is a human right.” **Staff respondent**

Some respondents talked about challenges they'd experienced when delivering a service in line with the commitments in Our Charter. Challenges included:

- complicated processes, systems and policies that changed often
- high workloads
- understaffing
- difficulties communicating with clients and colleagues using their preferred channels.

There was concern that these issues were leading to discrimination against clients and staff, especially around communication needs or gender. Some raised the need for more training on Our Charter and discrimination. Some expressed concern about the treatment of staff members and felt that Social Security Scotland's values weren't always applied to staff.

“Insufficient training provided for dealing with minority groups, in particular for transgender clients – next to no guidance on how to treat cases where the client is transgender as this falls within other generic guidance such as 'documents required when a client has changed their name' with no room for dignity, fairness and respect. [...] I believe there needs to be mandatory and regular equality and diversity refresher training for all staff so they are aware of how to treat vulnerable groups. I have been in the agency for 16 months and am yet to receive any mandatory training further to that which I received when joining.” **Staff respondent**

“In the last year the culture of 'dignity, fairness and respect' has gone from a lived mantra to meaningless buzz words and this is reflected in how managers (especially performance manager grade and above) word communications to staff of lower grades. There is no respect for operational colleagues' expertise from those that make decisions.” **Staff respondent**

2. Processes that Work: Experiences of using the service

This chapter looks at experiences of applying for or receiving benefits from Social Security Scotland. This aligns with the second section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter which says services should be supportive, accessible, simple, quick, and flexible.

2.1. Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland

Many client participants had experience of phoning Social Security Scotland for help or advice. Feedback about waiting times was mixed. Some said their call had been answered quickly. Some said they had to wait but didn't mind this. A couple of participants were unhappy at how long their wait was.

"The person I spoke to was helpful. I did wait a while. You don't need to sit by the phone anymore, you can do stuff while on hold. The wait was about 40 minutes. I called about 4pm, so it might be quite busy. It was my choice to wait so I didn't mind." **Client participant**

"Just when you want to call, you don't want to wait a long time. I forgot everything about the application because I waited a long time. Sometimes an hour and a half, a very long time. I don't always have the time." **Client participant**

A few client participants mentioned using Social Security Scotland's web chat service. Participants were positive about the waiting time to connect to a web chat adviser compared with phone waiting times. Participants were also happy with the service they received from web chat advisers. One participant suggested it would be helpful to know their position in the queue while waiting to connect to a web chat adviser.

"Web chat was fine. I like it, you don't have to talk to anybody. Much quicker than being on the phone. 10 out of 10 for that. I was filling in the form, trying to do the documents and I just couldn't do it. I looked for an alternative and used web chat. [The adviser] told me to do it another way and it worked." **Client participant**

“I think the web chat is a good facility but it can take a bit long to start. It would be nice if it said ‘we are trying to connect you’ or ‘you are X in the queue’, something to let you know you are waiting for an adviser. The first couple of times I thought what is happening?” **Client participant**

In the partner survey, respondents who directly support clients were asked about their experiences of looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland with or for clients (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: How easy or difficult has it been to do the following: Looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland with or for clients (n=94) Client-facing respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very easy	11%
Easy	15%
Neither easy nor difficult	20%
Difficult	23%
Very difficult	30%
Don't know/not applicable	1%

A quarter (26%) of client-facing respondents said looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland was easy or very easy. Over half (53%) said it was difficult or very difficult. One in five (20%) said ‘neither’.

In their comments, most partner respondents said information was easy to find and understand. Many praised Social Security Scotland’s website and said it was easy to access things like application forms and information on how to apply. A couple of

respondents felt that the website was confusing and information could be clearer, especially for things like eligibility.³

“Information online is easy to find but I do find the format of some information quite confusing to read and understand if you are a non-benefits adviser and/or reading the information for the first time. For example, Best Start Foods & Grants eligibility could be clearer than it is. I also think it should be made clear to people that they will have to reapply for Best Start Grant any time one of their children reaches a qualifying age.” **Partner respondent**

Some partner respondents gave positive comments about contacting Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients. However, many described negative or mixed experiences. Wait times to get through on the phone was the most common issue. Some partner respondents said web chat was easy to use but others experienced delays and didn't always get the help they needed. Suggestions for improvement included: benefit-specific phone lines, audio notifications when a web chat adviser becomes available, and a secure email service or dedicated helpline for partners who support clients.

“It can be difficult to get in touch with someone from Social Security Scotland on the phone. The web chat is a good service but can also be a long wait.”
Partner respondent

“Previous experience of the call line was excellent but it is now the same as the Department for Work and Pensions.” **Partner respondent**

“There should be a line for agencies. I don't have time to wait on the phone for ages. If I call, it is because the person I am supporting is unable to do it.”
Partner respondent

³ More partner respondent views on Social Security Scotland's website, resources, and communication channels can be found at Annex A.

Partner respondents also described difficulties acting on behalf of clients when contacting Social Security Scotland. Many found it frustrating that they weren't able to talk to Social Security Scotland without the client or a third party consent form. They said consent forms were time-consuming and complicated to submit and sometimes took a long time to be registered. There were suggestions for Social Security Scotland to set up a database of approved providers, similar to the Apollo List used by the Department for Work and Pensions, to allow partners to speak on clients' behalf after appropriate checks are made.

“Having authorisation to speak on a client's behalf is long-winded – downloading a form, printing and posting – don't know how long it will take to get on the system before we can speak with an adviser.” **Partner respondent**

“If the client is not available for the call, Social Security Scotland staff will not give any information to their representative if they are not a named contact on file. It would be better to have something similar to the Apollo List that the Department for Work and Pensions has.” **Partner respondent**

2.2. Experiences with staff

Many client participants had experiences of communicating with staff. This included over the phone, via web chat, and some in-person meetings. Overall, feedback about interactions with staff was positive. In particular, many client participants praised the attitude of the staff they had talked to. Participants said staff were friendly, polite, and helpful. They said staff listened to them, made them feel trusted and treated them with empathy.

“I found her really friendly, really helpful. I was actually surprised at how nice and how calm she was and how easy it was to talk to her, given their phones were ringing off the hook at that time.” **Client participant**

“Social Security Scotland [staff were] really friendly and [I] felt they genuinely wanted to help you and would go out of their way... I feel valued and that I’m important and they want to do the right thing for me, which builds a lot of trust.”
Client participant

“She listened to what I had to say about the issues I had, and she certainly sounded really empathetic. It was quite relaxed, she gave me a lot of reassurance.”
Client participant

Some client participants said they felt staff were honest. Participants said staff had been honest even when things went wrong or if there was a delay. Some said they appreciated this honesty in spite of challenging circumstances or long waits for decisions.

“Very honest, he said there’s a backlog however I have the application now and I can assure you I’m putting it in. So even though I knew there was a backlog and it would take time, I knew and I believed and I trusted that the application was in.”
Client participant

“They sound friendly. I don’t feel embarrassed speaking to them, they sound understanding. There are apologies there. Sometimes it’s really nice to have someone say ‘I’m really sorry we didn’t send the form’. They’re human, they’re really good.” **Client participant**

Many client participants were also positive about staff providing help and answering questions. Participants who had received help with forms said staff made them feel supported and listened to them. Participants were particularly happy that staff had taken care to explain the process and were sensitive to their needs.

“She was really good, she was brilliant. She understood the situation and I explained what had happened to my dad and she did almost everything for me. And if I wasn’t sure about something she would explain it in a different way and she was just really nice and professional.” **Client participant**

“The lady that I spoke to helped with the forms [for both my daughters]. She was brilliant and talked me through it. Without her I probably wouldn’t have got an award. She also split the call over two sessions which was helpful. Previously it has taken me about 15 days to complete the form myself.” **Client participant**

Client participants were asked if the staff they talked to were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland’s benefits and processes. Feedback was positive overall with most participants saying staff were able to answer their questions and give them the information they needed. A few participants highlighted that staff were able to signpost them to other forms of support. This included other Social Security Scotland benefits they might be eligible for and support from other organisations.

“Just the way they spoke on the phone, they were efficient and knew what they were talking about. I came off the phone thinking that I had spoken to someone that was knowledgeable, they weren’t humming or hawing, or having to put you on hold. They just spoke very well.” **Client participant**

“[The staff member] went above and beyond. He explained other benefits that may be applicable, like the Blue Badge scheme. He said speak to your local council about your Council Tax... he was absolutely right because I applied for the Blue Badge and got that. I now have safe parking, I’m close to wherever I’m going. It changed my life for the better.” **Client participant**

Some client participants had less positive experiences with staff members. Two participants described the attitude of the staff they spoke to as “frustrated” and “miserable”. One participant said she received conflicting information from different staff members and thought staff needed more training.

“Some [information] was missing to tell me that the payment [date] was changed to a [different] day. I could tell by his voice he was frustrated. Sometimes you can’t keep that out of your voice.” **Client participant**

“I only ever phoned once and got someone miserable. Everyone else I spoke to was great, [but] I didn’t think everyone in the call centre was clear about what was happening. The training wasn’t quite what it should be... I was told one story from one person and one story from another person.” **Client participant**

Partner respondents who directly support clients were asked to rate their experience of speaking to Social Security Scotland staff on behalf of clients (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: How would you rate your experience of speaking to Social Security Scotland staff on behalf of clients?

(n=93) Client-facing respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very good	11%
Good	39%
Neither good nor poor	28%
Poor	8%
Very poor	6%
Don't know/not applicable	9%

Half (50%) of partner respondents rated their experience with staff as good or very good. Slightly more than a quarter (28%) said ‘neither’ and around one in ten (14%) rated it as poor or very poor.

Positive comments talked about staff being kind, friendly, courteous and patient. Some respondents felt that staff were helpful and knowledgeable when dealing with queries.

There were also positive comments about Local Delivery staff and how they had listened to clients.

“Staff are very friendly, helpful. Most importantly they have a good manner/attitude towards our clients which puts them at ease.” **Partner respondent**

“The Local Delivery service have been amazing and clients feel they are getting listened to.” **Partner respondent**

Negative and mixed comments commonly said that whilst staff were friendly and polite, they couldn't always provide the help or information partners were looking for. Some partner respondents felt that staff lacked knowledge and training about things like benefits, processes, and dealing with vulnerable clients. A few respondents appreciated when staff were honest about not knowing the answer to a query and went to find the answer, but many found this frustrating and time-consuming. A couple of partner respondents reported poor experiences to do with staff manner, where client advisers were rude, abrupt or ended the call without warning.

“There is a lot of being put on hold as the worker needs to check things. This can happen three or four times in one call.” **Partner respondent**

“Staff do not seem to be very knowledgeable and have no concept of vulnerabilities within the community. I do not blame staff, I believe it is a lack of training to explain the difficulties people experience.” **Partner respondent**

“Rude staff. Long waiting time. People hanging up the phone without warning. Inappropriate answer to a question. When asking for a timeframe for a decision on a specific application that had been pending for four months, I was told "you'll know when you'll know". I don't have the recollection of a positive interaction with the service.” **Partner respondent**

2.3. Applications and case transfer

Client participants gave feedback about their experience of filling in and submitting an application. Many said the process was easy. Participants said the questions were clear and found it straightforward to provide information and submit the form. Most had applied online and said this was a convenient way for them to make their application.

“Easy and quite straightforward. And it was worded more easy to understand. There weren’t any jargon words or anything.” **Client participant**

“I noticed about the process, everything is relevant, on point, they ask the question, this is the specific information, not sifting through and getting confused about answers. Even the information booklet for applications, it’s not as busy as the Department for Work and Pensions, not as many pages.” **Client participant**

Some participants highlighted that the online application was an accessible way for them to complete their application. Some said that their disability or long-term health condition made writing on paper forms difficult. Others said it was helpful to be able to save their progress and return to complete the form at another time.

“I have problems with writing. I’m not a fan of handwriting, it’s inconvenient and tiring, so I found it very convenient to do it online... It was quick... The fact it was online really does help. People who have dyslexia or handwriting problems, it can help having it online and to be able to zoom in to read text as well.”
Client participant

“[Online is] far easier than hand writing it [or] doing it on the phone. I can take breaks. [I] get brain fog, I lose my words sometimes, it might not make sense later on, so I can double check it later... Questions are difficult but the option to save and complete later is good for my condition.” **Client participant**

Some client participants experienced difficulties with submitting their applications online. One participant who applied for Scottish Child Payment experienced problems accessing the mygov.scot website. Another participant said she found it difficult to find where to apply online. A participant who applied for Adult Disability Payment said it would be helpful to know what questions were coming up next on the online application. She said this would have avoided repetition in her answers.

“When we applied this year I think there was overcrowding. It was impossible to access the website for one or two days. When the traffic was down, it was simpler.”
Client participant

“Getting onto the Social Security Scotland website then finding out how to apply wasn’t as straightforward as it could be. The portal is quite hard to find if you’re not on a laptop or iPad. If I remember rightly I was getting quite frustrated at one point. I bookmarked the page to make life easier.” **Client participant**

“It would have been helpful to know earlier [that] unless you answered, you couldn’t see the next question. We didn’t know that when we started to write up, we had to adapt that into the application. I’m assuming if you had a paper form you would see that, but when you’re online you don’t see the [next] question until you’ve answered the question.” **Client participant**

Some client participants received support to complete their application. Participants mentioned getting help from friends, support services and Social Security Scotland staff. There was positive feedback about getting help from Social Security Scotland’s Local Delivery service to submit applications and verify participants’ identities. Local Delivery is a free service available across Scotland. Specially trained client support advisers can provide a range of support over the phone, video calls, or in-person at a client’s home or at a venue within their local community. Client participants who had used the Local Delivery service praised the client support advisers they met and said they were knowledgeable, made them feel at ease, and helped them to fully explain their circumstances and needs.

“The woman was really, really, really good. I couldn’t fault her...She was absolutely brilliant. Informal. It felt like she had been to the house lots of times. Wish everyone could be like her. The appointment was made bang on time [and she made] sure my daughter was at ease.” **Client participant**

“Someone came out. They were lovely and asked me lots of questions. I never would have considered giving extra information that wasn’t in the form. He asked if I hold onto furniture to get around. He said ‘you do I just saw you do it!’ It was a brilliant service.” **Client participant**

Partner respondents who directly support clients were asked about their experiences of going through the application process with or for clients (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: How easy or difficult has it been to do the following: Going through the application process with or for clients
(n=91) Client-facing respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very easy	7%
Easy	25%
Neither easy nor difficult	31%
Difficult	24%
Very difficult	12%
Don’t know/not applicable	1%

Over a third (36%) said it was difficult or very difficult to go through the application process with or for clients. A slightly lower proportion (32%) said it was easy or very easy, or ‘neither’ (31%).

In their comments, partner respondents were positive about having different ways to complete applications with or for clients. There was particular praise for online

applications being easy to access and complete. Some described problems with paper forms getting lost or being delayed, and receiving multiple copies of the forms. Some said applications were easy to complete, especially for Best Start Grant. Some said the applications for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment were easy to understand but were long, repetitive, and asked for too much detail.

“A client was told to submit an application online, [but] she has no digital skills. She asked for a paper form, it took three weeks to reach her.” **Partner respondent**

“I have assisted people with both the paper and online Adult Disability Payment applications and have found them relatively easy to complete. Although the applications are quite lengthy and some of the questions are repetitive. This can be difficult, especially if someone is sick.” **Partner respondent**

In 2022-23, the case transfer of benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland continued. There was mixed feedback from client participants who had experienced the process. For many participants, the process was smooth and straightforward. Communication was key to ensuring a good experience. Client participants said they got letters with information about the transfer and emphasised that they didn't have to “do anything”. Feedback was less positive where participants experienced issues with communication. Two participants mentioned missing letters. One participant phoned when a payment didn't arrive as expected and was told she should have received a letter about the transfer.

“Didn't need to do anything. It was seamless. There were letters quite far in advance to explain it was going to change. Advance notice is always a good thing.” **Client participant**

“The case transfer letter for my younger daughter was missing – I had to phone and ask. I only realised when I missed a payment... It went in later than expected. You need to know what you've got coming in.” **Client participant**

2.4. Consultations for Adult Disability Payment

One client participant who applied for Adult Disability Payment said they had a consultation with a health and social care practitioner. Clients can choose to have the consultation in a way that suits them. The participant chose to have the discussion over the phone and found it easy to book an appointment for a convenient time.

“[Booking] was easy enough... The booking system online gave you a list of days and times and you could choose. And it said how long you’d be on the phone.”

Client participant

The participant received information about what to expect and was pleased with how the appointment went. The participant felt listened to and that the practitioner took care of their wellbeing. The practitioner had followed Social Security Scotland’s safeguarding policies to ensure the client was supported after the appointment.

‘Interviewer: “How did the appointment go?”

Participant: “It went well. The woman explained if I wanted to stop for any reason I could. I felt comfortable. [She treated me] with respect, they listened.”

Interviewer: “Did you feel your wellbeing was protected and prioritised?”

Participant: “Yes. At that point I was feeling [condition]. I disclosed that. And the next day I got a call from someone else at Social Security Scotland [following up as a duty of care].” **Client participant**

Partner respondents who supported clients with an Adult Disability Payment consultation said whether client wellbeing had been protected and prioritised during the process (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: How much do you agree or disagree with the following: Social Security Scotland protected and prioritised client wellbeing during the Adult Disability Payment consultation process
(n=22) Client-facing respondents, Number of responses

Response options	
Strongly agree	3
Agree	7
Neither agree nor disagree	11
Don't know/not applicable	1

Of the 22 respondents, around half agreed or strongly agreed that client wellbeing was protected and prioritised during the consultation process. A similar proportion said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

In open-text comments, partners said clients had been treated well and with dignity during Adult Disability Payment consultations. Staff had been patient, respectful and helpful, and the consultation process itself was quick which reduced stress for the client. One respondent positively described how a client was able to describe their condition in their own words through an interpreter during the process.

“Client care was excellent... client treated with dignity during the call.”
Partner respondent

“The consultation process I was involved with whilst supporting a client was very good. It was quick and to the point, which meant that the individual did not experience any undue stress.” **Partner respondent**

“I had a service user who required [an interpreter]. The process went smoothly and meant the service user could explain their conditions and how these affect them in their own language, which helped immensely.” **Partner respondent**

Respondents made suggestions about how the consultation process could be improved. These included shorter waiting times between submitting an application and getting a consultation, and an easier way for clients to change their consultation appointment if they can't attend the original slot. Another suggestion was for the questions to be more specific and tailored to the client.

“The waiting times between submitting applications to getting a consultation at present are very lengthy. I can only suggest that the time scale is shortened.” **Partner respondent**

“A letter with an appointment is good, but if the person can't make the call time they are then faced with having to try and contact Social Security Scotland which is near impossible.” **Partner respondent**

“The questions could be more suited to the client's particular needs and not generic.” **Partner respondent**

2.5. Decisions on applications

Client participants who made applications were asked about their experience of receiving a decision. There was mixed feedback about the time taken to receive an outcome. One participant whose application for Adult Disability Payment was processed under special rules for terminal illness said she received a decision sooner than expected. A participant who applied for Funeral Support Payment said the time between applying and receiving a decision was reasonable. A participant who applied

for Adult Disability Payment and received a decision around three months after applying thought this was fairly quick.

“I was just shocked when it came through the post, it was so quick. I know some decisions can take up to six to eight weeks when you apply for different benefits. Originally it was supposed to be a bit longer, it said ‘by such and such date’ and it came through earlier.” **Client participant**

“Yes it wasn’t overly long. It was within a reasonable time. There was no problem like that.” **Client participant**

“I sent the application in September, and I had my decision made and my payment I think it was December, I can’t quite remember. I think that was quite quick.”
Client participant

Other client participants felt it took a long time to receive a decision. Some said they expected Social Security Scotland would be dealing with many applications so thought a decision wouldn’t arrive quickly. One participant who applied for Adult Disability Payment said he thought it would take time for staff to deal with the volume of applications from clients who had waited for the benefit to go live in their area. A similar theme was raised by a participant who applied for Scottish Child Payment when the payment was extended to under-16s in November 2022. The participant received an update to say Social Security Scotland was dealing with a high volume of applications.

“At that time there was a massive demand. Obviously a lot of people had thought what I did, just to hold off until [Adult Disability Payment] went live rather than starting a Personal Independence Payment claim. There wasn’t enough trained staff so there was quite a long wait, I think about 22 to 24 weeks, which is obviously a bit outside the norm. But it was a new system, new procedures, staff need trained etc. so I could understand.” **Client participant**

“It took a little while. But I remember it was a very busy time, I knew they were dealing with so many applications. I got a message, I can’t remember if it was on my phone or emails, saying they are dealing with a lot of applications and they’ll be in contact when it’s done.” **Client participant**

Other client participants said Social Security Scotland had told them about a “backlog” of applications and appreciated this honesty about potential delays. Participants said it was important to receive updates about the progress of their applications and issues affecting processing times. Some participants said updates were reassuring and were frustrated when they hadn’t received them.

“I wasn’t really that bothered. I knew they had the application and they were honest about the backlog... They sent some automatic emails saying there was a backlog although they didn’t say exactly how many weeks.” **Client participant**

“I didn’t expect it to happen straight away, I expected eight weeks as it said that on the form. But they had a backlog so it would be longer than the usual timescale. So I was kept up to date on how the process was getting on.” **Client participant**

“Just a bit frustrated, the timescales they gave weren’t met, they had lots of applications. It would have been good to hear ‘we’re working on it, we do have it’.” **Client participant**

A couple of participants questioned whether information about timescales was misleading. The participants said they struggled to get a clear indication from staff about how long a decision would take. A couple of participants thought Social Security Scotland should be more honest, or more realistic, about how long it takes to reach a decision. Changes to online information about application processing times in response to client feedback is discussed in section 4.4.

“I applied in July and was told I would get a decision in six weeks but it took three months and I didn’t get a reason for the delay... I would highlight that saying it’s a six week wait on the website when it takes three months, it’s not deliberately being dishonest but it was an oversight not to put up something more accurate.”

Client participant

“I don’t think [they’ve been] dishonest or misleading, but they could have been more realistic with their timescales.” **Client participant**

Other client participants raised issues with the time to receive a decision. A participant who applied for Adult Disability Payment highlighted the importance of timely decisions during the cost of living crisis. One participant who applied for Child Disability Payment said the wait for a decision had caused her to feel worried. One participant who applied for Adult Disability Payment said although the payment had been backdated, the time taken to receive a decision while experiencing homelessness had been challenging.

“It was a long time by Scottish Government standards. It was more than double the longest time they’d said... [It was] very very stressful. Because that money does matter. When you’re in a cost of living crisis and you’re trying to maintain the food you’re eating.” **Client participant**

“It’s been so long. It’s been seven months. Obviously I have to wait on the decision. There’s that worry in the back of my head. [I’m] finding it hard.” **Client participant**

“My only downside was, and I’m sure that’s been ironed out now, was just the length of time. Because it was great the money was backdated but I was homeless, I could’ve done with it in my pocket. But I think that’s just the same when you have any new system.” **Client participant**

There was positive feedback about decision letters. Many client participants said the letter was clear and easy to understand. Participants who applied for a disability benefit said it was clear which rates had been awarded. A participant who made an application for Job Start Payment said the letter made it clear why his application had been denied.

“It was by post, a letter. It was easy to understand, it explained about the amount of money that will be in your account every month.” **Client participant**

“It said that I hadn’t been out of paid work for more than six months. You have to be unemployed before you can apply for Job Start Payment. It said I can apply for an internal review and it was very clear how to do that, so yeah I’d say it was clear.”
Client participant

Some participants found their decision letters less clear. Two participants felt their letters were “generic” and not personalised to them. One participant who mentioned this had been denied and wanted more information specific to her circumstances to understand why she wasn’t eligible for the benefit. The participant suggested this information could also be provided over the phone.

“It was just a generic letter, your application has been successful, you’ll get these payments and this is how much you’ll receive. Not much else in it.”
Client participant

“I understand that you need to send a general letter that applies to everyone to save time. I personally would have liked to know [why I wasn’t eligible], like if there’s a threshold you earn, or my husband earned. This is the maximum money or the minimum money you should be earning to get this benefit. Then you see clearly.”
Client participant

Two participants mentioned some confusion about payment dates after reading their decision letter. One participant needed help to work out specific payment dates to know

when to expect the money to arrive. A participant who applied for Scottish Child Payment said the decision letter didn't make it clear how the payment amount was worked out. The participant said she decided not to query the sum.

"[The letter was] really straightforward and easy to understand. It set out that I would get enhanced daily living for five years. It said every four weeks but I had to get my mum to help me work out the dates when it would go in." **Client participant**

"The only thing I didn't find clear, it said this amount per month, then I get an amount in December, then in January as expected. I was a bit confused about how they worked it out, but I didn't phone to ask about it. I just assumed they got my application part way through a month and they worked it out from that."
Client participant

2.6. Receiving payments

There was mixed feedback from client participants about receiving payments. Many participants said they received the right amounts on time. Some participants said they experienced problems with payments. In one example, a participant who had experienced case transfer said her payment date had changed despite reassurance that this wouldn't be the case. The participant was told that information about payment dates was included in a letter that had gone missing.

"It was great. What it said on the letter, [it] happened. It was fabulous. I got up that morning and checked my account and it was there. No issues at all."
Client participant

"We got paid on a Tuesday from the Department for Work and Pensions. We were told it wouldn't change... Then the next Tuesday it didn't go in. I phoned and they said 'no you get paid on a Wednesday, it has to be a Wednesday'. Apparently that was in the letter I didn't get in January. The complaints people said it was a system thing."
Client participant

Other issues included unclear payment references and payments being received before the decision or award letters. One participant said he had felt concerned so phoned Social Security Scotland to make sure the payment was correct. Two participants said they hadn't received any communication about their payment.

“We got money in the bank. We slightly panicked as we didn't know. We got a lot of money put in, and no letter had appeared. [...] They apologised when I phoned to query.” **Client participant**

“I haven't had a letter. I've had the payment, I've had all of the payments. I got it quite quickly compared to other people I know. But I haven't actually received a letter. The post can be iffy, it might be lost in the post. I'm not too concerned about it.” **Client participant**

2.7. Re-determinations and appeals

If clients are unhappy with the decision on their application they can ask Social Security Scotland to look again at what they've decided. When a client requests this, the application is reviewed again by a separate team. Clients have the right to appeal to the Social Security Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland if they do not agree with the new decision after a re-determination. Appeals can be requested for all benefits except Best Start Foods and Job Start Payment. This means that these benefits do not have a re-determination or appeal process and only internal reviews are conducted.

Most client participants said they agreed with the decision on their application. Only one client participant said he had experience of the re-determination process. The participant requested a re-determination after his application for Adult Disability Payment was denied. The participant felt he had left out important information about his health condition and the impact it has on his life. He submitted more information and was happy that the re-determination awarded him the benefit.

“When I did the [re-determination] someone phoned and said [it] could take some time. They asked are you okay to contact the doctor or will we? Not hearing back from the doctor held it up a bit. I just told them my good days and bad days and was extremely happy to get the payment. It’s made a big difference to my life.”

Client participant

The participant said the re-determination process took around two months. A wait to receive supporting information from his GP had caused a delay. The participant was happy with the staff member who took him through the process. The participant said the staff member answered his questions and supported him by collecting supporting information on his behalf.

“The lady was amazing. Asked all the questions and went through all that and said the doctors haven’t got back. I said it’s fine for them to contact the specialist and the doctor. They were really, really good... I think it took about two months... I just put it to the back of my mind so that it doesn’t annoy me and then the letter came in so it didn’t seem like a long time. I just got on with life as best I could. After I got the payment I was quite happy.” **Client participant**

Two participants said Social Security Scotland should make it easier for clients to request re-determinations. One participant was unhappy with the decision on her application but felt the form to request a re-determination was off-putting. The participant was reluctant to ask for the decision to be looked at again in case there were consequences due to her status as a migrant. The participant said she might have called to request a re-determination if the decision letter had a reference she could quote about her application. Another participant said clients should be able to get in touch via email to request an internal review.

“There was no easy way to do it, it was a form, a few page form... this is the worst thing, if you don’t want people to get back to you, just send them this [form]. Nobody is going to take the time to write down on paper why they disagree... I’m not going to create trouble with them because I just don’t know what will be the consequence of it... If there was something as simple as a case number or reference, and you can call this number and quote your reference then someone will see you and give you some feedback and answer your question, then okay I thought I would do this.”

Client participant

“It’s not always easy to get to a post box or you might not be able to call someone because of communication difficulties so it would be good to have email as an option to submit the internal review.” **Client participant**

Client Experience staff participants were asked to describe some of the main reasons why clients had asked for their decision to be looked at again. For Funeral Support Payment, re-determinations were requested by clients who were unhappy with the payment amount or had their applications denied due to lack of clarity about who was responsible for the funeral.

“For Funeral Support Payment it’s about responsibility for who’s paying for the funeral and the amount, if we’ve deducted money from the deceased’s estate.”

Client Experience staff participant

For Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant, re-determinations were commonly requested where applications were denied due to a lack of information about the receipt of qualifying benefits. For Scottish Child Payment, decisions had been changed in competing claims cases where it became apparent at the re-determination stage that the applicant had responsibility for the child. Staff were able to award the benefit based on evidence such as court orders or from social work departments.

“With [qualifying benefits like] Universal Credit – we get it on the [internal] system but it shows as zero credit. But sometimes on a re-determination the client submits a statement and we can see it’s being paid.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“Competing claims for Scottish Child Payment where someone is already in receipt then another client applies and is denied because they say they are responsible [for the child]... We have asked for more evidence, like court orders or from social work, then I’ve received that and over-turned [the first decision] based on that evidence.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment clients had commonly asked Social Security Scotland to look at their decision again because they felt they should have been awarded a higher rate of benefit. Decisions were changed where further detail or supporting information was received at the re-determination stage. These clients were either awarded the benefit or had their existing rate of payment increased.

“A client said they could do everything on their application – no issues with mobility or daily living. They sent a re-determination which was completed by someone giving support. It turns out that the person had a cognitive impairment so they thought they could do everything, but when all the supporting information came through they went from having 0-0 scores to enhanced-enhanced. They said they could do everything but that wasn’t the case.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Client Experience staff participants were asked about the main reasons why decisions had not been changed following re-determinations. For Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment, this was common where a client’s condition or needs didn’t meet the eligibility criteria. For Funeral Support Payment, decisions stayed the same if the client didn’t have clear responsibility for the funeral. Decisions also stayed the same in cases where supporting information wasn’t received at the re-determination stage, or where clients weren’t in receipt of a necessary qualifying benefit.

“A broken leg should hopefully heal so that won’t meet the test. There’s a lot of that coming through. Clients think they’re eligible because they do have a health condition but it’s not just that, it’s how it affects their daily life.”

Client Experience staff participant

“It might be something as simple as supporting information – they still haven’t given us the correct information. That happens quite a lot.”

Client Experience staff participant

Client Experience staff participants were asked how the re-determinations process is working for clients and for staff. They felt the process was fair and open, and worked well for clients. From a staff perspective, participants enjoyed being able to help clients and found this rewarding. The structured process and ability to request more information from clients had helped them to feel confident in their decision-making. They said the increased volume of re-determinations had helped them gain experience across a range of cases, but they expressed some concern about increased workload as the organisation has grown.

“I find clients are generally positive regardless of your decision... Re-determinations are clear and structured, there’s information, we’re a named person... Clients are grateful for us taking the time to explain things to them.”

Client Experience staff participant

None of the participants had worked directly on appeals in the last year. Although the volume of appeals increased in 2022-23, this remained relatively low in comparison to the number of re-determinations. Participants were aware that reasons for appeals tended to be the same as for re-determinations: that clients’ circumstances had changed or more supporting evidence had become available. The reasons for upholding or changing a decision were also the same for appeals as for re-determinations, relating to eligibility and the availability of supporting information.

“The reasons are usually the same as re-determinations. We don’t see a lot [of appeals] for Low Income Benefits. That is based on their income so it’s easier to work out if the income means a client doesn’t qualify. Whereas with disability applications, clients often answer the question but they don’t talk about what they can or can’t do... Sometimes that ends up with appeals as they’re not giving the right information that we are looking for.” **Client Experience staff participant**

2.8. Additional support for clients

This section looks at the accessibility of Social Security Scotland’s service and suggestions for improvements to the service.

Partner respondents who work with clients were asked how accessible they thought the service was for clients (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: How accessible do you think the service is for clients?
(n=93) Client-facing respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very accessible	17%
Somewhat accessible	62%
Not at all accessible	18%
Don’t know/not applicable	2%

Around two-thirds (62%) of respondents said the service was somewhat accessible. Slightly less than one in five (17%) said the service was very accessible, and a similar proportion (18%) said it was not at all accessible.

Positive comments about accessibility were about clients being able to access the service in a way that suited them. Partner respondents mentioned things like: having multiple options to get in touch; the availability of applications in different formats; and being able to request help from staff to complete applications.

“People are able to access the service in the best way for them i.e. over the phone, requesting assistance with applications, making online claims. The format of the Adult Disability Payment application is also very good as the pictures and large layout means it is easier to explain to people the context of the questions being asked.” **Partner respondent**

Partner respondents praised the availability of interpretation but felt staff needed more training on this and that it should be available from the beginning of a client's experience. There were many examples of digital exclusion for clients who couldn't access online information or applications. Some said the very reason they had acted as a third party was because the service wasn't accessible for the clients they support.

“Ability to use an interpreter easily is great, however many of my clients are unable to even understand the initial menu options which are all in English so it would be good to make that option available earlier on. Additionally, some staff seem uncertain when it comes to using an interpreter which leads to confusion for clients.” **Partner respondent**

“I understand that computers are the way forward but we deal with older clients and those struggling financially. They do not always have access to a computer and the telephone waiting times are ridiculous.” **Partner respondent**

Clients, staff and partners had suggestions for improvements to Social Security Scotland's service for clients such as additional forms of communication. One client participant said that communication via email could free up advisers on the phone to help clients who need to communicate this way. Partner respondents expressed similar views and said they'd also like the option of email communication with Social Security Scotland. Staff respondents thought SMS and pre-recorded phone messages could be helpful for providing updates. There were also suggestions for an automatic call back system and having more staff resource on the phone line. A couple of client participants suggested an online portal as a helpful way to show progress from application to decision and to store letters.

“Might have been better to do letters by portal or email to cut down on paper. There was a lot of paper and that comes at a cost and postage too.” **Client participant**

“Clients have said the phone waiting times are too long – a call back service would be appreciated.” **Staff respondent**

“[Emails for] progress updates. And then people with communication difficulties can get through on the phone more easily and others can get email.” **Client participant**

“Having an automated message as soon as a client phones for Adult Disability Payment to explain the backlog [...] Have more regular texts/emails sent to clients apologising for the delay which again would limit calls and allow us to process faster.” **Staff respondent**

There were also suggestions about improvements to the application process. Staff respondents suggested having clearer guidance for clients on filling out application forms and providing supporting information. One client participant said it would be helpful to have guidance embedded in the application form. The participant suggested an icon which showed or linked to information at different points in the application form.

“I think finding a way to add more information with icons where people who need it more could click and get it without having to go back through the entire pages before. An easy way to access that content.” **Client participant**

“[...] Short videos [to] be put on the website with either real people or animation:

1. to inform clients of how to complete the application
2. what supporting information is required
3. what help is available i.e. Local Delivery, can they pop into the local office etc
4. what happens to the application form after we have received both Parts 1 and 2
5. how a decision is made i.e. with the supporting information, GP/consultant reports, and how long the process can take i.e. up to 58 days for a GP to respond.”

Staff respondent

Partner respondents suggested other improvements to the application process. These included: a tick-box on the first part of Adult and Child Disability Payment applications to request help from Local Delivery staff to complete the second part; perforated paper forms to make scanning easier; and online options to complete re-determinations, change of circumstances, and third party consent forms.

“A simple click box, after completing part one online, to ask for contact from the Local Delivery team would help a lot and save the phonelines and chat agents’ time.” **Partner respondent**

“We have requested editable documents so that our service can type directly on to the form but the only forms that are available are Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment – we require all forms including re-determinations, change of circumstances etc.” **Partner respondent**

Client participants who had applied for Adult Disability Payment had suggestions for improvements to the application process. These included information about the possible effect of making an application on a client’s wellbeing and guidance about providing information about more than one health condition in response to each question.

“Maybe put in safeguards on the website, to say if you’re struggling, maybe throughout the form... phone numbers or something.” **Client participant**

“If it felt like ‘okay we’re going to deal with X first and we’re going to ask you questions around that... this is what we’re talking about and all the questions in this section will refer to X because you’ve told us you suffer from X’. That might help people.” **Client participant**

There were also suggestions for improvements to letters. One client participant said if a letter includes a request for a client to do something, this should be clear at the beginning of the letter. Another client participant said she missed important information about other forms of financial support because the information was towards the end of a long letter. The participant said she had missed a deadline and wasn’t able to receive the help to which the letter signposted.

“I’ve worked in comms and usually the call to action should be early in the letter. Some of yours had that but others don’t. I like to sort things into piles of things I need to do something with and ones I don’t and some in between. Some of yours would end up in between. Because I received so many I was thinking do I actually need to do anything?” **Client participant**

“I have been really unwell and I didn’t read the full blurb in the acceptance letter. I should have read it as you only have one month to apply to get your extra money on your Working Tax Credit. And if you go over that time by one day, you don’t get it backdated. I think that should be on the first page. It was on the third page, and I missed it by one day. It’s really important and I think they should make sure it’s right on that first page.” **Client participant**

3. Working for Social Security Scotland

This chapter looks at: staff knowledge and experiences of training; how supported staff have felt and if additional needs were met; and experiences of communication.

3.1. Knowledge and skills

All staff respondents were asked how confident they felt in their knowledge and skills to do their job (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: In the past year, how confident have you felt in your knowledge and skills to do your job?

(n=1,566) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very confident	22%
Confident	60%
Not confident	15%
Not at all confident	3%

Most respondents (82%) said they felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job. Around a fifth (18%) said they didn't feel confident.

Staff who interact with clients as part of their job, or will do so in the future, were asked to rate their knowledge of the social security system in Scotland (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: How would you rate your knowledge of the social security system in Scotland?

(n=1,043) Current and future client-facing staff, Column percentages

Response options	
Very good	18%
Good	55%
Neither good nor poor	21%
Poor	5%
Very poor	1%

Around three-quarters (73%) rated their knowledge as good or very good. A fifth (21%) felt it was neither good nor poor. Very few (6%) rated their knowledge as poor or very poor.

In their comments, staff respondents said training, self-directed learning, support from colleagues, and previous experience had helped them to feel knowledgeable about the social security system. Many felt knowledgeable about their own area of work but less so about other areas or benefits. Some felt they could better help clients if they had broader knowledge of other benefits and processes. They said specific training or protected time for self-directed learning could help with this.

“I have a strong understanding of the benefit which my work role centres around, but do not have much knowledge of other benefits. I would not feel overly confident discussing other benefits with clients because of this.” **Staff respondent**

“I feel like I could know a lot more as there are a lot of benefits and services available. Perhaps a more interactive workshop on how to access various different benefits and services not necessarily administered by Social Security Scotland would be of benefit so we can better signpost our clients to things that may help them.” **Staff respondent**

Respondents who interact with clients, or will do so in future, were then asked about their knowledge of advice and advocacy services (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: How much do you agree or disagree with the following...
(n=1,050) Current and future client-facing staff, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I know about a range of advice and advocacy services that are convenient for clients	69%	18%	13%
I know how to refer clients to advice and advocacy services	60%	18%	22%

Around two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew about support services (69%) and how to refer clients to these (60%). One in five (22%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew how to refer clients to support services.

Finally, respondents who interact with clients, or will do so in future, were asked about their knowledge of the re-determinations and appeals processes (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: How much do you agree or disagree with the following...
(n=1,051) Current and future client-facing staff, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I know enough about the re-determinations process to explain it clearly to clients	53%	20%	27%
I know enough about the appeals process to explain it clearly to clients	40%	24%	36%

Half of respondents (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable about the re-determinations process. Fewer respondents (40%) felt knowledgeable about the appeals process. Around a quarter (27%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew enough about the re-determinations process. A higher proportion (36%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew enough about the appeals process.

Open-text comments showed respondents' knowledge of support services, re-determinations and appeals differed depending on job role. Some said these topics weren't relevant to their job. Others said they knew about some of these topics but not all. Some said refresher training would be helpful. Many said they knew where to look for internal guidance on support services, re-determinations, and appeals as needed.

"I feel I know a lot about these however there is always more to learn and upskill on and I think regular meetings/workshops covering this every few months for a refresh would benefit a lot of people including myself." **Staff respondent**

"I've not had the experience of having to provide these services to clients. I know enough to explain the process, but I would require having to take time to look through guidance to find the procedures." **Staff respondent**

3.2. Experiences of training and guidance

In open-text comments, staff respondents said they had taken part in a range of training that had helped them to feel confident in their knowledge and skills. They said training covered topics like: Our Charter and human rights, discrimination, inclusive communication, and understanding benefits and internal processes. Some respondents were positive about the training they'd received and said ongoing learning provided them with the skills and knowledge to do their jobs.

"I have extensive experience in my area, but also I am constantly upskilling and keeping my knowledge up to date with all upcoming changes. I think that the variety of training sessions offered by the organisation is helping with achieving this."

Staff respondent

"Learning and development and continuous improvement are actively encouraged in our team. Information sharing and collaborative workshops provide plenty of opportunity to share and learn from each other." **Staff respondent**

Some respondents mentioned issues with training and guidance in their comments. Problems included not being trained in new elements of their job role or training not being delivered in a format that suited their needs. Some felt that training had gaps or didn't cover all relevant topics and that there should be more training on specific things like handling challenging situations and using internal systems. Some said reliance on local knowledge across colleagues had resulted in incorrect or inconsistent practices.

"More training is needed on systems. Staff are left to work it out. The guidance is not accessible or easy to find." **Staff respondent**

“I do not feel that I was adequately supported by Social Security Scotland to fulfil my role. However, due to experience and training I have taken from other jobs I have been able to do my job well. There was no specific training for my role and I am aware that others have left the organisation as they were not as lucky as I was to have had previous experience in similar roles.” **Staff respondent**

Respondents also mentioned a need for improved guidance. They said guidance was hard to navigate, incomplete or inaccurate, had conflicting messages, and changed often. This had affected staff confidence and made it difficult to follow processes effectively. Respondents felt that guidance could be compiled and shared in a more systematic way.

“The guidance system needs a major overhaul. It’s difficult to search for things and it’s difficult to understand the guidance as it doesn’t match our systems or [hasn’t] been tailored for [specific benefits].” **Staff respondent**

“I have felt confident in my knowledge and skills to do my job. There are, however, often gaps in guidance which have required some thinking and teamwork to work out how to solve particular issues... [Changes to] guidance often take time to be published. This leads to an undercurrent of 'unofficial' guidance and workarounds which can be difficult to keep on top of and up to date with.” **Staff respondent**

3.3. Support for staff

This section looks at how supported staff felt at work. All staff respondents were asked to rate the support they'd received from their line manager during 2022-23 (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Thinking about the past year, how would you rate the support you've had from your line manager?

(n=1,562) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very good	59%
Good	23%
Sometimes good, sometimes poor	14%
Poor	2%
Very poor	1%

The majority of respondents (82%) said they'd had good or very good support from their line manager. Around one in ten (14%) said support had been mixed. Very few (3%) rated support from their line manager as poor or very poor.

In open-text comments, respondents said line managers were often approachable, reliable and responsive. Effective communication, with regular opportunities to check in and receive important information, had helped them to feel supported. Respondents said their line managers were often understanding of work-related or personal issues they were facing. Some said they were made to feel trusted, valued and listened to, and had autonomy to manage their own workloads. Some respondents said they felt supported in their career goals and professional development.

“My manager has been excellent. She's very supportive and has always made it clear that we can go to her for anything and that no question is a silly question. She has made me feel so welcome and comfortable and always ensures that she updates us as soon as possible with new information.” **Staff respondent**

“My manager was very welcoming when I joined and has continued to be friendly and supportive to me and my fellow team members. I have experienced personal problems and had to take time off work sick in early 2023. Throughout all this my manager was very supportive and listened compassionately to me explaining what I was going through. She was also very thorough in explaining to me the procedures for being off.” **Staff respondent**

Some respondents left open-text comments about feeling less supported by their line manager. Some felt their line managers did not have the required knowledge, experience or resources to help them with their roles. Some respondents said poor communication with managers was an issue. They said meetings were infrequent or managers didn’t cascade key information. Respondents commented that they often felt more able to rely on support from their peers rather than line managers. A few spoke of experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment from their line managers.

“My line manager is very approachable, will listen to concerns and act on them and makes themselves available when needed. The only down side is that they don't have the client-facing experience and therefore, is not always able to answer operational questions, therefore, I will go to peers for advice rather than my line manager.” **Staff respondent**

“I've had a mostly poor experience. I've had to contact the union due to mental health discrimination and had push-back [on] adjustments.” **Staff respondent**

The survey asked staff if they had any additional needs or accessibility requirements at work. Around a quarter said yes and almost all told someone about their needs. Most said they got what they needed. In open-text comments, they gave examples of support including getting the equipment they needed, adjustments to their work role, time off or special leave, and various adjustments around working location. Some mentioned having an employee passport. The employee passport is a voluntary tool to support all staff who may require adjustments whilst in work due to various circumstances. Experiences of the employee passport were mostly positive, although sometimes mixed on whether it had been or would be implemented and on varying levels of support from line managers.

“I have assistive technology which is great but I also need time off for medical appointments and I have received great support to enable me to do this.”

Staff respondent

“I have an employee passport for [condition]. I have shared this with three [different line managers]. One of the line managers practically ceased contact with me after receiving the passport. The other two were very supportive and I have had ongoing discussion with both of them about my needs, what is working for me and what isn't. With the supportive managers, I have found my wellbeing and my working ability to be greatly improved with adjustments in place.” **Staff respondent**

“[My line manager] sent me the employee passport document in order to understand how she could help support me... She has been fantastic at accommodating my flexible hours of working that change at short notice. She has been understanding when I have not been as quick to complete work as normal and regularly checks in on me to see how I am and if I need any additional support.”

Staff respondent

There were a few examples where respondents' additional needs or accessibility requirements hadn't been met. Examples included not being supported or understood by line managers, issues with processes and policies, and delays in getting what they needed. There were mixed views on hybrid working, with strong preferences either way for office or home working. Some felt under pressure to go into an office when it was detrimental to them, or struggled to have their needs met in an office.

“I was told my adjustment needs were not practical and that I could consider using items which would ultimately draw attention to me and single me out. I was not prepared to do this. I feel my [condition] and needs were utterly dismissed and the alternative suggestions were both ridiculous and unfair.” **Staff respondent**

“My health conditions aren't being taken seriously, and the consistent push to get advisers in the office only makes this harder – especially on my mental health. My team manager makes great effort to help, but can only do so much. Performance managers don't seem to care – some pointing out that advisers should ‘wind their necks in’. It seems as though ‘Dignity, Fairness and Respect’ was sidelined months ago.” **Staff respondent**

3.4. Communication

This section looks at staff experiences of communication. The staff survey asked respondents how confident they felt to deliver a service based on inclusive communication (Table 3.6). By ‘delivering a service’, we mean the services staff deliver to colleagues, clients and partners and the way they do their jobs across all areas of the organisation.

Table 3.6: In the past year, how confident have you felt to deliver a service based on inclusive communication?

(n=1,554) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very confident	24%
Confident	58%
Not confident	15%
Not at all confident	3%

The majority (82%) of respondents said they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service based on inclusive communication. Just under a fifth (18%) didn't feel confident about this.

In open-text comments, respondents said they felt that inclusiveness was rooted in Social Security Scotland's culture and was valued and prioritised across the organisation. They said this was evidenced in things like prioritising the use of accessible documents and plain English. They said support from the inclusive

communication team and internal training had helped them to feel confident. Some said “we don’t get it right all the time” and felt there was always room for improvement, especially as the organisation and service continues to grow.

“The idea of being inclusive is front and centre of our priorities, and all of my colleagues seem to put an effort into it.” **Staff respondent**

“While we don't get it right all the time, I do see [evidence that] Social Security Scotland is a service that prioritises inclusive communication i.e. use of plain language, accessible fonts, ongoing work on [the] use of icons, provision of various modes to contact Social Security Scotland and make applications for benefits, including Local Delivery and translation services. I think the more we probe into clients' communication needs and preferences the more the service will understand and adapt to these needs.” **Staff respondent**

Staff respondents were asked how easy or difficult it had been to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: In the past year, how easy or difficult has it been to communicate with colleagues in a way that feels inclusive of your needs?
(n=1,555) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very easy	43%
Easy	37%
Neither easy nor difficult	13%
Difficult	6%
Very difficult	1%

Most (80%) respondents said it had been easy or very easy to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs. A small proportion (7%) found this difficult or very difficult.

Respondents left positive open-text comments about being supported to communicate in the ways they prefer. Many felt their needs had been met and were positive about the support they'd received from colleagues. Some felt online tools like Microsoft Teams had been useful while others preferred to communicate in person. Some mentioned instances when their communication needs weren't met. Examples were: acronyms still being used across the organisation; internal systems that are incompatible with assistive technology; and the need for more accessible Microsoft Office templates for colleagues.

"I am able to communicate with colleagues in my preferred ways by being open about my preferences. My team are supportive and although I may have to remind/request information to be written, I am comfortable doing this."
Staff respondent

"It is more difficult using assistive technology on [internal systems], and this makes the role as a client adviser more challenging."
Staff respondent

Staff who interact with clients as part of their job now or in the future were asked how confident they felt to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: In the past year, how confident have you felt to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways?

(n=1,044) Current and future client-facing staff, Column percentages

Response options	
Very confident	30%
Confident	57%
Not confident	11%
Not at all confident	2%

Most (87%) respondents felt confident or very confident to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways. Around one in ten (13%) didn't feel confident to do this.

In their comments, some found it easy to navigate and use specific communication tools such as translations, alternative formats and interpretation. Many said they enjoyed this element of their job.

"I have felt very confident interacting effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways. We are provided with a range of inclusive communication formats, and are able to understand a client's support requirements before an appointment takes place." **Staff respondent**

"I use the Global Direct translator service fairly frequently, and try to adjust my thinking when it comes to where a different language isn't required. I have trained a large number of people on translations and am proud of that." **Staff respondent**

In open-text comments, some spoke of feeling less confident to communicate with clients in different ways. Some suggested that training could be more hands-on or in-

depth. Others said guidance on how to use communication tools was insufficient. Some felt the lack of email and SMS options restricted communication with some clients.

“Lots of guidance [on interacting with clients who understand or express themselves in different ways] but limited chance to put it into practice. More hands-on training working through examples would help to build confidence rather than fumbling through for the first time when engaging with a client.” **Staff respondent**

“Being unable to communicate with clients via text or email when we have asked their communication preferences makes us look incompetent. Have clients who cannot speak after having operations / treatments who have to wait prolonged periods of back and forth letter correspondence.” **Staff respondent**

4. A Learning System: Listening to feedback and making improvements

4.1. Openness to feedback from clients, staff and partners

This section looks at client, staff and partner views on how open Social Security Scotland is to receiving feedback and making improvements.

During their interviews, some client participants said they were happy Social Security Scotland encouraged feedback from clients to help them improve their service. Participants said they were happy to take part in this research. They felt sharing their experiences helped Social Security Scotland understand how their service is performing and where it can improve. One participant said it felt good to see his feedback included in published reports.

"I think it's good Social Security Scotland are listening and trying to improve. I'm happy to do what I can to help and make things get better." **Client participant**

"If I get asked to provide feedback I always do because that's how you make the process better." **Client participant**

"I like doing this [research] as it helps future people. I know my name's not against what I've said but I've seen stuff in documents and thought 'I remember that!' I like to see that." **Client participant**

Staff respondents were asked if they would speak up if there was a problem in Social Security Scotland (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: How much do you agree or disagree with the following...: I would speak up if I saw something that wasn't working, or something I thought was wrong, in Social Security Scotland

(n=1,567) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Strongly agree	43%
Agree	43%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%
Disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%

The majority (86%) of staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong in Social Security Scotland. Very few (6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would speak up. A similar proportion (8%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

In the survey of partner organisations, respondents were asked if they thought Social Security Scotland is open to and acts on feedback (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Partner respondent views on feedback

(n=95-96) All respondents, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know/not applicable
Social Security Scotland is open to feedback	58%	19%	8%	15%
Social Security Scotland acts on feedback	20%	33%	18%	29%

Over half (58%) of partner respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is open to feedback. Fewer respondents (20%) agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland acts on feedback.

In open-text comments, partner respondents who were positive about feedback said Social Security Scotland was open to taking feedback and suggestions on board. It was also felt that Social Security Scotland had been honest about the challenges of making improvements based on suggestions.

“Excellent partnership, take on feedback really well.” **Partner respondent**

“I recognise that Social Security Scotland are trying to engage with the third party sector to understand the issues/barriers faced by customers and taking on board the suggestions made for improvement. My impression is that they are honest about the issues and the difficulties of implementing any suggestions.”

Partner respondent

In their comments, some partner respondents said they had been involved in one or more of Social Security Scotland’s stakeholder reference groups: the Inclusive Communications Stakeholder Group, the Operational Reference Group; and the External Equalities Network.⁴ The reference groups are in place to allow for feedback and discussion between Social Security Scotland and partner organisations. Partner respondents said their feedback was welcomed and listened to at the groups. They felt positive about how Social Security Scotland handled that feedback on the whole.

⁴ The External Equalities Network was formally disbanded in 2022 but some partner respondents mentioned membership of this group in their survey comments.

“Both my own and colleagues experience of participating in various Social Security Scotland reference groups have been positive ones. We have felt heard and concerns we have raised have usually been addressed – either within the meetings or later.” **Partner respondent**

Some open-text comments said that whilst Social Security Scotland was open to receiving and listening to feedback, the organisation had been slow to take action or make improvements. There were some negative comments where partners felt the organisation hadn't taken feedback on board.

“Feedback is always gratefully received but action is slow.” **Partner respondent**

“I have been giving feedback [for some time] but Social Security Scotland don't want to take on board the negative feedback they have been given. They seem determined to run with this very flawed process.” **Partner respondent**

4.2. Staff experiences of giving feedback

In open-text comments, staff respondents said they felt strongly about the need to voice suggestions for improvements to ensure clients are receiving the best service possible. Some felt confident and supported to voice feedback and suggestions to their line manager. Staff respondents had given feedback about a range of issues including: how to better communicate with partners who support clients; better guidance and training for staff, and improvements to internal processes.

“I find it easy to speak to my colleagues and managers if I feel something is not working or if something is wrong because I feel it is expected and that they would rather know what isn't working so that changes can be made.” **Staff respondent**

“[I] would never be afraid to speak out or say my piece [...] I have had to numerous times and will continue to do so, putting the [interests of] clients and the staff I manage at the forefront.” **Staff respondent**

Although staff respondents reported a culture of welcoming feedback, open-text comments showed that many felt that suggestions had been ignored or not acted upon in practice. Respondents said suggestions were sometimes greeted differently depending on who raised them. Some felt their suggestions were not treated seriously due to being at a lower grade or on a temporary contract. Some spoke of being treated negatively or alienated for speaking out, which they felt had been detrimental for their wellbeing and career progression. Respondents felt there could be better communication in response to suggestions and how they will be actioned.

“Sometimes I have spoken up and nothing has been done about the issues I have raised. Then months down the line someone else raises it due to a client complaint and at that point it is taken seriously. Sometimes I can put time and effort into researching missing guidance but then it feels like I wasted that time because I find there is no route to escalate it that has the ability to take it forward.”
Staff respondent

“I did this when first joined but felt my colleagues were not receptive to my ideas and it seemed to alienate me from the wider team so I stopped. I also sent emails to people in the organisation [across different teams] and didn't receive replies so it felt a bit like I was wasting my time.” **Staff respondent**

“As a contractor, until recently I would have [given feedback]. Lately it has become very much not my place and I leave it to the permanent staff. [The] message from senior management has been very negative lately and created a two-tier team.”
Staff respondent

4.3. Partner experiences of giving feedback

This section presents partner respondents' experiences of giving feedback. Partner respondents were asked whether they had provided Social Security Scotland with feedback (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: In the last year, have you given Social Security Scotland any feedback about how they could improve?

(n=95) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Yes, I have given feedback	55%
No, I haven't wanted to give feedback	21%
I wanted to give feedback but don't know how	24%

Over half (55%) said they had given feedback. A quarter (24%) said they wanted to give feedback but didn't know how to do this.

In their open-text comments, some partner respondents described positive experiences of providing feedback, either online or directly to staff. Respondents were pleased to have received follow up communications in response to their feedback.

"I spoke to staff informally at an event about the lengthy Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment forms and they said they would take this back."

Partner respondent

"As part of [a forum] I have provided feedback on what would help customers and on problem areas with Adult Disability Payment claims. The Social Security Scotland staff have come back to the forum with a response to the feedback."

Partner respondent

Other partner respondents left comments about problems with the feedback process. One respondent described a negative experience where they tried to provide feedback to a client adviser over the phone but the staff member terminated the call. Other issues included: delays hearing back from Social Security Scotland, not hearing back at all, or feedback not being actioned. Some partner respondents talked in their comments about wanting to give feedback but not knowing how to do so.

“I pointed out that as a security question I was asked to confirm bank details which I declined to give as according to [Social Security Scotland’s] website at no point should such details be requested. The person just hung up the phone.”

Partner respondent

“There was a huge delay in responding to me and my feedback had been actioned two weeks before I was contacted. Other ideas passed on at virtual events do not appear to have gone anywhere.” **Partner respondent**

“Early on, we had a lot of issues when it came to finding more detailed, support level information. Clients were also not being told about the Local Delivery service when they contacted Social Security Scotland. These are things I would have given feedback about, but was unsure of the avenue.” **Partner respondent**

4.4. Improvements based on feedback

The Charter Measurement Framework asks for “Examples of You said: We did”. This means examples of where Social Security Scotland have made improvements based on feedback.

In open-text comments, some staff respondents said their feedback had been listened to and led to improvements in Social Security Scotland. Some described specific examples where their feedback was taken on board and led to changes. A common theme was improvements to internal policies and processes. This included improvements or changes to accessibility, the time needed to process some cases, and how information is communicated and shared within and between teams.

“I have been and continue to be vocal when things are not working... I feel that this has led to improvements, big or small, depending on the individuals and processes involved.” **Staff respondent**

“I have raised issues in the past regarding communication and the lack of information that was being filtered down to practitioner level. I felt that this was listened to. I have also fed [back] to my senior [colleague] regarding time frames expected in particular cases and I received feedback about that too.”
Staff respondent

“As part of the Accessibility Champions, I noticed something in a different business area that didn't meet accessibility guidelines. I reached out to the area that managed it, explained what I noticed and had a conversation about it. They appreciated the feedback and were able to tell me the plans that were in place to improve it.” **Staff respondent**

Client Experience staff participants said Social Security Scotland had made some changes due to client feedback. Complaints about processing times had led to indicative timescales being removed from information online. Another example where Social Security Scotland made a change was in response to feedback about information for clients who move away from Scotland.

“Time taken to process the claim – Social Security Scotland took that off the website as obviously we couldn't meet it and we were getting complaints.”
Client Experience staff participant

“We got a complaint about someone who was moving out of Scotland so their money stopped but it was our fault as we didn't have information out there about that. So I managed to get that improved.” **Client Experience staff participant**

5. A Learning System: Experiences of mistakes and complaints

This chapter looks at feedback from clients and partners who said something had gone wrong during their experience, and staff perspectives on mistakes and complaints.

5.1. Client and partner experiences of things going wrong

Client participants were asked if they felt anything had gone wrong during their experience with Social Security Scotland. One participant described getting in touch with Social Security Scotland about a letter she received about Scottish Child Payment. The participant was told by staff that a mistake had been made about who cares for one of her children. The adviser told the participant he would fix the mistake and called back the following day. Unfortunately the participant wasn't able to answer the call so wasn't sure if the issue had been resolved.

"I got a letter saying the Scottish Child Payment would stop for my middle son, because they see a record that I don't look after him anymore. I spoke to a man on the phone, he said it looks like a mistake and he will correct it... He said he would correct the mistake... He phoned back the next day but I couldn't answer so I still don't know for sure." **Client participant**

A client participant described a poor experience when trying to report a change of circumstances following a new diagnosis. The participant's disability benefit was transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland. The participant was advised to wait to report the change once the transfer was completed. The participant informed Social Security Scotland of the change once the transfer was complete but then received a request to review her circumstances. The participant described how unclear information from advisers had left her unsure what the proper process was and what would happen next.

“I phoned up and said there had been a change, I’d been diagnosed. So they had to put a change of circumstances in whilst my review was happening or something. I’m still not clear on what’s happening with that to be honest... Then they sent me a form and there was a tick box, have your circumstances changed and I thought, do I fill this out because I’ve already told you over the phone, what do I do. I phoned and the person said I didn’t have to send that back and then I got a letter to say they would stop my benefit if I didn’t reply with that letter.” **Client participant**

Another client participant made a complaint about a series of issues relating to the transfer of her son’s disability benefit. The participant said letters had gone missing and staff she spoke to weren’t able to give clear information or answer her questions. In particular, the participant highlighted the attitude of one staff member who she felt had hung up on a call when unable to answer her questions. The participant also said that the options for communicating with Social Security Scotland were limited for someone with caring and other responsibilities.

“[...] I got cut off. I was very frustrated at this point, so I made a complaint on the website. [...] The [staff member], he was horrendous. He shouldn’t have been dealing with customers at all.” **Client participant**

The participant said the complaints process was quick and that staff were helpful and did their best to investigate and resolve the complaint. The participant received a letter setting out the steps Social Security Scotland were taking to address the issues raised in the complaint. These included staff training and options for other ways to get in touch. The participant said the letter was honest about the mistakes that had been made but noted the letter had typos.

“They got in touch very quick, all the information was correct and timely. They contacted me by email, it was a combination of email and telephone. She was lovely, she was really nice. She seemed genuinely interested in trying to resolve what had happened to me. They did listen to the calls, and they said the level of service was not acceptable. There were four points, they were going to look at training, at accessibility for people in a vulnerable situation who don’t have time to phone... I got a letter apologising... it was full of typing errors.” **Client participant**

A client participant who had applied for Child Disability Payment also made a complaint. The participant didn't receive communication from Social Security Scotland after submitting her application. The participant made multiple calls for progress updates on her application but staff weren't able to provide helpful information. The participant said the complaints process was easy and quick.

"The adviser told me how to put in a complaint. I just wanted to know where I was in the process. [Making the complaint was] very easy and it was quite quick. I can't complain about the complaints process." **Client participant**

Some client participants who had negative experiences said they preferred not to make a complaint. There was evidence of some goodwill towards staff and Social Security Scotland. A participant who had to submit a second application after the first one went missing said she felt it was just "unlucky" and didn't want to complain. Another participant said he spoke to an adviser who had a poor attitude and the conversation had left him feeling a bit upset. The participant thought the adviser may have had personal problems on her mind during the call.

"No. I don't like [complaints]. I said I will try again. Maybe I'm unlucky. It's okay." **Client participant**

"I just thought she was having a bad day. It was what it was. It made me feel a wee bit down but I picked myself back up when I rationalised that I don't know that lady or what's going on in her life. She might have other problems." **Client participant**

A few partner and staff respondents mentioned problems and mistakes made by Social Security Scotland including: applications going missing; mistakes in mass communications to clients; clients receiving a payment but never an award letter; and being cut off by Social Security Scotland's telephony system whilst waiting to speak to an advisor. In one example, a partner respondent was pleased with how a staff member apologised for a mistake with a paper application and "went above and beyond" to

resolve the situation. However, the client they were supporting experienced further problems later when they received an automated communication saying their application had not been received.

“I had exceptional customer service from one member of staff when I contacted via web chat about a claim that was reportedly not received by post. He allowed me to send the copy of the form directly to him in case the upload on the system did not work. He also then called the client to apologise and reassure them that he had the claim and would ensure that it was passed to the correct person. He went above and beyond. Unfortunately a couple of months later the same client got another automated letter saying her claim had not been received and was deeply distressed by the experience.” **Partner respondent**

In another example, Social Security Scotland made a mistake with a partner who was supporting a vulnerable client. The partner respondent was concerned that the client wasn't supported during a video call with Social Security Scotland.

“I supported a client to make initial contact and we agreed the forms would be sent out for me to support him to complete as I know him best and he has limited insight into his abilities. Instead, Social Security Scotland decided to complete the forms via a video call with the man and now we have been waiting months for a decision.” **Partner respondent**

A few partner respondents said they'd complained to Social Security Scotland in cases where applications were delayed or got stuck. They felt that submitting a complaint was their only option due to the lack of other ways to escalate issues. Many other partner respondents mentioned frustration with the lack of escalation route within Social Security Scotland and felt this should be improved.

“When things go wrong, there is no escalation route to resolve the issue.” **Partner respondent**

"I did an application recently for a family whose child is critically ill and in hospital. I submitted the application under special rules online [in January] and the family had not heard anything [by the time of completing this survey in March]. We have tried calling and even put in a complaint and still no one has got back to us. It's frankly appalling." **Partner respondent**

5.2. Staff perspectives on mistakes and complaints

Client Experience staff participants were asked about common reasons for complaints in 2022-23. They said timescales was a key theme among complaints. Clients had made complaints after long waiting times for a decision on their application. Client Experience staff participants said that a lack of clarity about expected timescales contributed to clients' frustrations. They had received suggestions from clients for Social Security Scotland to introduce more updates during the application process.

"Waiting for everything and not being informed how the process works and where they are in the process. People thinking their case has been picked up and thinking it's in the process but then waiting three months to be told it's still at stage one. So they're not happy." **Client Experience staff participant**

"[Suggestions] from clients [were about] having more texts to let them know where they are in the process and how it works. They get a text when they apply but it would be good to let them know when it moves to different stages – so when it moves from part one to part two – with an indication of the timelines."

Client Experience staff participant

Client Experience staff participants said that communication was so important to clients that even when they weren't able to resolve their complaints, clients were reassured to have heard from someone about their case.

Participant 1: “Some clients are just grateful for a call back as they have been waiting for any communication.”

Participant 2: “You’re basically just telling them they will be waiting another 3-4 months.”

Participant 1: “But they do feel better having spoken to someone.”

Client Experience staff participants

Participants gave other examples of the types of complaints their team had dealt with. One participant said there had been complaints from clients who had experienced the case transfer process. In particular, the participant said the process for clients reporting changes in their circumstances, including changes in their health, can be delayed during case transfer.

“Case transfer is tough, sometimes the circumstances deteriorate. The Department for Work and Pensions put in a change but sometimes they put it in nine months before and they can wait all that time for it to come through to complaints.”

Client Experience staff participant

“I had someone the other day who had [condition] and they had been waiting for their award to get upgraded since last year. You feel sorry for people with the waiting. But you can’t give a solution as the change of circumstances has been received. I think with the complaints procedure they think it will happen quickly but it can’t, it’s still in a queue.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Another example was about parental responsibility for benefits paid for children. A participant described the difficulties experienced by some clients who receive Child Disability Payment on behalf of their child. The participant thought that clearer policies were needed to make sure payments went to the right person.

“Sometimes with Child Disability Payment the parents split up and whoever has responsibility gets the money and there seems to be a policy black hole of switching responsibility over. Kind of competing claims. The other parent wanting to put a claim in but they can’t as there’s already one in. The money needs to go to the child. It starts with one parent asking how to change the claim and then they come back later and it’s still not been changed. We don’t have a solution.”

Client Experience staff participant

Client Experience staff participants described some of the resolutions they had provided to clients about their complaints. Participants said they were often unable to do more than apologise to clients. Participants said where they could, they looked to take steps to make improvements where complaints identified issues with the service.

‘Participant 1: “Basically you tell them you are upholding the complaint and they have a right to complain but we can’t do anything faster so it is very difficult... We really just apologise.”

Participant 2: “We might remind them of the action we will take, speak to a manager. Something along those lines. There’s usually a bigger issue behind that – they’ve tried to achieve something but can’t do it so we focus on it if there is any improvement we can make to try and resolve that.”

Client Experience staff participants

6. Next Steps

The research findings provide insight into the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients, staff and partners during the year 2022-23. Findings from this report appear in the relevant sections of the [Charter Measurement Framework report](#) for this year. They will be fed into continuous improvement activities across Social Security Scotland.

Social Security Scotland's Charter and Charter Measurement Framework are required by law to be reviewed every five years. Research is currently taking place with Social Security Scotland clients, staff and partners for the first review. The findings from the review are set to be published in early 2024. We will shortly begin designing next year's bespoke research with clients, staff and partners for the 2023-24 Charter Measurement Framework and will incorporate the reviewed version of the Framework in this research.

7. Annex A: Social Security Scotland’s communication with partners

This year’s survey of partner organisations contained an additional section that asked respondents about their experience of using the guidance and resources provided by Social Security Scotland for its partners. The survey also asked for views on the communication channels used by Social Security Scotland to share information with partners. The key findings are summarised below. The findings will be fed back to national engagement and corporate communications colleagues to support continuous improvement.

7.1. Partner views on guidance and resources

Respondents to the partner survey were asked about their experience of finding and using guidance on Social Security Scotland’s website (Table A1).

Table A1: Partner respondents’ views on guidance
(n=90-91) All respondents, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	I didn’t know the guidance existed	The guidance is not relevant to me
It was easy to find the guidance I needed on Social Security Scotland’s website	49%	18%	7%	23%	3%
The guidance on Social Security Scotland’s website helped to answer my questions	42%	26%	12%	16%	4%

Around half (49%) of respondents agreed that it was easy to find the guidance they needed on Social Security Scotland’s website. Just over two-fifths (42%) agreed that

the guidance helped to answer their questions, whilst around one-in-ten (12%) disagreed. A sizeable minority said they did not know the guidance existed, and a few said that it was not relevant to them.

Social Security Scotland has a range of resources that partner organisations can share with clients. For example, this includes fact sheets, leaflets and posters. Respondents to the partner survey were asked how useful they found these resources (Table A2).

Table A2: How useful partner respondents find the resources that are designed for clients

(n=92) All respondents, Column percentages

Response options	
Very useful	14%
Somewhat useful	46%
Not useful	3%
Not at all useful	1%
I didn't know these resources existed	27%
These resources are not relevant to me	9%

The majority (60%) of respondents said the resources were 'very' or 'somewhat useful' (Table A2). Just over a quarter (27%) said they did not know the resources existed, and 9% said the resources are not relevant to them.

7.2. Partner views on communication channels

Social Security Scotland uses a range of communication channels to share information that is relevant to partner organisations. Partners were asked how useful they have found each of the channels (Table A3).

Table A3: How useful partner respondents find Social Security Scotland's communication channels

(n=87-91) All respondents, Row percentages

How useful have you found the following communication channels:	Very or somewhat useful	Not or not at all useful	I didn't know this channel existed	This is not relevant to me
Social Security Scotland's corporate website	69%	4%	15%	11%
Social Security Scotland events (such as benefit roadshows and stakeholder workshops)	76%	9%	7%	8%
Events run by other organisations where Social Security Scotland has an information stand (such as conferences)	41%	6%	13%	40%
Social media	57%	8%	9%	26%
Stakeholder newsletter	61%	4%	17%	18%
Media coverage	57%	15%	9%	19%

The majority of respondents said they found most of the communication channels used by Social Security Scotland 'very' or 'somewhat useful'. The channel viewed as useful by the highest proportion of respondents was 'Social Security Scotland events such as benefit roadshows and stakeholder workshops' (76%). The only channel which was

described as useful by fewer than half of respondents (41%) was 'events run by other organisations where Social Security Scotland has an information stand'. This is mainly because a notably higher proportion of respondents said this channel was not relevant to them compared to each of the other channels (40% compared to between 8% and 26% for other channels). Across all channels a sizeable minority said they did not know the channel existed. This ranged from 7% saying they did not know about Social Security Scotland events, to 17% who were unaware of the stakeholder newsletter.

7.3. Other comments on guidance, resources and communication channels

Partner survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide any other comments on their experience of guidance, resources or communication channels. Comments were provided by 25 respondents. Some outlined how they had made use of guidance, resources or communication channels and said that they had found them useful or informative. Some respondents also noted challenges they have experienced. This included information or resources being difficult to find or navigate online, and being (at least initially) unaware about some of the resources or communication channels available. One respondent noted that the information provided on social media can be helpful but does not give all the information so can lead to increased calls to already busy advice agencies.

"Event engagement is very good. And the website is always helpful to find information. Social media is good at informing of latest news. I haven't made much use of posters, fact sheets etc." **Partner respondent**

"I only found the resource page after Social Security Scotland advised me of it. Not all available forms are easy to find unless you know what to search."
Partner respondent

8. Annex B: About the staff survey respondents

Table B1: Gender

Response options	All respondents (n=1546)
Men	30%
Women	59%
Other	*
Prefer not to say	*

* Suppressed due to low numbers

Table B2: Age

Response options	All respondents (n=1555)
16 to 24	*
25 to 34	22%
35 to 44	27%
45 to 54	24%
55 to 64	14%
65 or over	*
Prefer not to say	8%

* Suppressed due to low numbers

Table B3: Ethnicity

Response options	All respondents (n=1536)
White groups	87%
Ethnic minority groups	4%
Prefer not to say	9%

Table B4: Disability

Response options	All respondents (n=1540)
Has a physical or mental health condition	28%
No condition	61%
Prefer not to say	10%

Table B5: Grade from most junior to most senior

Response options	All respondents (n=1545)
A-band	28%
B-band	59%
Fast Stream	*
C-band	6%
Senior Civil Service	*
Prefer not to say	6%

* Suppressed due to low numbers

Table B6: Working pattern

Response options	All respondents (n=1542)
Full time (37 hours a week)	82%
Part time	14%
Prefer not to say	4%

Table B7: Time in service

Response options	All respondents (n=1363)
<1 year	37%
1-2 years	32%
2+ years	31%

9. How to access background or source data

The data collected for this report:

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



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