Social Security Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland Client Satisfaction Survey: 2024-2025

social research

Introduction

The Client Satisfaction Survey collects the experiences of people who apply for, or receive, a benefit from Social Security Scotland (including those who experience the transfer of their award from the Department for Work and Pensions and those who automatically qualify for a benefit).

Survey questions cover key points in the experience of a client, including finding out about Social Security Scotland, interactions with staff, and making an application.

The Client Satisfaction Survey is one of many ways in which Social Security Scotland gathers and analyses data to continuously improve our service. These questions also support the measurement of commitments made in Our Charter.

The Client Satisfaction Survey is run by a dedicated team of analysts who work independently from the operational side of the organisation.

The following annual report for the year 2024-25 presents not only the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients (those in receipt of benefit payment or an appointee), but of applicants who were not successful in gaining an award. This is important, so that we can understand more fully the experiences of all Social Security Scotland applicants. In most cases, we therefore refer to those who filled in the survey as 'respondents', not 'clients'.

As Social Security Scotland expands to include more benefits and clients, the composition of its client base continues to change, as does the composition of Survey respondents.

The following chapters reflect the structure of the Client Satisfaction Survey, taking the reader through key milestones of a respondent's journey with Social Security Scotland. The data presented includes statistical figures about the experiences of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents, as well as respondents' own words for describing those experiences.

Exploring this research

Choose the depth of detail you want to read:

- For highlights and overall findings → ‘Executive summary’ on page 6
- For full findings → start at page 24

For key findings in a more visual format, a separate Summary report has also been published.

1. Executive Summary

Introduction

Of the 36,589 people who responded to the 2024-25 Client Satisfaction Survey, the majority (77%) agreed that their 'overall experience' with Social Security Scotland was 'very good' or 'good'. Measurements of satisfaction against Our Charter commitments are similarly rated, with the majority agreeing they were treated with dignity (79%), fairness (76%) and respect (80%) by Social Security Scotland.

For the year 2024-2025 Social Security Scotland has taken on new benefits, which have once again significantly altered the demographic and benefit composition of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents.

Year on year comparisons of overall client satisfaction are therefore difficult to contextualise and substantiate. However, more meaningful trends are drawn from quantitative measurements of satisfaction across the year.[1] Overall, an upward trend can be seen in overall satisfaction with Social Security Scotland and with the experience of applying for benefits. A downward trend can bee seen in the proportion of respondents reporting having experienced barriers or discrimination.

Moreover, as impacts on client satisfaction derive from factors (policies and processes) that interact with the individual, lived experiences of our clients, this report uses respondent comments to embed our statistical findings within this wider contextual milieu.

Factors shaping client satisfaction

Dignity, fairness and respect: Across qualitative and quantitative measures of satisfaction, it is clear the significance of practices and processes that embed the principles of dignity, fairness and respect to respondents' overall satisfaction.

Of note is the high proportion of clients who recognised the role of Social Security Scotland staff in treating respondents as individuals, with dignity, empathy, understanding and respect.

Most respondents (84%) who had interacted with Social Security Scotland staff agreed their overall experience with our staff was 'very good' or 'good', and that staff made them feel comfortable (86%), listened to (87%) and treated with kindness (91%).

For those with experience of a disability benefit, it is notable the number who expressed satisfaction at being treated with 'patience' and 'understanding'. As one respondent stated, the process of applying for Adult Disability Payment left them feeling "much more part of society when treated with a bit of dignity".

[1] See Chapter 11 'Changes across the year'

Some respondents have also recognised the principles of dignity, fairness and respect embedded in our written communications. Letters and texts received from Social Security Scotland have variously been described as 'friendly', 'respectful' and 'reassuring' in tone and content, while being informative and 'clear' to understand.

However, there are respondents who reported deficits in Social Security Scotland services, which posed barriers to their being treated with dignity, fairness and/or respect.

Respondents with caring responsibilities, as well as those with complex disabilities, were vocal in their need for their lived experience to be better understood.

There are also respondents from demographic groups, (both self-identified by respondents and as captured in demographic data) who highlight obstacles to their equitably accessing Social Security Scotland benefits and services. These include those applying for benefits to support children for whom they are their legal guardian or adoptive parent, who reported facing unfair, or unrecognised administrative barriers to accessing benefits and services. Additionally, respondents that had refugee status mentioned feeling discriminated by staff in a higher proportion than those without refugee status and more likely to have experienced communication barriers.

Those in receipt of a pension were also notable in voicing their disagreement with the eligibility criteria for Carer Support Payment. Some were left feeling the system was 'unfair' or 'devalued' their role as a carer.

Communication: The ways in which Social Security Scotland communicates has had a significant impact on respondent satisfaction. As well as impacting on Our Charter commitments to dignity, fairness and respect, communications have variously shaped respondents' confidence in the service, experience of accessibility, and their overall wellbeing.

Closed ended survey measurements show that over two thirds of respondents agreed they 'had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland' (76%), that they 'got the support (information or advice) I needed' (70%), and 'had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me' (73%).

Across a variety of open text comments, steps taken by Social Security Scotland to engender greater inclusivity in our communications, such as the availability of Webchat and the use of dyslexia friendly fonts and colours, were reported with satisfaction. Indeed, when asked if they were able to get information in a format that was accessible to them, 85% of respondents agreed.

The friendly tone used in written communications (notably those sent during the transfer of a benefit) was also cited as having helped allay respondents' anxieties and improve their wellbeing. As one respondent wrote "I […] take panic attacks and seizures, so all communication has to be clear and understandable, this was achieved by yourselves".

Our staff are also recognised for having verbally communicated to respondents in ways that reduced the levels of stress they experience, while engendering greater confidence in the professionalism of the service. As one respondent stated, “I was embarrassed about applying and she [helpline staff member] really made me feel comfortable and not judged”.

“The service provided is highly professional” wrote another “I felt my concerns were genuinely acknowledged, and all my enquiries were addressed in a clear and comprehensible manner”.

However, certain demographic groups reported barriers to communicating with Social Security Scotland. These include those living with hearing or cognitive impairments, and/or neurodiversity who can find communication channels, such as the helpline, difficult to access.

Long call-wait times are often referenced as a barrier to accessing our services. For some, long-call wait times, coupled with a lack of communication from Social Security Scotland on the progress on an application or case, fuelled their dissatisfaction with the service.

Respondents also expressed frustration at the lack of information helpline staff could communicate to them before a postal ‘decision letter’ was received.

When mixed or negative findings on the topic of communication relate to specific benefit experiences, these include those with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment. Stress and confusion were reportedly experienced due to written communications sent from both the Department for Work and Pensions and/or Social Security Scotland for those with ‘underlying entitlement’ to this benefit.

Trust: A final significant factor affecting client satisfaction, drawn from this year’s report, is the factor of trust. This measure comprises not only respondents trust in the knowledges, professionalism, and fairness of Social Security Scotland policies and processes, but the trust respondents feel Social Security Scotland places in them.

When respondents were asked if they felt they can ‘trust Social Security Scotland’ 72% of respondents agreed that they could. 69% agreed the agency is ‘open and honest’, while 82% said that they felt they were trusted by staff.

When respondent comments were positive, they variously related their experience of trust to a sense of pride in the agency and the Scottish Government; confidence that Social Security Scotland is working to administer benefits in a way that is fair; and feeling valued, listened to and respected.

“One lady actually said to me that her job was to make sure I got what I was entitled to” wrote one respondent, “…How wonderfully refreshing”.

“In my brief encounter with SSS” wrote another, “I was very impressed about how geared it was to the client and I trust the service completely for any future use.”

However, when respondents reported having been treated unfairly, or that they felt the outcome of their application was unjust (25% of respondents who received a decision disagreed with the decision), this was often linked in open text comments to respondents feeling misunderstood or misrepresented.

Feelings of misunderstanding and misrepresentation often stem, in open text comments, from clients feeling that application forms do not ask relevant questions (most often associated with disability applicants), or that staff have not understood information conveyed by clients and their supporting information.

Some related their feelings of mistrust to their experience of other government agencies, or to wider political and social debates on benefit reforms. As one respondent wrote “I think the current hostile environment for disabled people makes it difficult to trust any form of assessment.”

How do survey respondents suggest we can improve our service?

A prominent suggestion is for the availability of an online portal through which to access up-to-date information on application progress, and through which to communicate with Social Security Scotland. Additionally, respondents also suggested the use of email as a standard from of communication. Respondents variously suggested that both these inclusions would widen accessibility to our services for those with communication needs, as well as reduce call-wait times for those seeking progress updates.

Another suggestion is for the agency to provide more audio-visual guidance via traditional (TV) and social media (i.e. YouTube). As one respondent wrote: “I think a tv program to explain the procedures including reviews and applications would help, or a dedicated YouTube channel so you can be talked through completing forms.”

Other suggestions for improvement broadly ask for improvements to websites glitches. Respondents report having been unexpectedly logged out of applications, information having not been saved, or being unable to input information due to compatibility issues and errors.

2. Methodology

2.1 Structure of this report and materials available

The main body of the report is structured as follows:

- the remainder of Section 2 (this section) provides information on the survey methodology and factors to be aware of when interpreting results
- Sections 3 to 10 outline the main findings across the survey, grouped into themes as structured in the questionnaire
- Section 11 looks at changes across the year, making comparisons across the year on the main measures of this survey in bi-monthly intervals
- Section 12 provides an intersectional analysis of respondents' demographic characteristics and benefit experiences, including by seldom heard groups
- Section 13 briefly outlines how the results will be used and the future of the survey
- Section 14 in a glossary of frequently used terms
- Annex A provides the results from the 'point of contact' question present in applications and additional information on Seldom Heard groups calculations

A Summary report which presents the key findings from across this report in a more concise and visual format is also available.

More detailed information on the characteristics of respondents is provided in the Client Satisfaction Survey Supplementary Tables 2024-25 report published alongside this report. This also contains findings for the headline questions from each section of the survey, broken down by respondents' benefit experience and a range of demographic characteristics for readers looking for more detailed results.

2.2 Survey purpose

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

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

- how Social Security Scotland will uphold the Principles in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018
- what people should expect from the social security system
- how Social Security Scotland will make sure it is taking a human rights-based approach
- how Social Security Scotland will demonstrate dignity, fairness and respect in all its actions

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

The Social Security Scotland Client Satisfaction Survey (the Survey) was designed in 2019/20. Its purpose is to inform the Charter Measurement Framework and learn about the overall experiences and needs of Social Security Scotland's clients. The commitments in Our Charter explain what you can expect from Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government. It was reviewed with input from people who use the new Scottish social security system and approved by Parliament in 2024.

The survey sits alongside and complements other research activities which aim to capture the views and experiences of those who use (or will use) the social security system in Scotland. This includes short surveys at the end of application forms and phone calls.

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

All clients are eligible to join the Client Panels and joining is completely voluntary. Around 7,500 respondents to the 2024-2025 round of the Social Security Scotland Client Satisfaction Survey chose to sign up for Client Panels. The invitation to get involved in the Client Panels will also be included in future rounds of the survey. This will help to ensure the Panels continue to evolve as Social Security Scotland's live benefits and client base grow further.

2.3 Background

This report presents the findings from the 2024-2025 Social Security Scotland Client Satisfaction Survey. The Client Satisfaction Survey is voluntary and anonymous. This is essential so respondents feel comfortable sharing their unbridled views. Because respondents self select, this is not a randomised sample of people and, therefore, not necessarily statistically representative of the overall client base. However, the very large volume of responses and spread across benefits experiences and demographic characteristics means that its results can be understood as indicative of the experience of Social Security Scotland clients.

Because this is a growing organisation, year on year bringing in more clients with different needs and backgrounds, the populations across each of the yearly publications of this survey are not easily comparable. For example, in 2022-23 the largest benefits were Five Family Payments, whereas in 2024-23 it was Adult Disability Payment (including transferred awards). This year, Carer Support Payment and Pension Age Disability Payment were included, as well as their award transfer counterparts. Therefore, caution is advised when comparing the main overall measures of the survey across years. Comparing a single benefit across time will likely be more accurate.

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

During the financial year 2024-2025 the method by which survey invites were sent changed to include automatic invitations for benefits which require an application. This also lead to the use of benefit-specific surveys. This means that, in a phased manner from June 2024 onward, the survey was issued on a continuous, rolling basis to all applicants following a decision on an application. These automatic invitations are electronic only (email and text) which means that for those applicants who have not provided an email address or mobile number continue to be invited to the survey manually via post. Invites also they continue to be sent manually to people receiving automatically awarded benefits and for people who have their award transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The survey was open to everyone who had received a decision on an application for at least one of: Best Start Grant and/or Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Scottish Child Payment, Job Start Payment, Carer Support Payment, Child Disability Payment or Adult Disability Payment between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. A survey invite was also sent to clients who had their award transferred to Child Disability Payment, Adult Disability Payment or Carer Support Payment during this time. A survey invite was also sent to clients who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement, Child Winter Heating Payment or Winter Heating Payment.

Any client who applies for, and receives a decision, on a Social Security Scotland benefit during financial year 2024-2025 was invited to complete the survey for that experience. It is therefore possible for a single client to complete the 2024-2025 survey more than once about their experience with different benefits. As each benefit now has its own version of the Client Satisfaction Survey each invite would be to that specific survey.

2.4 Sampling

During the financial year 2024-2025 a decision was made to sample for some benefit experiences. In previous years all clients who had their award transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions or received a payment for Child Winter Heating Payment or Winter Heating Payment were invited to the survey.

On Child Winter Heating Payment and Winter Heating Payment a sampling approach was taken to include those who had received the payment over multiple years. Previously only those who had received the payment for the first time were invited. This was intended to increase the depth of understanding that could be collected from these clients.

For transfers from the Department for Work and Pensions, all remaining clients who had their award transferred to Child Disability Payment in 2024-2025 were invited to participate. For transfers to Adult Disability Payment, an investigation of response rates and volumes was undertaken. This suggested that the volume of responses had surpassed the point of stability. By sampling all clients who experience a transfer from 2024-2025 onwards, the Client Satisfaction Survey can achieve sample size sufficiency[2]. This also reduces the burden on clients who have their awards transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Moving forward, clients who receive a payment for a Social Security Scotland heating benefit will also be sampled. This is because the number of clients receiving a heating benefit will continue to increase and the Client Satisfaction Survey will therefore reach sampling size sufficiency. Utilising an approach that achieves sample size sufficiency by strategically inviting clients to the Client Satisfaction Survey also delivers value for money for the taxpayer.

The Client Satisfaction Survey remains open to all clients who receive a decision on an application. With the sampling approach described above the Client Satisfaction Survey will still deliver robust evidence of clients' experiences with Social Security Scotland.

2.5 Response

A total of 36,589 responses were received for the 2024-2025 Social Security Scotland Client Satisfaction Survey. Of clients who completed the survey:

- 34% had applied for Adult Disability Payment (n=12,285)
- 32% had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment (n=11,569)
- 12% had their award transferred to Carer Support Payment (n=4,214)
- 7% had applied for some or all Five Family Payments (Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods and/or Scottish Child Payment) (n=2,416)
- 5% had received Winter Heating Payment (n=1,908)
- 3% had applied for Child Disability Payment (n=1,237)
- 2% had received Carer's Allowance Supplement (n=869)
- 2% had applied for Funeral Support Payment (n=804)
- 2% had applied for Carer Support Payment (n=729)
- 1% had applied for Young Carer Grant (n=307)
- 0.5% had received Child Winter Heating Payment (n=172)
- 0.1% had applied for Job Start Payment (n=41)

[2] 'Sample size sufficiency' means the Client Satisfaction Survey has collected enough data to make reliable and valid inferences, detect true effects if they exist (statistical power), and ensure the results are generalisable to the population being studied.

The process of transferring benefit awards for disabled children and young people to Child Disability Payment is now complete. Only a very small number of these clients took part in the survey this year, and so, as a mitigation for risk of disclosure, findings are not presented by experience type. Responses from these respondents are, however, included in those presented as “All respondents”, “All applicants”, and if applicable “Respondents whose award was transferred”.

Out of the total of respondents (36,569), 17,819 which represents just under a half (49%) had experience of applying for a benefit, while 15,800 (43%) had experience of having their award transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions, and 2,949 (8%) received an automatic payment because of underlying eligibility to winter payments and Carer’s Allowance Supplement. There were 21 respondents for whom there benefit experience is not known.

It is worth noting that in the responses presented across this report there are three main groups of experiences depending on the benefit someone has applied for or received. These are:

- Respondents who have qualified for other benefits because of another one they receive (e.g. children and young people under 19 years of age who received the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Adult Disability Payment during the 3rd week of September 2023 automatically qualified for receiving Child Winter Heating Payment)
- Respondents who already received a benefit which has now been transferred over to Social Security Scotland from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Respondents who have applied for their benefit from Social Security Scotland and received an outcome

These three main groups of experiences will influence factors like how much contact a client has with Social Security Scotland, and which type of contact. Some respondents might have just received a letter confirming an upcoming one-off award while others might have contacted us to get advice on eligibility, or filled an application form, spoken to staff in local delivery, gone through a consultation, or appealed their initial outcome.

2.6 Data cleaning and analysis

Responses to the survey are anonymous. Data was cleaned and analysed by Social Security Scotland researchers. A non-response weight cannot be developed for this data as all questions are optional, and thus some respondents chose not to provide geographic or demographic information (for example their postcode and date of birth).

The majority of survey questions were closed, meaning they had answer options for respondents to choose from. Responses to these questions were analysed alongside the demographic information provided by respondents.

Results from the closed questions are generally presented for all respondents who answered the question, then broken down by benefit experience. Key results across the survey were also examined for differences across selected geographic and demographic characteristics.[3] The geographic and demographic characteristics used in analysis include:

- gender identity
- age
- ethnicity
- whether respondent had a long-term physical or mental health condition
- whether respondent lived in an urban or rural area (2-fold classification)
- deprivation (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation)
- whether respondent had any additional communication needs
- main language
- religion
- whether care experienced
- whether a veteran
- whether they provide unpaid care to someone
- whether respondent could speak, understand, read and write English 'very well'

A complete outline of the derivation and parameters for these groups, as well as further demographic breakdowns, are provided in the Client Satisfaction Survey Supplementary Tables 2024-25 report published alongside this report.

2.6.1 Handling of responses

Some of the questions included residual options such as 'Prefer not to say' or 'Can't remember/ don't know'. These are excluded from the totals unless they are a meaningful option to the question instead of a residual one.

Most tables and figures are presented with rounded figures. The only exception is for the 'Changes across the year' section to better allow the identification of trends and smaller shifts in measures.

2.6.2 Open text questions

Most sections of the survey included an open text space for respondents to provide further comments. Respondents were asked if they would like to say anything more about the subject of that section (i.e. the process of applying, experiences with staff or of discrimination, etc.). For the 'Overall' section the open text question asked the respondent if they would like to make suggestions for improvement as well as to provide any further comments.

[3] A minimum base of 25 was required for a benefit experience or demographic characteristic to be used a break down

This year around 51,000 comments were received. Comments made by those with experience of Adult Disability Payment far outweighed the number of comments received from other benefit types. Therefore, using SPSS analytical software, a 25% randomised sample was coded for comments from respondents who applied for, or experienced their benefit being transferred to, Adult Disability Payment. The 25% sampling of Adult Disability Payment related comments was applied to all applicable questions, apart from ‘Consultation’ which received a low level of response and was made up entirely of Adult Disability Payment respondents. The final number of comments coded were around 14,000 after non-substantive, unclear or ‘off-topic’ responses i.e. experiences explicitly relating to experiences with the Department for Work or Pensions, were discounted.

Before comments were analysed, a bespoke coding scheme for each topic was devised iteratively among a group of Social Security Scotland social researchers. Initially, this coding scheme consisted of high level, and lower-level themes, based on prominent topics that emerged in previous Client Satisfaction Survey annual reports. Social researchers then used the qualitative analysis software NVivo to code the open text comments for each section. As new themes emerged and / or themes were found to be redundant, the coding schemes were then revised, and a coding dictionary updated, considering changes recommended by the group.

While themes for each topic varied, most topics underwent a sentiment analysis, i.e. was the overall sentiment of the comment ‘positive’ ‘negative’ ‘neutral’ or ‘mixed’. Other codes include, but were not restricted to, topics around accessibility, guidance, staff knowledge, emotional responses, and suggestions for improvement. When researchers wanted to investigate the relationships between distinct codes, a ‘matrix’ coding tool was employed in NVivo to explore these relationships.

Unlike previous years, the benefit experience of the respondent was visible to the analyst when coding, enabling coders to identify benefit specific findings. However, while respondents were asked about their most recent experiences of applying for / receiving a specific benefit, some comments reflect on a breadth of experience with multiple benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland. Some also compared their experiences with Social Security Scotland to those with the Department for Work and Pensions.

After significant themes had been identified, quotes were selected to best reflect these themes. These quotes include the benefit experience of the respondent.

2.7 Understanding and interpreting the survey results

The survey results provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients. However, we cannot assume that the results represent the views of Social Security Scotland's clients as a whole. It is reasonable though, given the number of responses, to treat the findings as indicative of the general view of clients. This includes when results are shown by benefit experience and demographic group.

Information on the benefit experience and demographic characteristics of respondents helps us further understand the results contained in this report and view them in context. A detailed analysis of who took part in the survey is provided in the Client Satisfaction Survey Supplementary Tables 2024-25 report.

2.7.1 Comparison across demographic characteristics

Table 2.1 shows the demographic characteristics of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who completed an application between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 compared to applicants included in 'Social Security Scotland client and applicant diversity and equalities analysis for April 2024 to March 2025' thereafter referred to as the 'equalities publication'.

While meaningful comparisons may be drawn between the two equalities datasets, there are limitations. First, the equalities publication provides diversity and equalities information about people who made a benefit application to Social Security Scotland for benefits within the same reporting period as the Client Satisfaction Survey, and whose equalities monitoring forms were linked with application data. Therefore, the data covered in the equalities publication does not cover all people who applied for benefits during this period.

Secondly, comparison of all Client Satisfaction Survey respondents was not possible as equalities data is not available for clients who have been transferred from the Department of Work and Pensions nor for clients who receive benefits which are paid automatically (Carer's Allowance Supplement, Child Winter Heating Payment and Winter Heating Payment). Therefore, only respondents who have applied for a benefit and responded to the demographic and individual questions are included.

The equalities data presented in Table 2.1 may differ from the figures in the equalities statistics due to small differences in how responses have been categorised and counted to allow for comparison with Client Satisfaction Survey data. A footnote was added to mark that.

In the table, the data is divided into three columns showing: the proportion of applicants in the equalities publication; the proportion of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application that chose each answer; and the percentage point difference between these figures where '+' means a larger proportion of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents and '-' means a smaller proportion. As with all the tables in this report, figures may not sum due to rounding. Due to rounding, differences between +1 and -1 should be interpreted with caution.

For five of the ten categories included in the comparison, the proportions of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application and applicants in the equalities publication choosing each answer option was the same or similar. This means there was a difference of five or less percentage points between each of the available answers. These categories were: ethnicity, sexual orientation, transgender, geographical location and SIMD classification.

For the other five of the ten categories, there were larger differences between the two groups. The biggest percentage point differences were in the Benefit and Age categories. The difference in benefit composition could likely explain some of the other demographic differences as it is known that benefits differ in the population groups they reach. For example, disability benefits are more likely to reach people with longer-term health conditions, and child benefits are more likely to reach people in reproductive age groups. Therefore, a larger proportion of respondents with a benefit experience could impact the demographic composition of the survey sample.

More than two thirds (69%) of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application did so for Adult Disability Payment. This was 27 percentage points higher than applicants in the equalities publication (42%). While the proportion of respondents who applied for Five Family Payments was 14%, which is 17 percentage points lower than applicants in the equalities publication (31%). The proportions of respondents who applied for Funeral Support Payment, Job Start Payment, Child Disability Payment and Young Carer Grant were all similar to the proportions of applicants in the equalities publication with overall differences between 0 and 2 percentage points.

Around two-in-five (44%) of applicants in the equalities publication were aged between 16-34, compared to less than one in five (15%) of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents. Around half (51%) of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents were aged 45-64, compared to around a quarter (26%) of applicants in the equalities publication.

More than two thirds (69%) of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application had a long-term physical or mental health condition, compared to nearly half (49%) of applicants in the equalities publication.

Lastly, the proportion of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application that said they had no religion (46%) was 12 percentage points lower than the corresponding proportion of applicants in the equalities publication (58%). Around one in five (19%) of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents were part of the Church of Scotland, compared to nearly one in ten (9%) of applicants in the equalities publication.

Table 2.1: Comparison of demographic characteristics of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who made an application and applicants in equalities publication

Column percentages

Category	All applicants - Diversity and Equalities publication	Client Satisfaction Survey - respondents who applied for at least one benefit	Percentage point difference
Gender identity			
Man	27%	34%	+7
Woman	65%	62%	-3
In another way	1%	1%	-
Prefer not to say	7%	2%	-5
Unknown	0%	1%	+1
Age			
16-24	17%	6%	-11
25-34	27%	9%	-18
35-44	25%	19%	-6
45-54 55-64	26%	51%[4]	+25
65+	4%	12%	+8
Prefer not to say	-	1%	-
Skipped/unknown	0%	1%	+1
Ethnicity[5]			
White	85%	87%	+2
Minority ethnic	7%	7%	-
Prefer not to say	8%	3%	-5
Skipped/unknown	0%	3%	+3

[4] The age groups 45-54 and 55-64 were grouped to match the equalities publication.

[5] Ethnic minority categories have been combined for comparison. In the equality statistics, this includes Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, Asian, African, Caribbean or Black and Other ethnic groups.

Long-term physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last more than 12 months or more			
With long-term physical/mental health condition	49%	69%	+20
No condition	39%	23%	-16
Prefer not to say	12%	7%	-5
Skipped/unknown	0%	2%	+2
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual	83%	86%	+3
Gay / lesbian	2%	2%	-
Bisexual	3%	2%	-1
In another way	0%	1%	+1
Prefer not to say	12%	7%	-5
Skipped/unknown	0%	2%	+2
Transgender			
Yes	1%	1%	-
No	91%	93%	+2
Prefer not to say	8%	3%	-5
Skipped/unknown	0%	3%	+3
Urban or rural area[6]			
Urban	87%	86%	-1
Rural	12%	14%	+2
SIMD Quintile[7]			
Quintile 1 (most deprived)	35%	33%	-2
Quintile 2	24%	25%	+1
Quintile 3	17%	19%	+2
Quintile 4	14%	15%	+1
Quintile 5 (least deprived)	9%	9%	-
Religion			
None	58%	46%	-12
Roman Catholic	11%	14%	+3
Church of Scotland	9%	19%	+10
Other Christian	4%	6%	+2

[6] In the equalities publication, more detailed Urban and Rural breakdowns have been used. The statistics also include unknowns. These have been removed from the percentages in this table.
[7] In the equalities publication the SIMD is presented in deciles and ‘unknowns’ are included. The statistics have been recalculated to match the quintile presentation in the Client Satisfaction Survey in quintiles and excluding unknowns.

<table>
<tr><td>Muslim</td><td>4%</td><td>5%</td><td>+1</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other religions[8]</td><td>2%</td><td>3%</td><td>+1</td></tr>
<tr><td>Prefer not to say</td><td>12%</td><td>5%</td><td>-7</td></tr>
<tr><td>Skipped/unknown</td><td>0%</td><td>2%</td><td>+2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Benefit applied for</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Best Start Foods</td><td rowspan="3">31%[9]</td><td rowspan="3">14%</td><td rowspan="3">-17</td></tr>
<tr><td>Best Start Grant</td></tr>
<tr><td>Scottish Child Payment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Funeral Support Payment</td><td>5%</td><td>5%</td><td>-</td></tr>
<tr><td>Job Start Payment</td><td>1%</td><td>0.2%</td><td>-0.8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Young Carer Grant</td><td>3%</td><td>2%</td><td>-1</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Disability Payment</td><td>9%</td><td>7%</td><td>-2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Adult Disability Payment</td><td>42%</td><td>69%</td><td>+27</td></tr>
<tr><td>Carer Support Payment</td><td>8%</td><td>4%</td><td>-4</td></tr>
</table>

2.7.2 Comparing findings with previous annual publications

Caution should be applied when comparing findings from ‘all respondents’ between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 annual Client Satisfaction Survey publications. The reason being that applying for, or receiving certain benefits, is associated with higher or lower levels of satisfaction across a range of survey measures, and the proportion of respondents who applied for or received each benefit differs across the two publications. This association is suggested in figures collected in a comparative ‘Point of Contact’ survey, reported on in Annex A of this report.

For this current publication, the majority of respondents had experience of applying for Adult Disability Payment (34%) or having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment (32%). This is a similar proportion for Adult Disability Payment compared to last report, but a larger one for respondents that had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment. This year also saw the national roll out of Carer Support Payment and the transfer of Carer Support Payment awards from the Department for Work and Pensions. This is a substantial change from last year’s report. This has an impact on the overall benefit experience reflected by the following results, so careful consideration is required when making inter-year comparisons.

Sounder comparisons can be made across the two publications between benefit experience groups. For example, of those who received Carer’s Allowance Supplement in 2023-24, 88% rated their overall experience as ‘very good’ or ‘good’, compared with

[8] Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Pagan, Other (free text responses).
[9] Equalities publication figures were grouped from ‘Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods’ and ‘Scottish Child Payment’ to match the Client Satisfaction Survey presentation.

85% in 2024-25. However, when comparing by benefit experience consideration should be given to changes to the delivery of said benefit across the comparison period which may have influenced satisfaction.

2.7.3 Understanding results and quotations presented in this report

Other key factors to be aware of when interpreting the findings in this report are:

- Results for the closed questions presented in this report are rounded to whole numbers. As such, results included in charts and table figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding. This may also mean that if the report text presents a finding which is a sum of two response options, rounding may cause the summed value to be 1 percentage point higher or lower than the sum of the two constituent values.
- The only sections of this report that includes decimal places in percentage points are Table 2.1 – Chapter 2 (this one) and Chapter 11 – ‘Changes across the year’. This is to capture the smaller fluctuations.
- Results for each question shown in the report exclude any respondents who either skipped the question, said ‘not applicable’ or were filtered out of the relevant question, unless otherwise stated. ‘Don’t know’, ‘Can’t remember’, and ‘Prefer not to say’ responses are included as valid responses where they add to the analysis of the question.
- Some percentages quoted in the report relate to questions that allowed respondents to choose more than one response. These percentages will not sum to 100%.
- All quotes presented under the ‘Comments about…’ sections throughout this report are contained within coloured text boxes to separate them from the analytical commentary. Quotes are presented in a manner that reflects the comments received as accurately as possible. This includes where capitalised text may have been used by respondents for emphasis, but does not include text that’s been entirely capitalised (block capitals). Such text has been rewritten in lower case for better readability. Any potentially identifying information has been omitted.
- Themes are generally presented in order of prominence in the ‘Comments about…’ sections. This means that, in each subsection where quotes supporting a theme are presented, the theme with the most volume of mentions overall is presented first, then the second-most voluminous and so on. It should be noted, however, that this is generally how themes are presented. Despite some themes containing only a few responses this does not mean that that theme is less important or insightful.
- ‘#’ indicates that a value is suppressed due to a small number of respondents in a group. To reduce risk of disclosure, the minimum base size for a variable to be included in a cross break was set at 25. The minimum base size for a response within the cross break was set at 5.
- Some base sizes greater than 25 (for example the 41 respondents who applied for Job Start Payment) are included but should be interpreted with caution.
- Results are presented to zero decimal places. ‘0%’ should therefore be interpreted to mean <0.5%. If no responses were given then this is denoted by ‘-’.
- Many closed questions within the survey provide respondents with response options in a 5 point Likert scale format, for example: ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’, or alternatively: ‘very good’, ‘good’,

'neither poor nor good', 'poor', 'very poor'. When analysed these responses were combined into, for example, agree (including 'strongly agree', 'agree'), neither agree nor disagree, and disagree (including 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'). No guidance was given to respondents as to how they should interpret these response options, they were allowed to interpret at their discretion.

- Report Tables include a 'Total' row or column. Where a table presents findings from 'All respondents', the 'Total' is the number of respondents who answered the corresponding question. Where a Table includes a cross break, for example 'by benefit experience', the 'Total' outlines the number of respondents within each subgroup. When a table presents agreement/disagreement with multiple statements, the totals included belong to the first statement unless otherwise indicated.
- Some findings are broken down by benefit. This can be by 'experience of the benefit' (experience of applying for or receiving each benefit), 'experience of benefit application' (experience of applying for each benefit), or 'experience of having an award transferred from DWP'. Each table which includes benefit break downs will specify the category of benefit experience included.
- From this year onwards Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods and Scottish Child Payments will be reported together as 'Five Family Payments'. This is due to a logistical need of the automatic invites system. Nevertheless, it should not impact the quality of the data collected and insights produced.

2.7.4 Priority groups and seldom heard group analysis

This is also the first annual report to include intersectional priority family type analysis based on the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026. These should be interpreted with caution as the survey is not a representative sample of the total population however close it is. Therefore, intersectional breakdowns should just be taken as a way to gauge the presence of these groups in the survey and monitor any gaps.

The same is true for the seldom heard groups breakdowns. Given the nature of the population Social Security Scotland serves, the vast majority (94%) fall within at least one 'seldom heard' group. Due to the methodological reasons listed above, there are considerable gaps in some of the seldom heard groups internal compositions. This data is meant allow the gauging of the presence of these groups across the wider Social Security Scotland data landscape.

3 Overall experience

This section presents findings on respondents' overall experience with Social Security Scotland.

3.1 Overall rating of experience

The survey's last question, asked of all respondents, aims to gauge respondent satisfaction of their overall experience with Social Security Scotland. Over three quarters of respondents (77%) said that their overall experience was 'very good' or 'good', while 8% said their experience was 'poor' or 'very poor' and 15% remained neutral (see Table 3.1).

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

Response options	All respondents[10]
Very good or good	77%
Neither good nor poor	15%
Poor or very poor	8%
Total	36,184

In that same question, respondents are asked to provide feedback on their overall experience and suggest any improvements. General comments about a respondents' overall experiences were mostly positive. Some reflected on aspects of the service such as its professionalism or the accessibility of written communications. For those whose comments included negative experiences, themes include long wait times, Social Security Scotland not abiding by its Charter, and unfavourable comparisons to the UK social security system.

In Table 3.2 the overall rating of experience is broken down by benefit. There is variation across the different benefits, which in part could be explained by the very different experiences and processes that benefits require. Some may be automatically paid, others involve a transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions, while others require different levels of involvement in the application process.

Child Winter Heating Payment (91%) along with Five Family Payments (87%), Funeral Support Payment (87%) and Young Carer Grant (87%) have the higher satisfaction ratings across the benefits, followed by Child Disability Payment (85%). While Job Start Payment (68%) and Adult Disability Payment (70%) are lower in comparison.

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

Nevertheless, when looking at open text comments across the benefits those with experience of transferring to Adult Disability Payment offered largely positive views, specifically describing the written communication they received as informative and clear to understand, as well as being friendly, respectful and reassuring in tone and content.

Conversely, respondents with experience of transferring to Carer Support Payment of pension age had more negative views which largely linked to experiencing stress and confusion due to written communications. See more in section 3.3 Client Comments about their overall experience.

Table 3.2: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland
All respondents; Column percentages[11]

Benefit experience	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor	Total
Adult Disability Payment	70%	15%	14%	12,176
Child Disability Payment	85%	8%	7%	1,232
Carer Support Payment	80%	11%	9%	723
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	76%	20%	5%	11,385
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	80%	14%	6%	4,178
Five Family Payments	87%	8%	5%	2,387
Job Start Payment	68%	17%	15%	41
Funeral Support Payment	87%	8%	6%	795
Young Carer Grant	87%	7%	6%	305
Carer's Allowance Supplement	85%	12%	3%	861
Winter Heating Payment	84%	12%	5%	1,896
Child Winter Heating Payment	91%	6%	4%	169

3.1.1 Overall rating by demographic characteristics

Some variation was evident when assessing respondents' overall satisfaction rating by demographic characteristics. As shown in Table 3.3 below, some groups who were more likely to give a higher satisfaction rating of overall experience include:

[11] When columns don't add up to 100% the difference is accounted for by people who responded 'Can't remember / don't know'.

- Minority ethnic respondents (87%) compared to white respondents (77%)
- Respondents with no long-term physical or mental health condition (84%) compared to those with such a condition (75%)
- Female respondents (79%), compared to male (74%) and people who identify in another way (62%)
- Those with no communication needs (78%), compared to those with a communication need (72%)
- Overall rating of experience remained consistent across age bands. Varying between 76%-78% across them
- Characteristics such as geographical location and deprivation level showed little variation in satisfaction

Caution is required when interpreting these differences to allow for the nuances of experience and other influencing factors not considered here.

Table 3.3: Overall rating of experience with Social Security Scotland by demographic and geographic breakdowns
All respondents

Demographic/Geographic group	Proportion who said that their overall experience was very good or good	Total
Gender identity(***)		
Man	74%	12,743
Woman	79%	22,229
In another way	62%	194
Prefer not to say	48%	666
Long-term health condition(***)		
With long-term physical / mental health condition	75%	26,425
No long-term physical / mental health condition	84%	7,113
Prefer not to say	73%	2,127
Ethnicity(***)		
White	77%	32,611
Minority ethnic	87%	1,903
Prefer not to say	64%	900
Age(***)		
16 to 24	76%	1,277
25 to 34	76%	2,312
35 to 44	78%	5,382
45 to 54	76%	7,057
55 to 64	78%	12,659
65 and over	77%	6,674
Geographical location(**)		
Urban	78%	26,171
Rural	77%	4,558

Caring responsibilities(***)		
Unpaid carer	78%	11,350
Not an unpaid carer	77%	21,836
Communication needs(***)		
Had communication needs	72%	10,688
Had no communication needs	78%	25,496
Main Language(***)		
English	76%	26,979
Other	80%	8,713
Speaking, writing, understanding, and reading English(***)		
Could speak, write, understand, and read English 'very well'	78%	19,329
Others	75%	16,855
Deprivation level (SIMD by quintile)(***)		
Quintiles 1-2	79%	17,831
Quintiles 3-5	76%	12,898

* The p-value is less than 0.05
**The p-value is less than 0.01
*** The p-value is less than 0.001
(the smaller the p-value the higher statistical significance)

When looking at open text comments respondents living with hearing and cognitive impairments highlighted barriers to accessing Social Security Scotland Services. See more in Barriers and Discrimination chapters.

3.2 Experience of dignity, fairness and respect

Respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about their overall experience. Many of these questions align to measures and aims as outlined in Our Charter. Topics covered include whether Social Security Scotland treated respondents with dignity, fairness and respect. Again, respondents generally indicated a positive experience, with a majority agreeing with each statement.

Around eight-in-ten believed that they had been treated with dignity (79%), fairness (76%) and respect (80%). Seven-in-ten respondents also agreed they could trust Social Security Scotland (72%) and Social Security Scotland is an open and honest organisation (69%). Few respondents actively disagreed with each of the statements. Instead, respondents who did not give a positive response to each statement tended to say 'neither agree nor disagree'.

The written comments of respondents, as reported on in Section 3.3 of this chapter, help illustrate people's agreement/disagreement in relation to these measures. When comments were negative, some voiced mistrust in the agency while for others they may also feel the agency showed mistrust in them.

Table 3.4: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland
All respondents; row percentages

Thinking about your overall experience with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	79%	17%	5%	34,226
Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	76%	16%	8%	33,989
Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	80%	15%	5%	34,132
I feel I can trust Social Security Scotland	72%	20%	8%	34,635
Social Security Scotland is an open and honest organisation	69%	26%	6%	34,168

Table 3.5 shows the results for Table 3.4 divided by benefit. Broadly, respondents with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment, Five Family Payments, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant were most likely to agree with these statements. Agreement with almost all statements was lowest among respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment (both via an application or a transfer), transfer to Carer Support Payment and Job Start Payment.

Table 3.5: Views on overall experience with Social Security Scotland, by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of each benefit; Row percentages

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed that…(Social Security Scotland)					Total
	treated me with dignity	treated me fairly	treated me with respect	I can trust Social Security Scotland	is an open and honest organisation	
Adult Disability Payment	75%	69%	76%	68%	66%	11,899
Child Disability Payment	89%	86%	89%	82%	80%	1,216
Carer Support Payment	87%	82%	88%	79%	76%	714
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	77%	77%	78%	69%	64%	10,022
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	78%	78%	80%	73%	70%	4,078

Five Family Payments	89%	87%	91%	86%	86%	2,294
Job Start Payment	71%	71%	71%	73%	71%	41
Funeral Support Payment	90%	87%	91%	85%	84%	792
Young Carer Grant	88%	89%	91%	83%	85%	291
Carer's Allowance Supplement	85%	84%	84%	76%	71%	847
Winter Heating Payment	84%	83%	85%	77%	74%	1,829
Child Winter Heating Payment	92%	93%	94%	86%	85%	170

Respondents with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment were most likely to agree that they had been treated with dignity (92%), fairness (93%), or respect (94%), followed closely by those with experience of Funeral Support Payment (90%, 87% and 91% respectively). Conversely, respondents with experience of Job Start Payment were less likely to agree that they had been treated with dignity (71%), fairness (71%), or respect (71%), followed by those with experience of Adult Disability Payment (75%, 69% and 76%).

3.3 Client comments about their overall experience and suggestions for improvement

3.3.1 Summary

The survey's final question invited all respondents to offer suggestions for improvement, or further comment on their overall experience with Social Security Scotland. Around 3,900 comments were analysed. Of these, around 3,300 substantive responses were coded and analysed.[12]

Three significant themes that stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- **General comments of thanks or discontent** (including reflections of the professionalism of service, accessibility of the written communications, and pride in the Scottish Government)

[12] Comments were received from respondents with experience across each benefit experience group. The largest response rate came from those whose most recent experience with Social Security Scotland related to one of the following benefits: a transfer to Carer Support Payment or Adult Disability Payment, or an application to Adult Disability Payment.

- **Communication with Social Security Scotland** (including call wait-times, information received on application progress, communication needs and preferences and transparency over payments in written communications)
- **Dignity, fairness and respect** (including levels of trust in Social Security Scotland, the compassion / concern of clients towards Social Security Scotland's staff and their welfare, and whether humanity is embedded in service)

Suggestions for improvement Among these themes, suggestions for improvement were made. These include shortening call wait and case processing times; the provision of an online portal for clients to view their case status/application progress; Social Security Scotland postal correspondence being easily identifiable from the envelope.

Benefit specific findings Some findings, within the above noted themes, were more commonly aligned to specific benefit experiences.

When benefit specific findings were largely positive, these include those with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment describing the written communication they received as informative and clear to understand, as well as being friendly, respectful and reassuring in tone and content.

When findings were largely negative, they include those with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment and who were of pension age, who experienced stress and confusion due to written communications sent from the Department for Work and Pensions and/or Social Security Scotland.

When benefit specific findings offered suggestions for improvement, Adult and Child Disability applicants were notable in pushing for more face-to-face contact with agency staff. This group also stressed the need for Social Security Scotland to capture more of the complexity, and humanity of individuals living with disabilities within the context of their wider life experiences.

Demographic specific findings There are also demographic groups, (self-identified by respondents) who highlighted obstacles to accessing Social Security Scotland services. These include those living with hearing or cognitive impairments, and/or neurodiversity who find certain communication methods inaccessible.

Respondents with caring responsibilities were notably vocal in the need for their lived experience to be understood.

3.3.2 Full report

3.3.3 General comments of thanks or discontent

A large proportion of comments were general expressions of thanks or discontent. Of these, the majority were positive, with many simply containing phrases such as “All good”, “Could not fault a thing”, “Great experience from start to finish”.

Some reflected on aspects of the service such as its professionalism or the accessibility of written communications. Some expressed pride in and/or feelings of support from the Scottish Government.

Others reflected on aspects of Social Security Scotland’s service which helped alleviate levels of stress or anxiety experienced by the client. Some reflected on the provision of a service that treats individuals with kindness, courteousness and respect.

> “The service provided is highly professional. I felt that my concerns were genuinely acknowledged, and all of my inquiries were addressed in a clear and comprehensible manner…” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> “Overall I feel happier and less stressed . I used to get panicky when a brown envelope came through the door. I don't feel like that now. I feel like I'm treated better” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> “I had no idea the amount of stress and anxiety that carers go through and it has taken an extreme toll on my mental and physical health. I cried when I got my letter as it made me feel supported by the Scottish government. I want to thank everyone involved from the bottom of my heart.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> “a service that treats individuals with kindness, courteousness and respect” Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

For those whose comments included negative experiences, themes include long wait times, Social Security Scotland not abiding by its Charter, and unfavourable comparisons to the UK social security system.

> “Do as you have written in your charter! Be more transparent with you policies and processes.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"Close social security scotland and return to the UK system" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"Just way too slow." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

3.3.4 Communication

A large proportion of respondent comments referred to their experience of communicating with Social Security Scotland.

Predominant themes include:

- Call wait-times
- Information received on application progress
- Communication needs and preferences
- Transparency over payments in written communications

Call wait-times[13]

A sizeable number of respondents commented on the call wait times for Social Security Scotland's helpline. Of these, around half were suggestions for improvement, a third negative, with the remainder being either positive or mixed in sentiment.

When comments were positive, respondents mentioned the ease with which they connected to an advisor.

"It is very easy to get through to them by phone, and you can also chat on the website. Communication with Social Security Scotland is really easy, which is especially important for older and sick people (like me)." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

"On past occasions when I have had to call and speak to an advisor, I have not had to wait on hold too long and my queries have been answered promptly and thoroughly. I certainly find contacting Social Security Scotland far easier, less time consuming and much less stressful than dealing with the DWP!" Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

[13] References to call wait times can be found in sections 3.3.4 Overall, 4.4.3 'Webchat', 9.3.3 'Barriers', ' 6.5.7 'Application'

When comments were negative, respondents felt it took too long to get through. Respondents report waiting 30, 40, some over an hour before getting through to an advisor or finding themselves hanging up.

For some, long call wait times were a source of 'anxiety' and/or 'stress'. The 'on-hold' music was notably mentioned as a source of irritation which, as one respondent stated, makes them "more and more worked up".

For some, their negative experience with long call wait times was compounded by being 'cut off' at the point of reaching an advisor. Others voiced frustration at being told they would receive a call-back (after having waited in the helpline queue), that they never received.

Some felt long-call wait times, in conjunction with 9-5 opening hours, made the helpline service hard to access for working parents who are often busy during these times. Others felt that long call wait times made it too difficult for young people to make contact, with one respondent stating that a "25 minute wait time … is an extremely difficult concept for someone so young [16] to grasp".[14]

A lack of alternative communication modes was also listed as a factor that added to respondents' dissatisfaction with the service.[15]

"I never spoke to social security Scotland could never get through" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"The phone lines although a freephone number are soul destroying with an average waiting time of 45 to 60 minutes. I have also been put through to an adviser after a long wait only to be cut off and had to go through the same procedure again." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I've tried to speak to advisor on several occasions through trying to call, and I'm always put on hold for very long periods which makes me very anxious" Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Adult Disability Payment

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[14] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

[15] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.3.4 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

"When I phone it takes hours then when I get through they transfer me to someone who knows the answers then they don't know the answers so say they will get someone to call me back and no one does." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"Contact hours have changed to 9-5, but still says 9-6 on paper and online. This can make it very difficult to get intouch for working parents." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"The delay to get through on the main helpline (to arrange a video appointment to complete the form, and to return missed calls) was very long and there didn't seem to be alternatives. It wasn't that staff didn't try to help." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Suggestions for improvement include lengthening helpline opening times; having more people manning the helpline, and a call-back service (including when callers are cut off). Changes to the on-hold music (which was variously described as "horrendous", 'downbeat' "awful and noisy") were also suggested.

"The waiting times on telephone calls was very lengthy and had [to] call at opening time to avoid busy times maybe useful for late opening times on certain evening if daytime operators busy." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"Maybe have more people to man the phones and WebChat as waiting times on both are to long and people get fed up with it and hang up." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"Waiting on the phone for hours to get through maybe get a call back in place." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"The option to not have to listen to horrendous hold music interspersed with loud speaking. I have hyperaucusis (pain with sound) and I would rather get a call back, or have quiet beeps instead. The changes in decibels and the jarring nature of the music is particularly painful." Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Information received on application progress[16]

Comments often reflect on the frequency, contents and mode (i.e. text, email or helplines) by which information is received from the agency on the progress of an application. These comments largely concern the interim period between making an application and awaiting a decision.

When comments were positive, some mentioned the clarity by which timescales were communicated. Others had received regular texts or emails which kept them up to date with each stage of the process.

> "We were made aware that as its a new system for Scotland and applications could take up to 4 months to work through, we were indeed kept up to date with time scales and informed where we were in application stages, this was good and it was completed in this time scale." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "[…] I was also kept up to date by text at every stage the application progressed too." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I was kept abreast of my application process throu[g]h text" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When comments were negative, they often reflect a lack of communication in the interim period between applying and awaiting a decision. A lack of communication during this period was cited to have caused 'frustration', 'stress' and feelings of 'vulnerability'.

Several factors were reported to exacerbate the situation. A common complaint was that long call-wait times to the helpline posed a barrier to receiving updates. Moreover, when reaching an advisor, advisors were limited in the advice they could provide as to timescales, application progress or decisions.

> "Wait times far too long and staff not able to give updates which results in claimants feeling unimportant and stressed not knowing what is happening. Staff appear unhelpful due to actually not being able to provide updates that people need." Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

[16] References to information received on application progress can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.5 'Webchat', 6.5.10 'Application', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

"I've no idea what's happening with my claim, all I know is you received my form, and that took 40mins to get through on phone. And you are told not to ask about progress, have to wait for however long it takes." Respondent with experience of being transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"The website states you can contact for an update on your application but when I went on a webchat for this reason I was told they couldn't tell me anything." Respondent with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment

Negative comments also describe communications sent from Social Security Scotland on application progress that were factually incorrect, and/or sent in error. This includes letters incorrectly informing respondents that they had passed submission dates for returning information or completing forms which were now "overdue". These letters were variously described as provoking 'anxiety' and 'alarm'.

"It is very anxiety provoking for people who are repeatedly receiving reminders that information is "overdue" for submission when in fact we have submitted the information. The only option we have is to phone to clarify and be advised that your company keep changing systems and a manual over-ride is required to try and stop the reminder letters being sent out because your information is in fact waiting in the backlog!" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

"The technical hitch apparently responsible for the frightening letters mistakenly telling me to return paperwork was scary and it was very confusing, trying to work out if I had correctly responded to the review." Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"[...] I found myself experiencing increasing anxiety after handing in a form long before the deadline (some 2 months or so) for reassessment but the form took over 4 months to be processed and returned. This meant I received alarming letters saying I was late handing in the form and risked my claim being cancelled even though I had followed the requests appropriately on my end of responsibility." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

Suggestions for improvement include client advisors having the ability to communicate more openly with clients on the progress of applications and cases. Moreover, for the need for an online portal, or online account for people to independently access information about their case.[17]

Some also suggested that applicants are more regularly contacted to acknowledge the receipt of their applications. One respondent suggested that average processing times be published, so to help avoid calls to the helpline asking for updates on processing times.

> "Give contact centre advisors the capacity to explain timeframes for reviews etc as it is so frustrating and demoralising when a change of circumstances has been submitted several months ago yet no one can tell you when a decision will be made. It makes the process very stressful and makes you very vulnerable." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "It would be helpful to be able to log in to a portal to see the status of the application (eg application submitted/ID verification/application awaiting review/application under review/decision complete) as it felt like there was a communication vacuum for a couple of months." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Quicker response times, perhaps follow-up calls to say they received application, when i can expect a response etc. There is too much time spent waiting and worrying which just escalates already stressful periods." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Accurate waiting times to be published to clients directly and generally on social media, even with contextual statistics would reduce the quantity of where is my claim in the que telephone calls." Respondent with experience of transferring to Carer Support Payment

Communication needs and preferences[18]

Some respondents reported on the communication needs they face in their daily lives. These include hearing and visual impairments, difficulties with speech and comprehension (i.e. aphasia) neurodiversity (i.e. dyslexia), and/or those who experience digital exclusion (often self-identifying as elderly).

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[17] References to the need for an online portal can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.5 'Barriers'

[18] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.3 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

Some respondents commended the agency for taking measures to make the service more accessible. This includes dyslexia friendly colour schemes for written communication, fonts described by one respondent as 'calmer to read' and simple, easy to understand language.[19]

For others, the manner of Social Security Scotland staff is cited as a factor which lessened communication barriers. Staff were variously described as communicating in a way that expressed kindness, patience and compassion, factors which were identified as lessening communication barriers associated with speech impediments and/or anxiety.

> "I do work in accessibility consulting and have been continually impressed by how genuine Social Security Scotland clearly is about improving its services and, generally, doing the right thing." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "The use of coloured paper is ideal for people with dyslexia as well as having things broken down and not seem so scary." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I really appreciate the way of communication from you guys. Might sound silly, but the font used is much calmer to read!" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Everything was smooth, straightforward and easy to follow and I often do get mixed up or have difficulty getting things to sink in so to speak. Very satisfied with communication. Thank you." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I received a letter telling me what was happening and about to take place. That was nice and clear, your letters are usually fairly clear and straight forward which I appreciate." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

[19] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall',, 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

> "However you are training staff; keep it up! They are the most helpful, compassionate staff I have ever experienced on a helpline. I suggest from bad anxiety and phone calls are particularly difficult as I have a speech impediment. Staff don't rush me and put me at ease when I've spoken the them." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

The agency was also commended for sending regular communications regarding submission deadlines which, as one respondent stated, were 'very helpful' for someone with 'ADHD and thus time blindness'.

The friendly tone used in written communications was often cited as having helped allay respondents' anxieties and fears in relation to social security practices and policies. As one respondent wrote "I […] take panic attacks and seizures, so all communication has to be clear and understandable, this was achieved by yourselves".

Others explained how the tone and language of written communications assured them of the professionalism of the service. Moreover, of its commitment to treating everyone with dignity and respect.

> "As someone with ADHD and thus time blindness, chasing emails or texts about time running out were very helpful! I might even ask for another one, two weeks before deadline." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I appreciated that there was a range of reminders about my need to renew our application- there is always so much needing done and missing this would have been a major setback in life." Respondent with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment

> "The communication I received felt more personal and respectful. I have a number of health issues, and take panic attacks and seizures, so all communication has to be clear and understandable, this was achieved by yourselves and I never had a panic attack/seizure. Thank you" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "Overall the letters I've received have been well communicated, and feel confident that any questions I may have in the future will be answered professionally and respectably." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

When suggestions were made to further improve good communication practices, these include Social Security Scotland mail correspondence being easily identifiable from the envelope.[20]

> “Please continue to avoid using the fear and intimidation tactics which the DWP employ. Mail always makes me nervous, something on the outside of your envelopes to denote it's from you? […] So far the tone of your letters has been like night and day compared to them [DWP].” Respondent with experience of of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

When the sentiment of comments was mixed or negative, these comments identified Social Security Scotland practices that compound communication barriers. This includes respondents’ communication preferences not being adhered to and a lack of resources for deaf British Sign Language users.

Several respondents felt they had no choice but to use the helpline to access certain services (i.e. when wanting to make an appointment), despite this posing communication difficulties.

When suggestions for improvement were made, these include broadening the functionalities of webchat or email correspondence; for staff to have more training in communication and disabilities; and for greater integration of British Sign Language on Social Security Scotland’s websites and translation services.

> “The webchat function is not working most of the time. For that reason I have to use the phone. I'm autistic and I'd rather not use the phone.” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Supoort Payment

> “Instead of sending a letter to myself as someone with dyslexia a phone call would be better.” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to a Social Security Scotland benefit

> “As a blind person please send any correspondence by email. I live alone & it could be weeks before seeing someone” Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Adult Disability Payment

[20] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.5 ‘Overall’, 5.3.5 ‘Staff’, 7.4.5 ‘Decisions’, 8.2.4 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’.

"Sometimes I forget things as suffer from black outs maybe email conversation then I can read it back." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

"I would like to be able to communicate and receive communication without using the phone. I can't speak, so I can't use it. […] To make an appointment you must phone, which I can't do. I would like to be able to make an appointment via email, web form or web chat. I would like to be able to specify my communication preferences and needs at the beginning of the process and have this respected. I would like staff to be educated on communication disabilities. Especially ones that mean you can't speak. They should have training on how to adapt processes for people who can't speak." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I do understand lines are busy and there's limited time to solve as many queries as possible but I feel a bit more patience when dealing with severely mentally ill in my situation words can come out slurping and slow and I find harder to take information if talking is done too quick and not explained enough." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

"Make the website more accessible to deaf BSL users - more BSL formation would be really useful." Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Social Security Scotland

Some also wanted Social Security Scotland to be more proactive in offering certain demographic groups - such as the elderly or those who live with disabilities - home visits for face-to-face communication.

One respondent suggested the agency provide more audio-visual guidance via traditional (TV) and social media (i.e YouTube). Videos, they suggest, can better guide viewers through Social Security Scotland processes.

"My call was fine. Although i felt too much chat about websites. Elderly [o]r disable[d] clients should be offered home visits." Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

"I find having a lot of information in written form difficult. […] I think a tv program to explain the procedures including reviews and applications would help, or a dedicated YouTube channel so you can be talked through completing forms." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Transparency over payments in written communications[21], [22]

Written communications, sent by Social Security Scotland regarding payment amounts and dates, were sometimes portrayed negatively in respondent comments. Specifically, respondents mentioned a lack of transparency regarding payment amounts and payment dates (including back payments).

For some, the lack of transparency stemmed from payments being received before receipt of an award letter (for more info on this see section 7.4.5 'Decisions'). For others, award letters lacked detail, such as an explanation of how payment amounts were calculated, or why/when payment dates were set.

> "when my application was awarded- I received a backdated payment into my account without any award letter telling what the amount was for or for what period- when I phoned for a breakdown of the award I was told they couldn't tell me and I had to wait for the letter…" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "More communication, I felt I should have been [in]formed that my claim was approved prior to an [u]known lump of money appearing in my bank account" Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

> "The award letter had nothing about how the back payment was calculated." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Those who experienced a transfer of their award to Carer Support Payment were particularly vocal about deficits in communication. Confusion around new payment dates, changes to the name of the benefit, and/or confusion as to the continuation of eligibility were linked to the wording of letters sent by the agency. Some also explained that the wording in letters received from the Department for Work and Pensions precipitated a stressful or confusing experience.

For those who had reached pension age and had an underlying entitlement to Carer Support Payment (and receive no payment because of the eligibility criteria) there was confusion, in some cases frustration, as to why they were sent correspondence advising them of the transfer process.[23]

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[21] References to payments can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.5. 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

[22] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

[23] References to Carer Support Payment and 'underlying entitlement' can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.4.6 'Application', 8.2.6 'Transfer', '10.3.6 'Discrimination'.

"Learn how to communicate more concisely . It was never clear whether i would still get my benefits. I am dyslexic so had to read the letters several times to absorb the information . What was need(ed) was clarity that you would still receive the same benefit 2 that the name would change and 3 these are the new payment dates, could have been done in 3 lines." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"My carers allowance stopped when I received the state pension. I don't understand why I am still getting correspondence from you." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"Don't send silly letters repeating what they already know, which is 'no help available'. I get that, we're fine with it, until we're reminded by letter that we are 0." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

3.3.5 Dignity, fairness and respect

- Trust in Social Security Scotland
- Compassion / concern of Clients towards Social Security Scotland's staff and their welfare
- Humanity embedded in service or de-humanising processes?

Trust in Social Security Scotland[24]

Some respondents reported on the level of trust they felt towards Social Security Scotland. Around half of these comments were positive, while the remainder were mixed, negative or suggestions for improvement.

These comments provide insight into factors that precipitate trust/mistrust in the agency. Some also describe the impact that trust and/or a lack of trust in the agency can have on respondents.

When comments voiced a high level of trust in the agency, respondents perceive that the goals of Social Security Scotland are variously to serve the people of Scotland with fairness, dignity, compassion and understanding. As one respondent stated "I trust Social Security Scotland and feel I will be listened to as a person and not just treated as a number".

[24] References to the trust respondents have in Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

High levels of trust in the agency were also linked to the perception that benefits are administered in a way that is fair; that encourages people to obtain the benefits they are entitled to. As one respondent wrote “One lady actually said to me that her job was to make sure I got what I was entitled to…How wonderfully refreshing”.

> “In my brief encounter with SSS I was very impressed about how geared it was to the client and I trust the service completely for any future use.” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> “Social Security Scotland gives my family peace of mind knowing they are working for us and not against us.” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> “I felt that the ultimate goal of the organisation was to achieve an outcome that resulted in the best service for my parents (whom I care for).” Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

When comments are mixed or negative in sentiment, they voice differing levels of mistrust in the agency. Some also said they felt the agency shows mistrust in them.

For those who voiced mistrust in the agency, some state their mistrust stems from previous experiences with government agencies.[25]

Factors precipitating mistrust may include deficiencies in how Social Security Scotland and other government agencies communicate with respondents, notably regarding transfers and reviews.[26]

> “[…] feeling like I can trust SSS is down to extreme wariness when dealing with the DWP […] it has left me with a lingering doubt about the state's ability to support me as a disabled person. You are a new organisation, and though things have gone far better than my experiences with the DWP, there's still that fear that I'll be discriminated against. It'll dissipate over time, as you prove yourselves far more empathetic and understanding, I'm sure.” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Adult Disability Payment

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[25] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents’ experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 ‘Overall’, 5.3.2 ‘Staff’, 8.2.3 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.4 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.5 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’.

[26] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 ‘Overall’, 3.3.5 ‘Overall’, 5.3.5 ‘Staff’, 7.4.5 ‘Decisions’, 8.2.4 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’.

> I think it's going to take a while for people to trust SSS after their experiences with the DWP. Social media sites have groups for claimants, and the feeling seems to be that when it comes to ADP, you are poor at communicating with claimants. Reviews are taking a long time, and this increases anxiety. Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment[27]

> recipients have been threatened with "soft check-ins" but we haven't been told if that is applicable to us, when it might happen and what that actually means. I don't feel secure that my benefits won't suddenly stop or I'll have to jump through hoops in order to keep them Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "Probably more of a universal credit problem rather than a sss problem however lack of communication between the two has led to problems for me which make me feel uneasy about trusting these agencies." Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Carer Support Payment

For others, they perceive the agency to be taking steps to disincentivise applicants from making an application. Complex application forms and processes were viewed by some as a calculated means of putting off applicants. Some also perceived a lack of publicised information about benefit eligibility as a means of keeping application numbers down.

> "The staff are all fantastic and really helpful. The issue I have is that the system is too complex to navigate, maybe that is done on purpose to prevent engagement, if so, it works." Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Given my Grandsons mental health he would not have completed the application himself nor reapplied when he was unfairly rejected the first time. Its plane to see the aim is to discourage even genuine applicants." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

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[27] References to traditional and social media shaping perceptions of Social Security Scotland can be found in section 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.4 'Staff'.

"The questions relating g to trusting SSS further confirm my thoughts. I could have had this payment for many years before my first application but there is no information anywhere about this 'secret benefit', why is this?? […] that money was for my children not your pockets." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

For some, a perceived lack of fairness in the system has bred mistrust. Often, this stems from a respondent comparing their application decision and/or level of award to other applicants whom they perceive as receiving (unfairly) a better service or more favourable outcome.

"Be more consistent with decisions. My health is worse than someone I know who is in receipt of the highest payment and has a mobility car despite being able to walk further and do more than I currently can !" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When Social Security Scotland staff are perceived to lack knowledge, or to give incorrect information, this also seeds doubt in the trustworthiness of the service.[28]

Some respondents called into question the 'honesty' of the agency when mistakes needed to be acknowledged and rectified. Mistrust was notable when respondents perceived that Social Security Scotland had been dishonest about the loss of information submitted by an applicant.

"The process for the carer support payment has been unnecessarily long, with staff unable to give accurate advice. It took three months for a member of staff to be honest and cancel the application to be able to re submit." Respondent with experience of Carer Support payment

"Staff should be better trained and more knowledgeable about benefits. Staff gave me different information. I was lied to and received terrible service." Respondent with experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit

"Tell the truth, if you have lost the application in the system be honest, I received false information several times and had to contact a local MP to actually get the information and have the claim completed, very poor service." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

[28] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

A lack of reasoned information regarding back payments was also cited as a factor for finding Social Security Scotland to be acting in a way that was "a little dishonest".

> "No information on 13 week backward rule would be applied. I feel this was a little dishonest on your behalf. Nothing explained on certificate of payment. Was told over the phone but never really explained why it was applied in the first place." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Among mixed and negative comments there are also benefit specific findings. Notably, some Disability applicants/recipients have described the language used by Social Security Scotland resulting in them feeling mistrusted, threatened or insecure.[29]

For some, this was against a backdrop of welfare reforms being debated by the Government in Westminster, which added to feelings of vulnerability.

> "Less discrimination and more trust in claimants." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "(I) appreciate that many disability paymeny claimants, especially on behalf of a child, have never claimed a benefit in their life and do not have knowledge of the system, nor are they trying to scam it. Some of the warnings about claiming things you might not be entitled to feel threatening and almost put me off applying altogether." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I think the current hostile environment for disabled people makes it difficult to trust any form of assessment. Staff did their best to assuage these concerns and it was really appreciated. I hope all staff are like this." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When suggestions for improvement were made, this included more communication between the agency and Disability applicants, so that over time greater understanding and therefore greater trust can be built between the agency and its clients.

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[29] References to respondents feeling misunderstood or mistrusted by Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 7.4.4 'Decision', 7.4.6 'Decisions', 10.3.3 'Discrimination', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

> "Better communication over time would help us to trust you and build a better knowledge pool for dealing with specific conditions." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Adult Disability Payment

Compassion / concern of Clients towards Social Security Scotland's staff and their welfare

A small, but notable number of respondents commented on the welfare of Social Security Scotland staff; voicing appreciation for the service they provide but also concern for their wellbeing.

Concern centred upon the perception that staff workloads were sometimes too high, that staff may be verbally abused by clients, and that staff making home visits may be placing themselves in situations in which they are vulnerable.

> "Staff to have more support during changes that expect to see a significant rise in applications. They are doing there best and they are very professional. The time from application to decision is long but that is understandable when they are really busy and some cases may be complex. I truly appreciate each individual that helped me during the process." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "It's a very tough environment to work in and I thank you for dealing with such a wide range of people." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

> "Just easy to talk to, but the[y] get abused, it's very wrong when people are there to help and get abused. During my entire life working or having to use this service all staff have been good and kind." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Social Security Scotland

> "I was very surprised that only one individual representative from Social Security Scotland visited my home … to conduct an assessment. Both my son and I are very civil people, but I fear many people suffering from mental health issues may quite possibly be unpredictable… I suggest if possible that it may be advisable for two representatives may be required in certain circumstances." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

Humanity embedded in service or de-humanising processes?[30]

It was notable that many respondents placed great significance on whether or not they were treated with humanity. To be recognised as an individual, to have ones' experiences heard, understood and/or empathised with greatly shaped respondents' attitudes towards the agency.

The majority of comments on this topic were positive, or offered suggestions for improvement. A minority were mixed or negative in sentiment.

When comments were positive, many noted their appreciation at being treated "as a real person", 'humanely', with "dignity", as opposed to a mere "number/statistic". Many felt that the humane treatment they received helped validate their roles and identities within society, as opposed to leaving them feeling 'demeaned' or 'diminished'.

As one respondent stated, the impact of being treated humanely was that they felt "much more part of society when treated with a bit of dignity". Another respondent explained that while feeling "less-than" and "below human" at the beginning of the application process, the treatment and support they received from Social Security Scotland left them feeling "like I'm just a human who needs a bit of extra support" rather than "a waste of space".

> "Keep doing what you're doing! Staff are friendly and talk to you as a real person, not just a number/statistic." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

> "I normally go to pieces when I have to fill out forms etc. The ones I received recently were very different. When I plucked up the courage to look at them they were much easier and more humane than previous experiences. I feel much more part of society when treated with a bit of dignity as I really don't want to be in this situation." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Adult Disability Payment

When suggestions for improvement were made, some simply stated they wanted to be treated more as a human being. The converse treatment was variously described as being regarded as mere 'facts' or 'numbers' that should conform to standardised 'systems', measures and processes.

"Take time to understand each individual" suggested one respondent. "Assess each person individually rather than an algorithm for each disease" suggested another. Some

[30] References to the embedding of humanising processes into the service (including those that enable clients to express their individualism and unique circumstances) can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 7.4.4 'Decision'.

reasoned that to be treated 'fairly' everyone should be recognised as 'different', individual or unique.

> "Yes, please remember we are human beings who cannot work for a reason not facts on a screen." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

Some specified they wanted greater provision of training for staff so that 'lived experience' is put at the heart of service planning, processes and delivery.

> "I think there needs to be continuous consultation with those who access your services and a real drive to put lived experience at the heart of how you build your systems for applications and decisions. […] I also think there needs to be more training for staff on the phones […] hearing in a training setting of the lived experience of families applying for and in receipt of CDP might help to foster understanding and empathy of the people they deal with on the phone." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

When findings were specific to certain demographic or benefit experience groups, respondents with caring responsibilities were notably vocal in the need for their lived experience to be understood.

Across a range of benefits, those with caring responsibilities called for greater understanding, by Social Security Scotland staff and within the agency's processes and policies, of the lived realities of providing care.

One young carer wanted Social Security Scotland to better appreciate how the care they provide cannot easily be measured in time. Rather they wanted the agency to appreciate that, for themselves and their sister, care is an ongoing, ever-present component of their daily lives that pervades their time at home and at school.[31]

For others, they wanted greater recognition of the availability or absence of familial and social networks of support, and how this impacts their ability to care for dependents.

When such conditions were met, carers variously voiced their appreciation of a service that recognises the lived experiences, and therefore the value of unpaid carers. As one respondent stated "I just appreciate a government system that does not demean me or diminish my work as an unpaid carer."

> "You need to find out more from us reg[a]rding the experience of beng a carer and the exploitation involved." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

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[31] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.6.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

“Never mind the politics. Listen to people. Every case has unique issues. Mine was that our standard of living has dropped dramatically since giving up my employment to becone an unpaid carer.” Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

“[…] you could be understanding what life is like with a child with additional needs. Then you can make a fair decision. It’s not fair to make the wrong one that leads to so much time being wasted during an appeal.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

“I think if you a[r]e a young carer who looks after a family member like me and my sister do then it should not matter what kind of education setting you are in to be able to get carers payments […] It makes no difference how many days or hours you attend school ir college we are always looking out for the people we care for even when we are not with them thanks to technology, etc.” Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

“Didn’t consider how I was a single parent with 3 other children when looking at the level of care provided for my child. No support network either. Nowhere on the application to include that relative information.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

4 Communication with and finding information about Social Security Scotland

This chapter presents the insights on the experiences of clients communicating with Social Security Scotland and how Social Security Scotland communicated with them. This includes from the first time they heard about the benefit they were surveyed about to the following contact through our different channels.

4.1 Finding out about Social Security Scotland's benefits

The survey opens by asking all respondents how they first heard about the Social Security Scotland benefit they had applied for. The most common means of first finding out about a benefit was via 'word-of-mouth', reported by one-in-three respondents (31%). One-in-five (20%) first found out about Social Security Scotland's benefits from a health service (e.g. NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist). Around one-in-ten (10%) respondents first heard through the Department for Work and Pensions and one-in-twenty (6%) respondents through being contacted by Social Security Scotland. Respondents were least likely to say that they first found out about a Social Security Scotland benefit via a 'Leaflet, pamphlet or poster' (1%) or a 'News article or programme' (1%) (See Table 4.1 below).

Table 4.1: How respondents first heard about the benefit that they had applied for
All respondents that applied for a benefit

Response options	All respondents
Social Security Scotland contacted me (for example, phone call or letter)	6%
Advert (for example, TV, radio, newspaper)	1%
Online or social media (for example, X, Facebook)	6%
News article or programme (including radio)	1%
Word-of-mouth	31%
Citizens Advice Scotland	8%
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Jobcentre Plus	10%
Health service (e.g. NHS worker, GP, Health Practitioner, Psychologist)	20%
Community or social care service	4%
Leaflet, pamphlet or poster	1%
Local authority/council	3%
Other*	9%
Total	16,910

*Includes responses that selected 'other' as well as benefit specific ones.

The following table (4.2) shows how respondents first found out about the benefit that they had applied for or received, broken down by benefit experience. Overall, respondents who applied for a benefit were more likely to have heard about it in the first instance from either a health service, through word-of-mouth or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (see Table 4.2).

Respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment, Five Family Payments and Carer Support Payment were more likely to have first heard of the benefit from word of mouth. For respondents with experience of Child Disability Payment the same proportion selected they first heard of the benefit through word of mouth as a health service (31%). For respondents with experience of Job Start Payment, the majority (54%) selected the option ‘Department for Work and Pensions’. For respondents with experience of Young Carer Grant and Funeral Support Payment the highest selected choice was ‘Other’. This is likely because there are specific options for these benefits like ‘Young Carer Support Group’ or ‘Funeral Director’ that are contained in the ‘Other’ option.

Table 4.2: How respondents first heard about the benefit that they had applied for
All respondents that applied for a benefit, row totals

Benefit experience	Social Security Scotland	Advert	Online/ Social media	News	Word-of-mouth	Citizens Advice Scotland	DWP	Health Service	Community or social care service	Leaflet, pamphlet or poster	Local Authority / Council	Other	Total
Adult Disability Payment	5%	1%	5%	1%	34%	10%	11%	22%	4%	1%	4%	5%	11,677
Child Disability Payment	3%	1%	5%	#	31%	4%	5%	31%	7%	1%	#	11%	1,184
Carer Support Payment	11%	2%	9%	2%	29%	7%	11%	9%	5%	1%	4%	11%	694
Five Family Payments	11%	2%	11%	1%	23%	8%	9%	17%	6%	2%	1%	12%	2,224
Job Start Payment	#	#	#	#	15%	#	54%	#	#	#	#	15%	39
Funeral Support Payment	6%	#	4%	#	26%	3%	7%	2%	2%	1%	#	49%	775
Young Carer Grant	11%	#	7%	#	30%	3%	#	2%	4%	#	4%	36%	289

4.2 Looking up information about Social Security Scotland

This section explores respondents' experiences of looking up information about Social Security Scotland, including through the Social Security Scotland and MyGov websites. Nearly half (47%) of all respondents said that they had looked up a Social Security Scotland website (including mygov.scot).

Table 4.3: Where respondents got information about their benefit
All respondents

Response options	All respondents
Website (mygov.scot or Social Security Scotland's website)	47%
Webchat	9%
Helpline/Phone	14%
Social Media	5%
Other	28%
Can't remember/Don't know	10%
Total	36,360

The survey also asked if respondents were able to find information in a format that was accessible to them. The majority of respondents (85%) agreed that was the case.

Table 4.4: Accessibility of information
All respondents

Thinking about your overall experience with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
I was able to get information in a format that was accessible to me	85%	11%	4%	22,077

4.2.1 Experience with websites

The majority of respondents who had looked up a Social Security Scotland website or the related MyGov websites agreed the websites were 'easy to navigate' (72%), 'easy to understand' (73%) and 'made it clear whether I was eligible or not' (69%) (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Experience with Social Security Scotland's websites
All respondents that said they used our website(s)

Thinking about your overall experience with Social Security Scotland website(s)...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
It was easy to navigate the website(s)	72%	21%	7%	21,698
The information was easy to understand	73%	20%	7%	21,802
The information made it clear if I was eligible or not	69%	17%	14%	11,705

There was a variation in experience by benefit experience, as set out in Table 4.6. Those who had applied for Child Disability Payment were most likely to have looked up Social Security Scotland websites (71%), whereas respondents who had experienced a transfer to Adult Disability Payment were least likely (28%). However, this is logical given that the transfer process happens without the for the need the intervention of the client in most cases.

Those who had applied for Adult Disability Payment were least likely to agree that websites were 'easy to navigate' (76%), 'easy to understand' (74%) and 'made it clear whether I was eligible or not' (61%). Conversely, people who applied for Five Family Payments and Young Carer Grant agreed the most with the three statements. Additionally, people who received Child Winter Heating Payment also had very high levels of agreement.

Table 4.6: Experience with Social Security Scotland's websites by benefit
All respondents

Benefit experience	Looked up website(s)	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed			Total
		it was easy to navigate	the information was easy to understand	made it clear if I was eligible or not	
Adult Disability Payment	59%	76%	74%	61%	7,098
Child Disability Payment	71%	87%	89%	77%	876
Carer Support Payment	62%	86%	82%	78%	448
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	28%	79%	80%	N/A	3,142

Benefit experience	Looked up website(s)	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed			Total
		it was easy to navigate	the information was easy to understand	made it clear if I was eligible or not	
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	37%	83%	82%	N/A	1,517
Five Family Payments	67%	91%	90%	83%	1,579
Job Start Payment	46%	89%	83%	59%	19
Funeral Support Payment	48%	87%	86%	76%	371
Young Carer Grant	60%	87%	91%	85%	184
Carer's Allowance Supplement	58%	86%	90%	86%	499
Winter Heating Payment	45%	84%	84%	81%	840
Child Winter Heating Payment	70%	91%	91%	83%	118

4.3 Contact with Social Security Scotland

In the following section the survey asks if people had direct contact with Social Security Scotland, how they contacted us and how their experience went. There are many reasons why people may contact Social Security Scotland. For example, to get information about a benefit, to make an application, to check for progress or in relation to a consultation.

Just under two-in-five (38%) of all respondents said that they had tried to contact Social Security Scotland at some point since 1 April 2024. When looking across age ranges, the likelihood of contact with Social Security Scotland goes down with age. Over half (52%) of respondents aged 16-24 said they tried to contact Social Security Scotland, compared to 28% of respondents aged 65 or over. However, it is important to recognise that there is likely an intervening factor influencing the age of respondents to the survey, which is the presence of respondents that are appointees or representatives to clients. Comments left by respondents suggest that, for some people in the higher age bands, they are contacting us through 'younger' representatives. In future annual reports we will be able to make a more informed reporting on this aspect.

Table 4.7 sets out the type(s) of contact respondents had with Social Security Scotland. Respondents could select more than one option. By far the most common was through the phone helpline (64%), followed by 'letter' (23%) and webchat (16%).

Table 4.7: Type of contact with Social Security Scotland
All respondents who contacted Social Security Scotland

Response options	All respondents*
Phone helpline	64%
In person - at an arranged venue	4%
In person - home visit	5%
Video call appointment	4%
Phone appointment	11%
Webchat (through mygov.scot or the Social Security Scotland website)	16%
Letter	23%
Other	2%
Total	13,618

*This question allows for multiple responses, therefore the percentages won't add up to 100%.

Those respondents who selected the options that include an appointment, whether it is at a venue or at home were also asked if the appointment was at a convenient time and of a convenient type (i.e. via phone call, video call or in person). These appointments could be meant for multiple purposes, from confirming identity, helping with the completion of an application or to have a consultation with a medical practitioner.

The majority of respondents agreed that the appointment they were offered was at a convenient time and of a convenient type (89%), with 4% disagreeing with both those statements.

Table 4.8: Experience of appointments with Social Security Scotland
All respondents who said they scheduled an appointment; row percentages

Thinking about your experience with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
The appointment was at a convenient time for me	89%	7%	4%	2,762
The type of appointment (e.g. phone call, virtual face-to-face, in-person face-to-face) was convenient for me	89%	7%	4%	2,727

4.3.1 Experience of contact with Social Security Scotland

Those who had tried to contact Social Security Scotland were generally positive about their experience of doing so. Most respondents agreed with the statements, 'I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland' (76%) and 'I got the support (information or advice) I needed' (70%). A similar proportion agreed that they 'received the right level of communication from Social Security Scotland' and 'I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me' (71% and 73%, respectively).

Table 4.9: Views on communication choices and support received
All respondents, row percentages

Thinking about your experience with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland	76%	14%	11%	13,407
I got the support (information or advice) I needed	70%	13%	17%	12,998
I received the right level of communication from Social Security Scotland*	71%	17%	12%	34,556
I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me*	73%	18%	9%	33,684

*These two statements are asked of every respondent. The first two statements are asked only of those who communicated with Social Security Scotland at some point.

Some divergence was seen between benefit experience and views on communication choices and support received, as shown in Table 4.10. Respondents with experience of applying for, or having their award transferred to, Adult Disability Payment were less likely to agree with each of the statements regarding communication choices and support received, whereas agreement was highest among Five Family Payment, Funeral Support Payment and Child Winter Heating payment respondents.

Table 4.10: Views on communication choices and support received by benefit
All respondents, row percentages

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed				Total*
	I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland	I got the support (information or advice) I needed	I received the right level of communication from Social Security Scotland	I had enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with me	
Adult Disability Payment	73%	67%	67%	73%	11,597
Child Disability Payment	83%	76%	77%	84%	1,201
Carer Support Payment	82%	76%	75%	83%	690
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	69%	65%	68%	66%	10,204
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	75%	70%	71%	71%	3,990
Five Family Payments	86%	82%	83%	86%	2,212
Job Start Payment	76%	72%	59%	76%	38
Funeral Support Payment	85%	83%	83%	87%	733
Young Carer Grant	83%	78%	80%	84%	293
Carer's Allowance Supplement	78%	77%	78%	77%	815
Winter Heating Payment	79%	73%	78%	78%	1,729
Child Winter Heating Payment	88%	80%	84%	84%	165

*Totals included in this table belong to the last statement.

4.3.2 Experience with Webchat

There is a section of the survey dedicated to Social Security Scotland's webchat service. There, respondents were asked about their reason for using the service, their overall rating of their experience and why they chose that rating. Below is the summary of the findings from 2,190 responses to that section.

This section also included an open text question for respondents to reflect on their overall experience with the webchat service.

Table 4.11 presents the results to respondents being asked about their overall experience with Social Security Scotland's webchat service. Two-in-three (68%) respondents who had used the service said their experience was 'good' or 'very good', while one-in-five (20%) said that their experience was 'poor' or 'very poor'. This is consistent with the feedback provided in written comments by the same respondents (See 4.4 below for more detail).

Table 4.11: Overall experience of using webchat
All respondents who said they had used the webchat service, column percentages

Response options	All respondents who used webchat*
Very good or good	68%
Neither good nor poor	11%
Poor or very poor	20%
Total	2,155

Table 4.12 shows the most common reasons respondents selected for using webchat. The most frequently selected one was 'to track progress of (their) application' (61%), followed by 'to get information or clarity on eligibility' (32%). The least common, though still not much lower than others, was 'to let us know something changed with your application' (20%).

Table 4.12: Reasons for using webchat
All respondents who said they had used the webchat service, column percentages*

Response options	All respondents who used webchat*	Total
To check the progress of your application	61%	1,502
To get support to complete your application	23%	1,502
To get information about payments for example dates or amounts	26%	2,036
To get information or clarity on eligibility	32%	1,662
To let us know something had changed with your application	20%	2,036

*Respondents could select more than one response.

4.4 Client comments about the webchat service

4.4.1 Summary

For those who reported having used Social Security Scotland' webchat service, they were invited to comment on their experience. Around 900 comments were analysed. Of these, around 750 substantive responses were coded and analysed.

Four significant themes stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- Ease of use and accessibility
- Waiting times to get connected to an advisor and connection faults
- Limitations of the information provided and suggestions for improvement
- Quality of service provided by staff

Suggestions for improvement were also made. These include respondents suggesting Social Security Scotland make available a downloadable script of what was discussed over webchat.

4.4.2 Full report

4.4.3 Ease of use and accessibility[32]

A large proportion of respondents highlighted the ease of use of the webchat and the quality of service received from advisors. Underpinning its ease of use was, for many respondents, the clarity and speed of communications provided in this format.

> "Easy to use and straight forward. Staff prompt and helpful." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Very easy to use and received the information requested." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "Webchat was easy to use. The customer service representative was clear and polite." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[32] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall',, 4.3.2 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

"Prompt courteous advisor, who answered my query, a easy to use service to use even from a non computer user." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Other respondents focused on the diachronic quality of the service; of being able to message while conducting other tasks, like caring for others.[33]

"It's quicker and easier than phoning and can do alongside other things." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"Because it was a fast service with no need to sit on hold listening to annoying music for 45 minutes or more taking me away from helping my dad. Being a young carer is hard enough without having to sit on hold for ages." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

Others reflected on the service being an easier and/or faster alternative to getting through on Social Security Scotland's phone line.

"It was easy to use, probably quicker than waiting on the telephone, and the chat advisor was able to advise me well on my situation." Respondent with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment

"I found it easier and simple to us instead of trying to call or sending a letter and it was quicker as well." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Respondents also mentioned the multiple ways in which webchat was more accessible to them and their circumstances. Among those were respondents who are hard of hearing, suffer from anxiety, struggle with their voice, or simply feel more comfortable communicating in this way.

"(I'm) hard of hearing so easiest way for me." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

[33] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

"I suffer bad anxiety and speaking to strangers is difficult. The webchat made it easier to communicate." Respondent with experience of Child Winter Heating Payment

"Found the web chat easy to do they were nice friendly and accommodating. And suffering from anxiety and mental health found this easier way to communicate." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"For me with hearing loss it is a much better way to contact and it also allows you to have a record of what is being said but at the same time depending on what your query is the answers can be quite limited and you are no better off." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"I'm 18 years old I'm not that great on a phone my mum does help me alot but since finding the webchat I have used it all the time so much easier for me don't get anxious." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"It was a great way of connecting from home. My voice isn't great just now so it's easier to converse and ask relevant questions. The employee of social security was very quick and clear. They were very helpful. A great addition to the service. A helpful handy way to chat." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Others mentioned that having written communication afforded them the time to understand and think through their responses.

"It's very easy to understand and easy to read and understand every question." Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

"Easier for me to process written information having time to read it. The person on the other end was very helpful." Respondent with experience of Adullt Disability Payment

Lastly, a handful of comments mentioned that webchat allowed them to have discussions over benefits privately regardless of their location.

> "It was so fast and easy to discuss with a member of staff through webchat . Though there's a queue always but it is never been disappointing for me. I do not need be in the house or in a quiet place to discuss my things like over the phone. Through webchat I can contact them even when I am in public transport as well." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

4.4.4 Waiting times to get connected to an advisor and connection faults[34]

The majority of comments containing negative sentiment referred to long wait times to get connected to an advisor. Others mentioned being cut off and having to rejoin the queue. Some linked being cut off, or losing their place in the queue, to the use of webchat on a mobile phone.

> "I got cut off when using the Webchat and someone called me on my mobile to discuss. I was asked for my number at the start in case we got cut off, this was clearly a good idea." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Kept waiting for half an hour to connect and no response." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

> "Sometimes I had to wait that long the chat refreshed and I had to start at begining again." Respondent with experience of Adullt Disability Payment

> "The web chat service was great and my problems were resolved quickly however the wait time was very long, often well over an hour and any navigation (using my phone) away from the page appears to have caused me to lose my place in the queue, so I couldn't use my phone for anything else whilst waiting and had to make sure my phone didn't go into "sleep mode" or close the page or couldn't make/answer calls or texts etc so it's not overly great." Respondent with experience of Adullt Disability Payment

[34] References to call wait times can be found in sections 3.3.4 Overall, 4.4.4 'Webchat', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 5.4.13 'Application'

Some comments balanced the positive with the negative, assessing the quality and ease of the service alongside wait times.

> "It's was so easy to navigate sometimes waiting time can be nightmare."
> Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

> "I got the assistance required. It only took very long to get through to someone on the chat and then quite a while to get the answer. I wasn't sure if I'm doing something wrong on my end. I used the chat after not being able to get through to the phone line for number of days in a row. I was very pleased to be able to get help through the chat feature. The person(s) were helpful and friendly. I couldn't have completed my application without their help." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "When using the webchat the wait time was pretty long but once I got to speak to someone they answered my questions quickly and were very helpful." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

4.4.5 Limitations of the information provided and suggestions for improvement[35]

As per table 4.12, the main reason for using webchat selected by respondents in closed responses was to check the progress of an application (61%). In open text comments, many respondents showed their frustration that some information on the outcome or progress of their application could not be shared with them via webchat. Instead, they reported having to wait for an outcome letter.

> "It takes an extremely long time to get through to an advisor and then there isn't a huge amount of information they can give you other than your application is in a queue. No time frames, etc." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "I thought I might be told how my application was progressing and how long I may have to wait for an answer but was simply told that my application was pending. This obviously I already knew!" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

[35] References to information received on application progress can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.5 'Webchat', 6.5.10 'Application', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

Respondents also pointed to inconsistences in Social Security Scotland's published guidance on the use of webchat. Several respondents reported Social Security Scotland's websites listing 'getting progress updates for an application' as one of the main reasons to get in touch through webchat. This guidance was contrary to their experience.

> "I didn't have to wait too long to get through on webchat. It was frustrating though not being told about the progress of the application despite the website telling you that you could contact for this reason." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "You can be waiting for well over an hour to chat with someone to be told that they can't give you any information." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Some respondents were frustrated that when joining the queue to speak to a webchat advisor they are not told their place in the queue, or given an estimated wait time.

> "The service is wildly inconsistent. Occasionally, there is not much of a wait and the live chat is answered within the hour. However this is overwhelmingly the exception rather than the rule. Often, I have been waiting over three hours and it is apparent that the chat has 'timed out' behind the scenes but still appears live. This has happened on several occasions. There is also no queue position which would give a rough indication a) that the chat is still online [...]" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "It took a long time to get through with no idea of the queue length or no sound to let me know an operator had entered the chat." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Finally, some respondents suggested that it would be useful for them to get a downloadable script of what was discussed. Some respondents said that a download would be useful to refer back to, especially if they experienced inconsistencies in the advice provided.

> "I use the chat because I find it difficult to use the phone. I used the chat several times and there was always a different answer given by staff. Also, the chat cannot be downloaded - which is a disadvantage if we need to refer to it later. I want a better chat platform." Respondent with experience of their award being transferred to Carer Support Payment

4.4.6 Quality of the service provided by staff

Across the majority of the comments, even when negative views were expressed, there was praise for the quality of service and manners of the staff on webchat.[36] Please see more on this theme on section 5.3.3.

[36] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.1.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 5.3.2 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.3 'Discrimination'. References to staff manner can be found in sections 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Application'.

5 Experiences with staff

This chapter focuses on the experiences respondents had with members of staff in their different capacities, whether that would be as helpline or webchat advisors, case managers or staff in local offices (Local Delivery).

5.1 Overall experience with Social Security Scotland's staff

This section presents findings on how respondents, who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff, felt about their experience. Respondents were asked if they had been in contact with a member of Social Security Scotland staff, in-person, over the phone, or through an interpreter, at any point since 1 April 2024.

Around a third of respondents (36%) said they had been in contact with a member of staff. This figure varied notably by benefit experience. More than half of those who said they had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit reported contact with staff (53%), compared to a quarter (25%) of those who had qualified automatically for a benefit and under a fifth (18%) for respondents who experienced a transfer. This is a logical finding as transfers and pre-qualified payments are less involved processes than a new application.

Looking at individual benefits, respondents with experience of Funeral Support Payment, Job Start Payment and Carer Support Payment were most likely to have been in contact with staff (76%, 72% and 61% respectively). Clients with experience of a transfer to Adult Disability Payment or Carer Support Payment were least likely to have been in contact with staff (17% and 21% respectively). See Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Contact with staff by benefit
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff

Benefit experience	Had contact with a member of staff	Total
Adult Disability Payment	50%	12,197
Child Disability Payment	56%	1,229
Carer Support Payment	61%	727
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	17%	11,473
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	21%	4,168
Five Family Payments	54%	2,387
Job Start Payment	72%	39
Funeral Support Payment	76%	800
Young Carer Grant	63%	304
Carer's Allowance Supplement	23%	863
Winter Heating Payment	24%	1,890
Child Winter Heating Payment	38%	170

The majority of respondents who had been in contact with our staff said their overall experience was ‘very good’ or ‘good’ (84%) while 7% rated their experience as ‘neither good nor poor’ and 7% rated their experience with staff as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ (See table 5.2).

This is consistent with the open text comments also left in this section. Respondents frequently described the service provided by staff as kind, friendly, helpful and knowledgeable, among other qualifiers. Respondents also often expressed their gratitude towards members of staff. In more mixed comments respondents recognised that staff provided a high quality of service, but sometimes that experience was influenced by other factors like long call wait times or lack of clarity of processing timelines. Finally, more negative comments refer to having been given conflicting, confusing or incorrect advice when contacting our staff that had a detrimental impact on their circumstances. There are plenty of examples of staff taking action to address any mistakes or confusion.

Table 5.2: Overall experience with Social Security Scotland’s staff
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff, column percentages

Response options	All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff
Very good or good	84%
Neither good nor poor	8%
Poor or very poor	7%
Total	12,805

Respondents were very positive about staff regardless of their benefit experience. For instance, nine-in-ten respondents who had applied for Five Family Payments (90%) or received Child Winter Heating Payment (91%) rated their experience with staff as ‘very good’ or ‘good’, (see table 5.3). Respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment, both via an application or a transfer, had the lowest rating of experience with staff with 83%.

Table 5.3: Overall experience with Social Security Scotland’s staff by benefit
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff

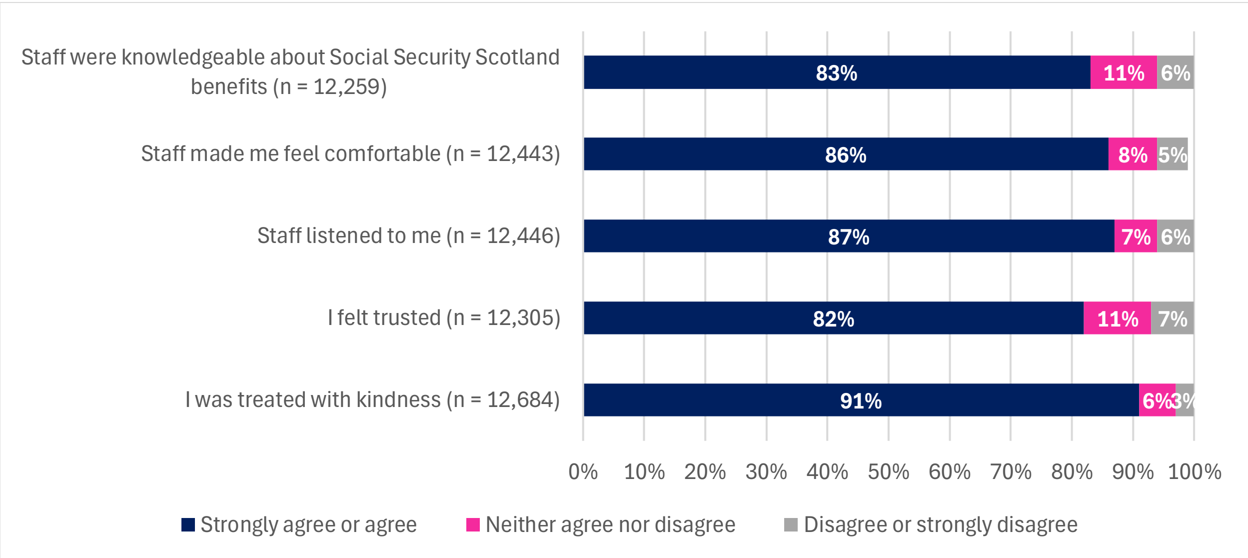
Benefit experience	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor	Total
Adult Disability Payment	83%	9%	9%	6,042
Child Disability Payment	87%	7%	7%	685
Carer Support Payment	84%	10%	7%	445
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	83%	10%	7%	1,932

Transfer to Carer Support Payment	84%	9%	7%	879
Five Family Payments	90%	6%	4%	1,272
Job Start Payment	70%	#	#	27
Funeral Support Payment	91%	5%	4%	602
Young Carer Grant	87%	7%	6%	193
Carer's Allowance Supplement	85%	7%	8%	202
Winter Heating Payment	85%	8%	7%	453
Child Winter Heating Payment	91%	#	#	65

5.1.1 Views on contact with staff

A large proportion of respondents said staff listened to them (87%) and made them feel comfortable (86%), while 91% of respondents said staff treated them with kindness, as set out in Figure 5.1. This is consistent with open text comments on this section where a majority of respondents described staff using words like “kind”, “friendly”, “helpful”, “knowledgeable”, “polite”, “patient” or “understanding”, highlighting their positive attitude and kindness.

Figure 5.1: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland's staff
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff



There are overall high levels of agreement with these statements across the different benefit experiences. Five Family Payments, Child Winter Heating Payment and Funeral Support Payment have some of the highest levels of agreement across the five statement. Despite some benefits like Job Start Payment and Adult Disability Payment reporting lower levels of agreement with these statements, ratings are still relatively high with at least three quarters of respondents agreeing with them. See Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4: Views on interactions with Social Security Scotland's staff by benefit experience

All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed					Total
	I was treated with kindness	I felt trusted	Staff listened to me	Staff made me feel comfortable	Staff were knowledgeable	
Adult Disability Payment	90%	81%	86%	85%	81%	5,988
Child Disability Payment	93%	88%	89%	89%	87%	681
Carer Support Payment	91%	83%	87%	88%	80%	445
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	90%	80%	86%	84%	80%	1,896
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	90%	81%	88%	86%	80%	874
Five Family Payments	95%	90%	93%	92%	91%	1,251
Job Start Payment	89%	75%	89%	79%	75%	28
Funeral Support Payment	94%	89%	92%	93%	90%	603
Young Carer Grant	94%	87%	92%	89%	87%	192
Carer's Allowance Supplement	92%	79%	87%	86%	84%	199
Winter Heating Payment	90%	80%	87%	86%	85%	453
Child Winter Heating Payment	95%	87%	92%	91%	92%	65

5.1.2 Experience of Local Delivery appointments with Social Security Scotland

Clients that interact with Social Security Scotland can book and attend various kinds of appointments with our staff members, we refer to the teams that offer that service as Local Delivery. Local Delivery is a free Social Security Scotland service that's available across Scotland. The Local Delivery service is made up of specially trained client support advisers who can provide a range of support. This includes: answering questions about benefits; completing an application form on an applicant or appointees' behalf; helping to submit supporting information or identity documents; or carrying out assessments for people who want to become appointees.

Appointments with the local delivery service are always booked in advance. Clients who use the service will speak to a booking adviser to arrange the appointment for a time and location that suits them. The appointment could be at a venue within their local community, at their home, by video call or telephone.

Of the 2% of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents who said they had contact with Local Delivery staff, 92% rated their experience as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ with 3% rating it as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. This is consistent with the overwhelmingly positive open text comments left by respondents (See section 5.3).

Of the respondents who told us they had experience of using our Local Delivery service, the vast majority (91%) agreed that ‘it was clear what the appointment would involve’ as well as 90% agreed that it was clear what their next steps would be after their appointment. When asked about the appointment itself, 94% of respondents agreed that they were at a convenient time and 93% that the appointment was of a convenient type (i.e. video call, in person, etc.).

When looking across the different benefit experiences, respondents who had applied for Adult Disability Payment were more likely to have used our Local Delivery service. A majority (84%) out of the total respondents who told us they used the Local Delivery service having been surveyed for their Adult Disability Payment application. They are followed by 6% of respondents who applied for Child Disability Payment and 4% for Carer Support Payment.

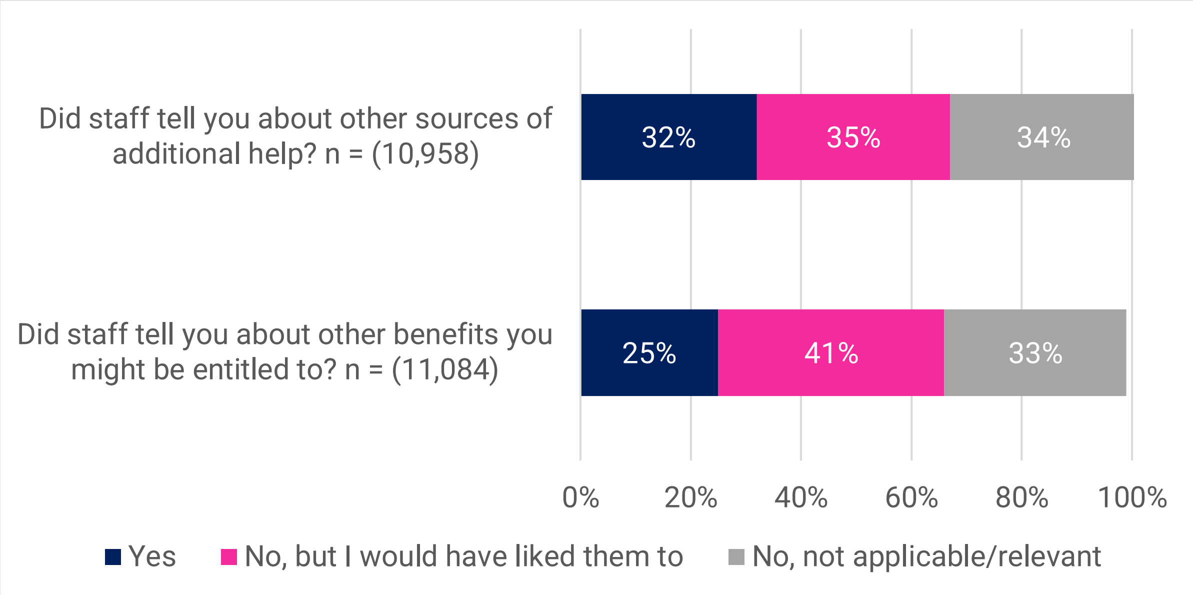
5.2 Information provided by staff

Respondents were also asked whether staff told them about other benefits they might be entitled to. Over a quarter (26%) of respondents said this was the case. A larger proportion (41%) said that they would have liked to have been told about other benefits by staff, but were not. However, these results do not tell us whether staff considered eligibility or other factors when choosing whether to provide further advice. Neither do these results tell us whether there were appropriate services/resources to signpost people to that people were not already aware of.

Around a third (32%) of respondents also said that staff told them about other sources of additional help. Of these, the most common sources of help identified by respondents were: Citizens Advice Bureau (67%), welfare rights support organisations – such as the council (29%) and housing support (25%).[37]

[37] This is a question that allows multiple answers and that is why the percentages do not add up to 100%

Figure 5.2: Whether respondents were told about other benefits or sources of help
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff



Respondents who said they were told about other benefits or sources of additional help were much more likely to rate their overall experience with staff positively. Almost all (98%) of those who were told about other benefits they might be entitled to rated their experience with staff as 'very good' or 'good'. This figure fell to 70% for respondents who said they would have liked to have been told about other benefits but were not (see Table 7.2). A similar disparity was also evident with regard to being told about sources of additional help (97% rating their experience as 'very good' or 'good' for those who were told about other benefits, compared to 66% for people who weren't).

Table 5.5: Relationship between being told about other benefits/sources of help and overall experience of staff
All respondents who said they had contact with a member of staff, row percentages

Whether told about other benefits or sources of help	Very good or good	Neither poor nor good	Poor or very poor	Total
Staff told me about other benefits	98%	2%	1%	2,814
Would have liked to have been told by staff about other benefits but were not	70%	15%	15%	4,527
Staff told about other sources of additional help	97%	2%	1%	3,448
Would have liked to have been told by staff about other sources of additional help but were not	66%	16%	18%	3,798

5.3 Client comments about their experiences with staff

5.3.1 Summary

Respondents who had been in contact with a member of staff had the chance to provide further comment on their experience. Around 3,100 comments were analysed. Of these, around 2,000 substantive responses were coded and analysed thematically and by sentiment.[38]

Three significant themes that stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- Staff manner and the overall quality of service provided
- Other factors influencing the experiences with staff (i.e. comparisons with previous experienced with the Department for Work and Pensions, processing delays, etc.)
- Conflicting, confusing or incorrect advice

It is worth noting that most respondents referred to speaking to staff on the phone, yet there were also mentions of contact with staff through webchat and our local offices (also referred to as 'Local Delivery' in this report). There is a smaller section in this chapter dedicated specifically for webchat and Local Delivery to make it easier to have an understanding of those experiences.

Although there can be differences in the application processes for different benefits, comments had similar themes with no significant differences based on the benefit experience of the respondent.

Positive comments Most positive comments referred to staff's manner and the overall quality of service provided. Many left expressions of thanks and appreciation for specific staff members. Multiple respondents characterised the treatment they received by our staff as 'being treated like a human and not a number'. Another significant portion of comments mentioned they had initial anxieties about getting in touch with Social Security Scotland or applying for a benefit, but these were dispersed after speaking to helpline advisers and staff in local delivery.

Mixed comments When the sentiment of comments were mixed, respondents often recognised that staff provided a high quality of service, but sometimes that experience was influenced by other factors like long call wait times or lack of clarity of processing timelines. Most comments on this theme recognised that this was not something advisers could change but, nonetheless, it still informed their perception of the service provided to them.

Negative comments In negative comments several respondents highlighted that they had been given conflicting, confusing or incorrect advice when contacting our staff and

[38] The term 'substantive comment' refers to comments that referred directly to the topic, i.e. to staff.

that had a detrimental impact on their circumstances. However, there were numerous examples of staff taking action to address any mistakes or confusion.

Other respondents expressed their disappointment of being told that they would receive follow-up communications and those not then materialising. A smaller proportion of comments also mentioned being 'passed around' to multiple advisers before getting to the person that could provide the required advice.

Finally, some respondents mentioned they had calls that were not properly recorded on the system. When following up from that conversation the next adviser was unaware and this also ultimately caused processing issues or delays.

5.3.2 Full report

5.3.3 Quality of service and manner[39]

A vast majority of respondents described our staff using words like "kind", "friendly", "helpful", "knowledgeable", "polite", "patient" or "understanding", highlighting their positive attitude and kindness. Their comments also mentioned staff being supportive and caring. This was for staff in our phone helpline, webchat and in local offices, also referred to as 'local delivery'.

> "Every person I spoke to has been polite and professional and friendly." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "The person that handled my claim couldn't have been more helpful! She called me back when she said she would and processed thing in a very fast manner. She was polite and helpful and I honestly felt like she was so happy to help me in anyway she could. In fact any time I have had contact with SSS I have felt like the staff go out their way to make sure they get all information needed to fully complete and no back and forward or waiting weeks on end with no reply and always very friendly."
> Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "The staff have all been friendly and professional when dealing with queries. The face to face appointment was essentially very supportive and the adviser was compassionate and effective. I couldn't have got a more caring individual."
> Respondent with experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit

[39] References to staff manner can be found in sections 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Decisions'.

"They are always very kind and helpful and patient and make things simple. A joy to speak with." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Often in these comments respondents would also mention how this treatment made them feel put at ease, humanised and not judged.

"I have never been so impressed with a service. I am sorry I don't have the lady's name to hand who completed my form via telephone. She was very kind and I felt very listened too. I was embarrassed about applying and she really made me feel comfortable and not judged." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

"Every member of staff I have spoken to has made me feel like a valued human being. This is incredibly refreshing. Thank you." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Linked to the manner of staff and their positive impact on people's feelings were a large volume of messages of gratitude and appreciation of members of staff, some by name.

"[Client Adviser name] was very nice to speak to and listened to my story about my health. She made me feel understood. I am very satisfied with the advice she gave me regarding other agencies. I had in my mind some horrible person was going to speak to me in my home. I was put at ease right away by [Client Adviser name]. Thank you." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"The staff member I spoke to was [Client Adviser name] on the 27th of June she is a fantastic member of staff. Really polite, kind and genuinely sounded as though she cares about you. I had originally called regarding my Scottish Child Payment and she made me aware we were also entitled to Best start foods and helped me though the process of applying. She is a credit to the team and honestly made a stressful situation so much better and helped out our family so much." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Another large portion of comments commended staff for being knowledgeable and for their communication style. Comments also mentioned how staff supported them to complete their applications, gave advice and solved problems for them.[40]

[40] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

"The two ladies that helped me fill out the form were lovely and helpful really knowledgeable." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"Very helpful on phone and the web chat. Always had great communication and made felt listened to understand and comfortable. Any questions I had were fully answered." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"I have severe anxiety and difficulties processing information. I didn't do my first application right and your staff member, [Client Adviser name], called me to talk me through it. [Client Adviser name] went above and beyond what she needed to do, was very kind and empathetic towards my situation as had been in and out of hospital.
I was also advised about the whole process, other benefits and to be honest I wouldn't have been able to get back on track with life without thr support of your very professional staff member. So very grateful." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Comments specifically about staff based in our local offices (Local Delivery) were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents praised the professionalism, knowledge and kindness of staff who attend client's homes to help with applications, as well as staff situated in different offices across the country and conducting video calls. Respondents mentioned feeling understood and respected by them.[41]

"The adviser that I seen in [location] to verify my identity was amazing. Great level of knowledge, I felt very relaxed and was able to communicate with her like a 'normal' person. Did not feel intimidated in any way. She made sure I understood everything thats was happening and I left feeling happy that I had done everything that was required. Lovely adviser. 5 star review for her!!" Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

" [Client adviser] went through everything and made me feel really comfortable especially in my own home." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

[41] Other references to Local Delivery can be found in section 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.5.6 'Application'.

> "The face to face appointment in my home was so convenient for me. The staff that came to support could not have been more helpful. She took all the stress out of the appointment and I felt Listened to and supported." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Respondents also provided positive feedback about their interactions with members of staff through our webchat service. This feedback again concentrated on the helpful manner and overall quality of service provided by advisers in webchat. Some made specific mention to the personable approach as opposed to a tightly scripted or 'robotic' interaction.

> "I honestly feel like your advisers working in the webchat field should be recognized for their personable approach. It made a huge difference to me and my stress level. People do not want a scripted AI interaction when it comes to this field and by allowing your advisers to let their personality out it really helps you to connect and calm." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Question was answered via webchat within minutes. I've never had such efficient government service communication. I do feel strongly that SSS is going above and beyond in expanding communication abilities - both in terms of format but also how staff work with applicants." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "The web chat agent I spoke with was very helpful, informative to what I was entitled to and was very nice to chat with. She gave me all information I needed and sent link to direct website I needed as I was nervous I got the wrong thing." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

5.3.4 Other factors influencing the experiences with staff

Often when mentioning interactions with staff, respondents referred to other factors which influenced their views and experiences. Some were related to the overall time taken to process a claim, other were related to the lack of updates the staff were sometimes able to provide when getting in contact.[42]

[42] References to processing times can be found in sections 5.3.4 'Staff', 6.5.3 'Application'.

"I am still waiting to hear after 7 weeks whether I'm entitled to a Carer's support payment. This is too long to wait and the person I phoned to ask about my application couldn't even tell me an average estimate of how much longer I would have to wait. I don't think this is very acceptable to be waiting this long and not have any idea when my application will be confirmed." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"Pleasant experience over the phone, albeit the staff member was unable to give an approximate application processing time which would have been useful (understand this is difficult)." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"Very polite and tried to help. Unfortunately the system is so slow." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Other factors mentioned as influencing the views and expectations of respondents were previous experience with The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).[43]

"The woman whom I spoke to was extremely helpful, polite and proactive in checking I was aware of other benefits. Thanks to her proactive questioning I didn't need to also call child benefit which wad very helpful. I've spoken to a few staff over the past 2yrs and every single time they have been compassionate, patient with me and very helpful. They speak to me as human being (which is a far cry from my experience with DWP)." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

"Staff were great, was simple enough process, was a very different experience from dealing with universal credit, much warmer." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Other external factors mentioned were previous perceptions of Social Security Scotland/Scottish Government through account by news outlets and social media.[44]

[43] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

[44] References to traditional and social media shaping perceptions of Social Security Scotland can be found in section 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.4 'Staff'.

> "I was pleasantly surprised by the approach and professionalism of the staff. This is in stark contrast to how they are often portrayed in the media." Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

> "Not one letter or phone call has made me any wiser as to what is actually happening. Given the Scottish government's record with honesty about finance it has left me very worried which is very bad for my health especially considering how bad it is to start with." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

5.3.5 Conflicting, confusing or erroneous advice

Some respondents mentioned having been given conflicting information about their applications by different members of staff and reflected on how this impacted them. Respondents were specific about other issues with escalation to more senior staff.[45]

> "My experience is a fairly poor one. Any time I called I was given different information, every time it was different information." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "[...] When contacting SSS I was giving new and different conflicting information each step of the way. When trying to escalate the issue further I got nowhere. Seems there is no one to help and individuals answering the phones have no power or say to fix issues. I applied in January and I'm still not in receipt of any monetary support come May, and can't get help with this as any staff I call seem to mess up my application further. Dealing with this has been stressful and timely and wouldn't recommend to people." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "The staff in general are very helpful, but unfortunately they did not give me the correct information at the beginning of my conversation, which wasted several hours of my time completing information that did not apply to me." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

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[45] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

> "I was spoken to kindly and no one was rude to me but my claim got lost and staff were misleading me about what was being done to fix it. One person told me one thing and another something different. I chased it up multiple times with all three times being told senior management was informed and it was being delt with. I then found out that only on the third attempt I made senior management was actually notified. After this my claim was then delt with but the process took from October till July." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Another salient topic was that of 'follow up communications'. Respondents commented of experiences of being promised a follow up call which did not come in the time frame they expected or at all.[46]

> "I phoned last week about my application. They said someone would call me back. They didn't I phone again they said I would get a letter but I haven't. When I phoned they didn't tell my anything about my application." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "Staff member I spoke to was lovely and couldn't help me with my querie with my award letter/account being wrong. Was promised a call back once it was looked into the next day but it is now a week later and have had no contact. Also finding it hard to get through on the phone." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

It was also mentioned that respondents experienced issues to return a call to an adviser after missing a call from them. When receiving a missed call from an adviser they often mentioned that getting back in touch with the adviser was tricky as they had to go through the main helpline route which meant waiting in line as well as not necessarily getting to reach who they were contacted by in the first place.

> "I tried to contact the office four times using the number but couldn't get through. This was to return missed phone calls so I eventually gave up." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Other respondents mentioned having their calls or contacts with webchat not properly recorded in the system and this leading to delays.

[46] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

"I think the handover notes should be better. I had several instances of contacting the service for the same thing and each time I was told the communication I'd received was due to the system not being updated. It caused massive delays in our application not to mention my time. That's frustrating. However, staff were really nice, helpful and apologetic when required and I'm glad of that." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Respondents reflected on mistakes happening with their awards and their resolutions. Some described struggling to get in touch with 'the right person' and needing to escalate their situation to get it resolved.

"After filling the form out, I tried to phone as I made a wee mistake but I kept getting sent to different departments & couldn't speak to the proper department so I just gave up after hours of going around in circles, someone ended up phoning me about my error & she was great." Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

"Face to face appointment was fine, person was helpful and friendly. Staff on phone lines were much less helpful or knowledgeable with one person repeatedly asking me if I was working? Or earning money as he had "information" from HMRC that stated that I had earnings! This was really upsetting for me as I had provided all the relevant, true information as requested. I have a small NHS pension as an income, this is not earnings as suggested. I did lodge a complaint about it. It was investigated by a manager/supervisor who listened to the call. My concerns were addressed one by one and resolved quickly. I felt listened to and validated by that." Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

"I received a letter in error asking for the same evidence I already submitted and it stated my case would be closed by a certain date, this worried me which caused me to contact security Scotland by phone, the lady I spoke to was very reassuring and left me feeling at ease." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Lastly, a handful of respondents offered their feedback on how their claims were handled regarding immigration requirements and advisers lacking the correct knowledge to deal with them. That made some respondents feel uneasy about their application being handled with fairness.

"Staff was very respectful and willing to help. The only issue was that I felt staff (we)re not well grounded with immigration laws which impacts the decision making process. This I believe makes decisions not to be handled fairly." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

"I think there doesn't seem to be a workflow for applicants who are have an Irish passport as I was repeatedly asked for EU settled status numers - though not on the phone, only letters and maybe website/email." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

6 Applications

This section presents findings on respondents' experience of applying for Social Security Scotland benefits. The findings presented in this section relate only to respondents who had applied for a benefit. Anyone who had not applied for a benefit did not answer these questions.[47]

A separate analysis of Social Security Scotland's 'point of contact' survey is also included in the Annex A of this report, covering the same reporting period. While separate to the Client Satisfaction Survey, the point of contact survey also asks about respondents' experience of making an application. Open text responses, however, have been analysed alongside the Client Satisfaction Survey ones in section 6.4.1.

6.1 Views on the application process

Just under half (49%) of the total respondents to the Client Satisfaction Survey had experience of applying for Social Security Scotland benefits. Seven-in-ten respondents (72%) said their experience of the application process overall was 'very good' or 'good' while over one-in-ten (12%), described their experience as 'very poor' or 'poor'.

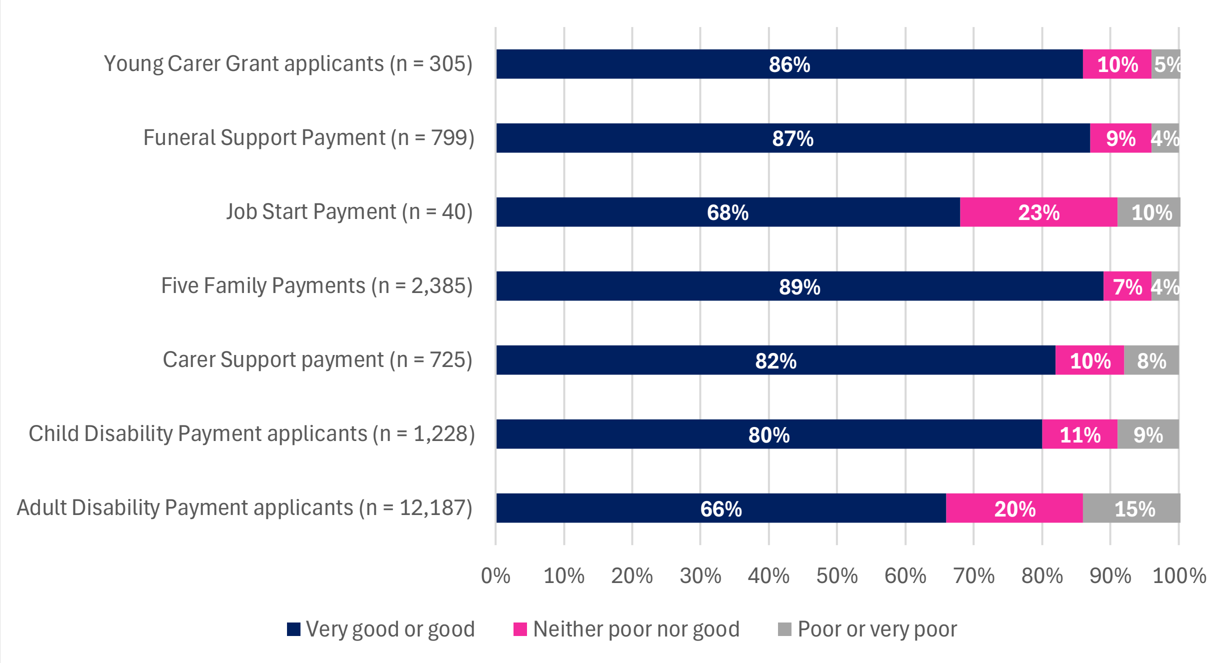
Table 6.1: Overall experience with the application process
All respondents who applied for a benefit, column percentages

Response options	All respondents
Very good or good	72%
Neither good nor poor	16%
Poor or very poor	12%
Total	17,669

Figure 6.1 presents the findings broken down by benefit experience. Broadly, it shows a positive experience across the board, though those with experience of applying for Five Family Payments rated their application process the highest (89%), followed by Funeral Support Payment (87%) and Young Carer Grant (86%). Respondents with experience of applying for Adult Disability Payment and Job Start Payment rated their application process the lowest (66% and 68%, respectively).

[47] This section does not apply to those who only received Carer's Allowance Supplement, Child Winter Heating Payment, Winter Heating Payment or who experienced a transfer to Child or Adult Disability Benefit or Carer Support Payment.

Figure 6.1: Overall rating of the application process
All respondents who applied for a benefit



Around three quarters of respondents who had applied for a benefit agreed that the application process was clear (74%) and that they were treated fairly during the application process (78%). A slightly lower proportion felt that they were only asked relevant questions (68%), that the eligibility criteria were clear before they applied (66%) and that the application form allowed them to fully explain their or their child's circumstances (64%) (see Table 6.2 below).

Table 6.2: Views on the application process
All respondents who applied for a benefit, row percentages

Thinking about your experience of submitting an application with Social Security Scotland...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
The application process was clear	74%	13%	13%	17,424
The application asked only relevant questions	68%	16%	16%	16,993
The eligibility criteria was clear before I applied	66%	18%	16%	17,018
I was treated fairly and respectfully throughout the application process	78%	13%	9%	17,226
The application process enabled me to fully explain my/my child's circumstances	64%	14%	22%	13,048

Respondents who had applied for Adult Disability Payment were less likely than other respondents to agree with all five statements, followed by respondents who applied for Job Start Payment. Conversely, respondents who applied for Five Family Payments, Young Carer Grant and Funeral Support Payment were more likely to agree with these statements, as shown in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Views on the application process by benefit
All respondents who applied for a benefit, row percentages

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed					Total
	The application process was clear	The application asked only relevant questions	The eligibility criteria was clear before I applied	I was treated fairly and respectfully throughout the application process	The application process enabled me to fully explain my/my child's circumstances *	
Adult Disability Payment	69%	60%	59%	73%	62%	11,999
Child Disability Payment	82%	76%	73%	85%	81%	1,227
Carer Support Payment	84%	84%	81%	86%	#	719
Five Family Payments	88%	89%	84%	89%	#	2,345
Job Start Payment	71%	78%	80%	73%	#	41
Funeral Support Payment	84%	87%	80%	90%	#	790
Young Carer Grant	88%	92%	88%	90%	#	303

*Only applies to disability benefit applications.

6.1.1 Application under Special Rules for Terminal Illness (SRTI)

In the 2024-25 Client Satisfaction Survey a new question was added to help understand the experiences of clients who apply under the Special Rules for Terminal Illness (SRTI). This only applied to disability benefits, both for people who arrive to Social Security Scotland as applicants, or for people whose case was transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Of a total of 22,377 respondents who had either applied for or whose award was transferred to Adult or Child Disability Payment, 1,467 (6.6%) told us they did so through the SRTI route. The vast majority of those cases (96%) were from Adult Disability Payment.

Respondents who told us they went through the SRTI route gave a very similar rating to their overall experience compared to respondents that did not. Just under three quarters (74%) said their experience was ‘very good’ or ‘good’, compared to a very similar proportion (73%) for those who did not go through the SRTI route. Around a tenth (10%) of respondents who went through the SRTI route said their overall experience was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ compared to 9% of respondents who did not go through the SRTI route.

Table 6.4: Overall experience with Social Security Scotland by SRTI
All respondents who applied or whose award was transferred to a Disability Payment, column percentages

Response options	Respondents who accessed their benefit through SRTI	Respondents who did not access their benefit through SRTI
Very good or good	74%	73%
Neither good nor poor	16%	17%
Poor or very poor	10%	9%
Total	1,451	20,683

When looking specifically at the experience of applying for a disability benefit through the SRTI a slightly lower proportion of respondents who applied through SRTI said their experience was ‘very good’ or ‘good’ (65%), compared to those who did not (67%). For respondents who applied through the SRTI they also rated their experience of applying as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ in a slightly higher rate (17%) than those who did not (14%).

Table 6.5: Overall experience with Social Security Scotland by SRTI
All respondents who applied or whose award was transferred to A Disability Payment, column percentages

Response options	Respondents who accessed their benefit through SRTI	Respondents who did not access their benefit through SRTI
Very good or good	65%	67%
Neither good nor poor	18%	19%
Poor or very poor	17%	14%
Total	873	10,512

6.2 Support with an application

During the application process some of our clients get help from different advocacy or community organisations, friends and family, or Social Security Scotland. This is a multiple response question so people could choose as many options as appropriate.

Almost half (43%) of all respondents who applied for a benefit told us they received support with their application. Of those who received support a over a third (37%) received help from a friend or family member, just over a quarter (26%) received help directly from Social Security Scotland and just over a tenth (11%) from Citizens Advice Scotland.

Table 6.6: Support to complete an application by provider
All respondents who applied for a benefit

Response options	All respondents
Friend or family	37%
Social Security Scotland	26%
Citizens Advice Scotland	15%
Welfare rights (for example, your local council)	11%
Health services	9%
Advocacy services	5%
Money help organisation	3%
Housing support organisation	3%
Pregnancy and baby service	1%
Childcare service	1%
Other	2%
Total	7,328

For most benefits the main sources of help were either Social Security Scotland or friends of family.

Respondents who told us that they received help from Social Security Scotland were asked how easy it was for them to get help from Social Security Scotland. The majority of them (92%) agreed that it was easy to get help from Social Security Scotland to complete an application, while 3% disagreed with that statement.

6.3 Experience of providing supporting information

This section considers respondent's experiences of providing 'supporting information'. We call 'supporting information' all the documents and paperwork that clients provide to support their or their child's application. Not all benefits require supporting information and sometimes the need depends on specific circumstances. This section of the questionnaire only applied to those respondents who applied for Adult or Child Disability Payment.

Most respondents (68%) told us they provided their supporting information when they submitted their application, almost a quarter (23%) of respondents said they provided details to allow Social Security Scotland to gather supporting information on their behalf, and 9% provided it after they were contacted by Social Security Scotland to request it.

When looking at this behaviour by benefit we can see a difference between Adult and Child Disability Payment applicants (see Table 6.7). Adult Disability Payment applicants were more likely to request Social Security Scotland to collect the supporting information on their behalf (24% compared to 10% for Child Disability Payment applicants). Conversely, 76% of Child Disability Payment applicants provided their supporting information when they submitted their application compared to 67% of Adult Disability Payment.

Table 6.7: When respondents provided supporting information
All respondents who provided supporting information

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed			Total
	Asked Social Security Scotland to collect on my behalf	Provided when I submitted my application	Provided after I was contacted by Social Security Scotland	
All applicants	23%	68%	9%	12,248
Adult Disability Payment	24%	67%	9%	11,061
Child Disability Payment	10%	78%	12%	1,187

Respondents were then asked how much they agreed with the statements 'It was clear what information I should supply' and 'It was easy to get the supporting information I wanted' (see Table 6.8). As with the table above, responses differed between Child and Adult Disability Payment. Those who had applied for Child Disability Payment were more likely to agree that is was both clear what information to supply and that it was easy to get the supporting information they wanted (87% and 78% respectively), in comparison to 80% and 70% for Adult Disability Payment respondents.

Table 6.8: Views on providing supporting information
All respondents who provided supporting information

Benefit experience	Proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed		Total
	It was clear what information I should supply	It was easy to get the supporting information I wanted	
All applicants	81%	71%	9,344
Adult Disability Payment	80%	70%	9,344
Child Disability Payment	87%	78%	9,232

6.3.1 Reasons for not providing supporting information with their application

The following question in the survey looks to understand why some respondents did not provide supporting information while submitting their application. The most common option selected, with a third (32%) of respondents, was ‘I didn’t think it was needed’. This was followed by ‘I didn’t have anything suitable to provide’, selected by another third (31%) of respondents. See Table 6.9 below.

When looking across both benefits, for Child Disability Payment the highest option was ‘I didn’t have anything suitable to provide, with 45% of respondents selecting it, compared to 29% of Adult Disability respondents. The second highest for Child Disability Payment respondents was ‘I didn’t think it was needed’ while that was the highest for Adult Disability Payment respondents with 33% of them selecting it.

Table 6.9: Why respondents did not provide supporting information initially
All respondents who provided supporting information

Response options	All respondents	Adult Disability Payment	Child Disability Payment
I didn't think it was needed	32%	33%	23%
I found the process of providing supporting information too stressful	16%	17%	13%
I tried to provide supporting information but it was too difficult	21%	21%	20%
I didn’t have anything suitable to provide	31%	29%	45%
Total	881	748	133

6.3.2 What supporting information respondents provided, why and where did they get it

The survey then asks respondents what supporting information they provided, why they chose to provide that specific information and where they got it from.

The first question on what supporting information was provided allowed for the selection of multiple options. Two thirds of respondents provided confirmation of diagnosis and prescriptions (65% and 66% respectively). This was followed by a half of respondents (50%) who provided medical or social work reports. A quarter of respondents providing evidence from a person that know them or their child and test results (26% and 25% respectively). See table 6.10 below.

Table 6.10: What supporting information was provided
All respondents who provided supporting information

Response options	All respondents
Confirmation of diagnosis	65%
Test results	24%
Medical or social work reports	50%
Prescription / Information about my medication	66%
Care plans	7%
Information from another person who knows you / your child	26%
Something else	9%
Total	9,445

The following questions asked why people chose to provide that specific type of supporting information. This was a multiple choice question where respondents could select as many options as it applied to their case. Most respondents (81%) said it was the best information to support their application, followed by the option 'Social Security Scotland had told me what to provide' (17%) and 'I didn't know what else to provide' (14%).

Table 6.11: Why that specific supporting information was provided
All respondents who provided supporting information

Response options	All respondents
It was the best information to support my application	81%
I wanted to provide other information but could not get it	8%
I didn't know what else to provide	14%
It was the easiest information to obtain	11%
Social Security Scotland told me what to provide	17%
Total	9,434

Finally, this section asks where people got their supporting information from. Most respondents said they got their supporting information from a GP (40%), a hospital (including from doctors, consultants or nurses) (16%) or a family member (14%). See table 6.12 below.

Table 6.12: Where respondents got their supporting information from
All respondents who provided supporting information

Response options	All respondents
A hospital (including from doctors, consultants or nurses)	55%
A GP	63%
A social worker	3%
A therapist (including occupational therapists or physiotherapists)	20%
School, College or Nursery	7%
A support worker	5%
A family member	16%
A friend or neighbour	4%
An unpaid carer or childminder	1%
A volunteer from a group or activity that you go to	2%
Total	9,408

Respondents where later asked if they have asked Social Security Scotland to collect information on their behalf and over a quarter (27%) said they had. They were then asked why they asked Social Security Scotland to collect supporting information for their application on their behalf. The most selected option was 'I thought they would know better than me what to collect' (52%), followed by 'I thought they could collect the information faster than me' (39%).

Table 6.13: Why asked Social Security Scotland to collect supporting information
All respondents who asked Social Security Scotland to collect supporting information on their behalf

Response options	All respondents
I thought they could collect the information faster than me	39%
I thought they would know better than me what information to collect	52%
I thought that they would be able to get information I wouldn't be able to get	29%
I wanted to provide supporting information, but couldn't do it myself	18%
Total	5,299

Finally, for those respondents that said they didn't ask Social Security Scotland what to collect on their behalf, they were then asked 'why was that?' The majority of respondents selected 'I thought I could provide all the information needed' (62%), followed by the option 'I did not think Social Security Scotland would be able to do this' (25%).

Table 6.14: Why not asked Social Security Scotland to collect supporting information
All respondents who said they did not ask Social Security Scotland to collect supporting information on their behalf

Response options	All respondents
I did not trust Social Security Scotland	2%
I did not think that Social Security Scotland would be able to do this	25%
I thought that I could provide all the information needed	62%
I thought I could get the information faster than Social Security Scotland could	14%
I did not think that there was any information available to collect	8%
Total	4,955

6.4 Consultation experience

As part of the application process for Adult Disability Payment some clients meet with a practitioner to discuss their condition, we refer to these specific appointments as ‘consultations’. Clients are only asked to take part in a consultation if there’s no other way to find the information Social Security Scotland needs to make a decision.

For Client Satisfaction Survey respondents there are two situations where they may have experienced a consultation. The first is as a result of an application (as above). The second is if a client was due a review of their Personal Independence Payment with Department for Work and Pensions around the time of their award being transferred to Social Security Scotland. In this circumstance Social Security Scotland may have conducted a consultation. Again, this is only where there’s no other way to find the information Social Security Scotland needs to make a decision.

Around 650 respondents said they had experienced having a consultation with a Social Security Scotland practitioner, that is 3% of all Adult Disability Payment respondents including both applicants and those who had their award transferred from Department for Work and Pensions. Of these, 88% rated the experience of a consultation as good or very good, 4% poor or very poor, with 8% saying neither poor nor good.

Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with statements related to their experience of their consultation. The majority of respondents agreed that they ‘understood why the consultation was needed’ (91%) and that their practitioner ‘understood my disability or health condition(s) and how it affects me’ (84%). See Table 6.15 below.

Table 6.15: Views on the consultation process
Respondents with experience of a consultation, row percentages

Thinking about your overall experience with Social Security Scotland consultation process…	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
I understood why the consultation was needed	91%	6%	3%	625
My practitioner understood my disability or health condition(s) and how it affects me	84%	9%	6%	610

6.4.1 Client comments about the experience of a consultation

When respondents left comments about the consultation process, these were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with a health practitioner.

The main positive aspect mentioned was the manner of practitioners. Respondents often highlighted practitioners' empathy, as well as their ability to put people at ease despite it being a very vulnerable situation which produced feelings of anxiety for some of them.[48]

> "Compassion showed and a(n) overall excellent service provided for which I'm most grateful." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "The staff member that attended was absolutely brilliant. She managed to put me at easy and calm me enough to last the full three hour meeting. She demonstrated the most simple and pure form of care. Providing ne with a safe and care free enviromed to fully open up and talk freely about how much my condion effects me. As much as your service and others have failed me, that staff memeber done her job perfectly and explained every scenario fully." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "It was well conducted and although it was upsetting explaining my limitations I felt supported during the call." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Positive comments also mentioned the way practitioners communicated with them in a professional yet friendly manner, being mindful of people's unique circumstances.

[48] References to staff manner can be found in sections 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Application'.

"The person I spoke to was very professional, friendly and listened to me. I felt they understood my situation." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"[The practitioner] explained everything and asked questions but gave me time to explain as I am deaf and don't process information easily. She was very kind in her manner and allowed me to talk freely without judgement of me as a person which made me feel less anxious." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When comments included negative sentiment, some respondents said that a single practitioner may not have the expertise to fully understand the implications of complex health conditions, where multiple disabilities or conditions may interact.

This was specifically mentioned in relation to those whose complex needs include both physical and mental health conditions. Some respondents highlighted that the mental health issues that take place as a result of the main condition causing the disability, were not considered in the assessment process.[49]

"If you have several medical issues physical and mental health one person might not have the knowledge required to cover all bases." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"[The practitioner] did not ask about the impact my condition has on my mental health which would have hugely supported my applicationIt was well conducted and although it was upsetting explaining my limitations I felt supported during the call." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"[The practitioner] did not focus the consultation on the psychological side and do not speak clearly about it." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

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[49] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

6.5 Client comments about the application process

6.5.1 Summary

Anyone who reported having made an application for a Social Security Scotland benefit was invited to comment on their experiences.

Around 2300 comments were analysed. Of these, around 1900 substantive responses were coded and analysed.

Supplementing this report is the analysis of an additional 1900 comments left by applicants in a 'point of contact' survey. This is a voluntary survey offered to applicants straight after they submit an application for a Social Security Scotland benefit. The survey asks applicants to make suggestions for improvement to the application process.[50]

Seven significant themes stood out from the comments received. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- General comments on applying for a benefit
- Understanding eligibility criteria
- Website errors
- Benefit specific findings relating to application forms
- Help to apply
- Supporting information
- Emotional impact of the application process
- Communication and updates

Suggestions for improvement Regarding sources of 'help to apply', some respondents suggested that clients would benefit from being actively directed to external organisations for support, while others encouraged fellow applicants to use the Local Delivery service.

Regarding supporting information, some suggested that Social Security Scotland published guidance be more specific on what kinds of supporting information to include for each benefit. Additionally, the ability for Social Security Scotland websites to accept the uploading of larger files was frequently suggested, alongside requests for email confirmation and updates on the status of supporting information.

Benefit specific findings Recently bereaved Funeral Support Payment applicants report struggling to locate and access documents addressed to deceased relatives that are needed as sources of supporting information. Moreover, some Funeral Support

[50] This survey provides a contextual backdrop to the Client Satisfaction Survey analysis on the topic of 'making an application'. A 10% randomised sample of comments were coded and analysed.

Payment applicants stated that eligibility criteria could be unclear, particularly on whether it should be the applicant or the deceased who was in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Demographic specific findings For those who face barriers to acquiring supporting information, this includes young respondents who face barriers to providing identification documents including proof of address.

6.5.2 Full report

6.5.3 General comments on applying for a benefit

When respondents left general, often short comments on the application process, they tended to be positive in sentiment.

When comments were positive, they variously describe the application process as "straightforward", "quick", "seamless" and "efficient". Several respondents expressed surprise at how quick and straightforward the process had been, with the timeliness of the process linked to reduction of stress.

When respondents left general comments reflecting on the comprehensibility of the application process, some spoke favourably regarding the process being clear and easy to understand. Many praised the accessibility of the process, while the ease of use of the online form was also frequently mentioned.

The general role of staff and their impact on the application process was also often mentioned. These comments were overwhelmingly positive. Staff were frequently mentioned as "friendly", "helpful", "patient", "kind" and "understanding". Those with experience of applying for a disability payment particularly praised the assistance they received from the Local Delivery Service.[51],[52]

> "Easy, timely and discrete application process." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "It was very straightforward and very easy to apply which made it a whole lot less stressful when dealing with grief at the same time as having to do the practical and financial side of my Dad passing." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

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[51] References to staff manner can be found in sections 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Application'.

[52] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.1.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 5.3.2 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.3 'Discrimination'.

> "Application process set out clearly & well presented to f[i]ll in & complete." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "One thing I'd like to mention is how the application process felt organized and efficient. […] I appreciated how the process seemed to anticipate the needs of different applicants, offering flexibility and support options to ensure everyone could navigate it successfully. […] Overall, the experience was less daunting than I had expected, which I truly appreciated." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "The lady that I spoke to was extremely helpful, knowledgeable and discussed everything with me. She was clear and supported me more than she will know as I have never gone through this before and was emotional." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "The employee who visited me and helped me fill in the paperwork was brilliant very helpful and caring and very patient." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When comments were constructive, or negative in sentiment, the majority referred to the length and complexity of application processes.[53] Respondents who experienced only occasional issues, such as processing errors, or who found the application process to be complex or confusing, generally described having a positive experience overall.

> "I believe this process is as straight forward as something so complex can be, there was points I was confused but I am not sure how you could make it any clearer due to the vast net the application form catches." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Process has taken ages from start ro finish." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

[53] References to processing times can be found in sections 5.3.4 'Staff', 6.5.3 'Application'.

"Despite some processing issues you were still swift and helpful! Thank you for making the process not stressful. I find paperwork overwhelming so it was a lot easier due to how straightforward it was." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

6.5.4 Understanding eligibility criteria[54]

Some respondents did not feel that the eligibility criteria was made clear to them before applying. Some were left feeling that they had wasted their time and could have been notified earlier in the process that they were not eligible.

Some responses, in relation to Pension Age Disability Payment, came from respondents who were acting on behalf of their parents. These responses expressed confusion as to whether the benefit was appropriate to their parent's circumstances or what other help was available.

Others were unclear on the date they would be eligible to apply. This was often the case for Five Family Payment applicants applying for Pregnancy and Baby Payments, and/or Young Carer Grant.[55] Some noted that staff proactively reached out to advise when to re-apply, while others said they had received no information.

Some Funeral Support Payment respondents stated that the eligibility criteria could be unclear on whether it should be the applicant or the deceased who was in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Those who shared a pension with their late spouse, or later had their pension transferred, were also unclear about their entitlement. Delays to changes in Pension Credit were also cited as a concern, due to the time limit for submitting a Funeral Support Payment application.

"Waste of time if I had been told at the start that my pension meant I was ineligible." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"I suspect that I may not be able to claim this benefit because of the cash I have at hand. I would be useful to know the acceptance criteria before I started the application." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

[54] References to eligibility can be found in sections 6.5.4 'Application', 7.4.6 'Decision', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 10.3.6 'Discrimination'

[55] Young carers who are eligible can get Young Carer Grant once a year between the ages of 16-18. Applicants need to apply each year. References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.1.4 'Overall', 3.1.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 5.6.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

"Straightforward to fill in but am left unsure if this was the most appropriate form for us to apply for the help dad needs." Respondent with experience of Pension Age Disability Payment

"Very easy to follow steps to complete application and I applied a little early and they phoned me the following day to advise me to reapply after 24 weeks of pregnancy." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

"I applied for a Young Carer Grant back at the end of May and heard absolutely nothing until I phoned today and was told that my application was denied because I had applied slightly too early. I got no communication to let me know this no letter email or phonecall." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant[56]

"seem to recall it being unclear to me re who is on benefits as to whether i was permitted or not. My deceased husband was on benefits but I am on superann pension only." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

"Refused because the pension credit that my wife and I shared was not automatically passed on to me even though the only change was my wife dying. I had to reapply for pension credit and I am still waiting for this to happen. Meanwhile time to claim is running out. At this time the last thing I need is more paperwork with all the other things I have to deal with." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

6.5.5 Website errors[57]

A significant theme brought up in the 'point of contact' survey were applicants' negative experiences of using Social Security Scotland websites due to errors and glitches. Some described websites as being 'difficult to navigate", slow or prone to crashing, while others honed in on more precise examples of IT glitches and errors.

Examples of websites being difficult to navigate include: hyperlinks failing to route users to application home pages; and incorrect or irrelevant routing in application forms.

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[56] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

[57] References to Social Security Scotland websites can be found in sections 6.5.5 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

Examples of specific website errors include online applications not saving progress; forms not allowing for the use of apostrophes or "special characters" (notably for Pension Age Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment forms); forms logging out with the loss of work (despite the applicant actively filling it in); or incorrect messages becoming visible.

"There is no link on the mygov.scot website to bring you here, the support just takes you round in circles. I have been trying to start this process for a very long time but have never been able to as the websites are not optimal." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

"I could not skip sections that did not pertain to me i.e. the section on medication did not apply to me however there was no option to simply say this does not apply to me having this option I feel would make this process quicker and easier." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"The 'Resume Application' button does not work, and comes up when you are actually typing - so not when the form is inactive. When you hit resume application - even if it came up seconds before - it logs you out instead and you lose everything you just typed." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"Website very temperamental saying I have added strange characters even when I spoke to the lady on live chat she could only suggest I remove commas. this seemed to work for 2 questions then I had to do the form on a relatives laptop." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"Application form keeps incorrectly stating that my application is now complete and cannot be viewed or modified - even when it is nowhere near complete. Fortunately when I go to my mygov.scot dashboard I am able to resume the incomplete application. Very, very poor." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

6.5.6 Benefit specific findings relating to application forms

Benefit specific findings relating to application forms come from those with experience of Adult and/or Child Disability Payment, Carer Support Payment, Five Family Payments, Funeral Support Payment and Job Start Payment.

Comments include positive and negative aspects of application forms, as well as suggestions for improvement.

Disability Payment (Adult and Child)

A large proportion of comments, related to filling in the application form, were written by respondents who had applied for either Adult or Child Disability Payment. Themes that emerged from this cohort of respondents offer constructive comments that are not/rarely discussed by respondents from other benefit experiences. Themes include:

- The length and repetition of application form
- Complicated, unclear or confusing aspects of application form contents
- Degree to which forms allow respondents to fully explain their circumstances
- Suggestions for improvement to application form contents

Length and repetition of Disability application forms

When comments about the length and contents of application forms were negative in sentiment, many respondents applying for a disability benefit said the application form was too long. Forms were variably described as "overwhelming", "laborious", "off-putting" and "stressful".

Many reflected that questions in the form were repetitive. For some, the need to repeat themselves was distressing. For some, the situation was compounded by their having to cope with illness, caring responsibilities and/or busy schedules.

> "Stressful - form is very long and there is a lot of repetition needed." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I did not have a good experience as I had to repeatedly declare about the same issue around my terminal illness." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When comments were positive or mixed in sentiment, some reflected on the functionality of application forms that enabled them to complete the form over several sittings. While some felt the length of time taken to fill in the form, bit-by-bit, to be onerous, others were pleased they were able to save and return to their application. This was often the case for respondents with caring responsibilities, with conditions which impact concentration or cognition, and/or those who experience fatigue.

> "I like the idea that you get plenty of time to fill in the form as with being sore /tired /ect its good to have a break until you feel better to start the form again." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Being able to complete the form in parts was also viewed positively by some for whom administrative tasks are difficult. Many were grateful not to feel rushed, and that the length of time available to complete the form was made clear.

When suggestions for improvement were made, some felt that the avoidance of repetition in application forms would allow for a better use of time, and a better quality of response.

> "I rated good as it was very clear but it's a very difficult form to complete […] It was good that it was clear how long I had as it took me a prolonged period to get through the application." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Complicated, unclear or confusing aspects of Disability application form contents

Several respondents reported finding parts of the application form to be ambiguous, complicated, "confusing", difficult or frustrating. Some commented that they were unsure of how to interpret questions, what to write, or how much detail to give.

> "I had an issue with the toilet question as I can go myself but it is a painful experience and the question made me feel like it was to do with being unable to go alone or being incontinent very confusing as it's an issue I don't always make getting my clothing down in time." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I think it was confusing when asking about distances of walking apart from that I felt it was easy enough to fill in." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Because of this perceived lack of clarity, respondents frequently said they had difficulty articulating how their circumstances affect them. Some expressed regret or anxiety at having filled in the form "incorrectly". Others said they were reliant on the help they received to apply, such as provided by Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service.[58]

> "I found it very difficult to tell you exactly how I was feeling and what I was able to do / not do and go into detail. Since the completion of the form I feel I was granted the minimum scores but I don't know how to tell you more?" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[58] References to Local Delivery can be found in section 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.5.6 'Application'

"I found it very difficult to find the words to convey the information in the context of the questions. My issues and need for support are mainly around neurodivergence, mental health and behaviour and I needed the support with this. I was very grateful to be able to access help with this and the input of the local delivery worker was 100% what enabled my application to be successfully submitted" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"It is difficult to apply when you don't have any evidence to supply because your child is not diagnosed. It is not clear what information is relevant and there's little guidance on what is relevant to include in answering the questions. More guidance and support would be helpful on how to complete the form, the help services that exist are oversubscribed. Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

When suggestions were made for additional and/or improved guidance, some wanted more illustrative examples of what to include and how to interpret questions.[59]

"It is a well thought out form but you need to know what is expected to be included. The guidance around it is good but I really needed the support and advise I was given (over the phone, over several sessions) to fill in the form fully." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Degree to which Disability applications enable respondents to fully explain their circumstances[60]

Respondents who had applied for a disability benefit often referred to the extent to which the form enabled them to fully explain their, or their child's, circumstances. Some spoke positively about their experience, detailing that they had space to describe their circumstances in the right amount of detail and in their own words.

"It was a lengthy form but I expected that. I feel the form gave good guidance about what to include and opportunity to include everything I wanted to say." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

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[59] References to supporting information can be found in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

[60] References to the embedding of humanising processes into the service (including those that enable clients to express their individualism and unique circumstances) can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 7.4.4 'Decision'.

> "It was a long application to complete however it gives the opportunity to address the daily struggles with caring for my child needs and the effects it has in more depth. It also gives the parents the chance to explain fully and supporting statement from friends and family is relevant as they provide the evidence of this on a daily basis" Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

More often, however, respondents presented constructive or negative comments. Many found the questions too prescriptive and expressed that they could not adequately describe the daily struggles they faced. Some said they did not feel that they were viewed as an individual with unique personal circumstances and that this resulted in them being treated unfairly.

Phrases such as "black and white" and "box-ticking" were frequently used to refer to the question wording. Often, respondents felt that they were asked questions that were not relevant to them, whilst simultaneously being denied adequate space to describe their specific circumstances. Questions around mobility and daily living were considered particularly narrow.

> "I don't think it is a fair application. I think the questions are generic and black and white rather than looking at a person individually. It felt like a box ticking process […]" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

It is notable the number of comments that said the contents of the form were more catered towards those with a physical disability or mobility issues, preventing them from properly detailing their experiences. This was overwhelmingly the case for those with neurodivergent conditions and those experiencing poor mental health, as well as hidden disabilities, multiple conditions, and those with fluctuating symptoms.[61]

Others with fluctuating symptoms also found the wording of the form restrictive. They describe difficulty in articulating the changing nature of their conditions. Particularly they reference challenges in explaining the difference between a "good day" and a "bad day".

For some, the implications (of various) of the above factors were that they wanted to "give up" on their application. Others explained that they did not complete their application at all due to finding it challenging. Comments emphasised that forms are too long; that they do not allow them to explain their circumstances and that the process became demoralising and distressing.

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[61] References to inclusivity in application form contents (namely physical and mental health recognition) is explored in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

"I am autistic. I feel that your Adult Disability Payment process - the scope of the questions asked and thus the scope for answers - do not adequately cover autism issues. I feel that this has resulted in my claim being refused." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I found it hard as i have good and bad days that vary and some severe episodes last longer than others, which is hard to rate on an average, given the specific questions." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

We attempted to complete the application previously but due to the time it takes to complete and lack of supporting documentation we had to abandon our initial application. Our second attempt started in September and we still have not received an outcome." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"I did not complete my application due to the difficulties in completing it. It is not user friendly & appears to be aimed more to physical disabilities rather than mental health." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Suggestions for improvement to Disability application form contents

A few suggestions for improvement to the forms were made. These mostly refer to revisions to wording, i.e. improvements to wording and guidance on how to answer daily living and mobility questions.

"I felt some of the questions were not worded well and did not give myself the correct way to explain my information. For example how long does it take you to bathe/ shower. Does this mean time spent in the shower or the whole process which for me could take upwards of 30 to 45 minutes. I felt the question could have been clearer in what was expected as the answer." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

A more sensitive approach to capturing the experiences of those with invisible, and/or mental health conditions was also considered necessary.

"It would be better if there were two different types of applications. The one you have and then a separate one just for those applying on the grounds of mental health disability." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “I feel there is an entire line of questioning that is missing on the application form. This is to do with 'how easily you manage your time, meet deadlines and stay on top of administrative tasks' Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Some advocated for a space to summarise in their own words, for example by way of a personal statement or somewhere for additional information. Others wanted shorter, less repetitive forms.

> “I thought there would be a summary box at the end to explain how living with a chronic disease for 58 years has affected me and the long term complications I suffer from.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Carer Support Payment

From the ‘point of contact’ survey, many Carer Support Payment applicants left comments on how to improve the application form.

For those with ‘underlying entitlement’ (who do not receive Carer Support Payment but whose underlying entitlement may enable them to access additional benefits or top ups to existing benefits, including Pension Credit) respondents said that there should be: a simpler application form for this situation; the form should provide space for clients to record which additional benefit/top up they are applying for.[62]

More generally, respondents flagged concerns about providing supporting information about their income. Issues raised included: how to provide information about student income; the list of accepted forms of evidence; and if income from pensions should be included.

> “Need an easier form for pensioners claiming underlying entitlement.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> “I am applying for underlying carers entitlement to increase my pension credit entitlement but there is no comments box for me to advise this is why im applying.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> “In the income and earnings section there is no where to add information about student income from SAAS.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

[62] References to Carer Support Payment and ‘underlying entitlement’ can be found in sections 3.3.4 ‘Overall’, 6.5.6 ‘Application’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’, ’10.3.6 ‘Discrimination’.

"Slightly confused at the section for uploading information. I have a recent P45 which I could send you if required but the section to upload information didn't have a section for P45's - just statements, invoices, etc." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

Five Family Payments

Respondents left feedback about completing joint applications for two or more of the Five Family Payments. Some were positive and thought combining applications for multiple benefits made it easier for applicants. Others thought it was less convenient. Given the different eligibility criteria for each of the five family payments, some respondents said they would prefer separate application forms.

There was also feedback about how to record unborn children on application forms. Pregnant respondents said they were unsure where to include details of their unborn baby and in response to which question.

"The fact that I only need to fill in one form to apply for everything makes things so much easier." Respondent with experience of Scottish Child Payment Payment

"It would be good if you could have the option to apply for the Best Start Foods and Best Start Grant either separately or together. Makes it difficult when you want to apply for the Best Start Foods before the Best Start Grant. It would surely save on admin and paper costs for Social Security Scotland not having to process applications and send out rejection letters for the Best Start Grant because people are trying to apply for the Best Start foods award before the 24 week eligibility point." Respondent with experience of Best Start Grant / Best Start Foods

Mostly the application is straightforward however the question regarding if the applicant has a children under a certain age is confusing It could be clearer to state whether or not this includes unborn children for those of us who are pregnant applicants". Respondent with experience of Best Start Grant / Best Start Foods

"It would be clearer if the order of the questions was changed slightly so that the question of 'are you pregnant' comes before the question regarding looking after children I almost ended the process as I thought it was only for people whos children had been physically born." Respondent with experience of Best Start Grant / Best Start Foods

Funeral Support Payment

It was notable that several Funeral Support Payment respondents said the application form should be more flexible when it comes to providing the details of funeral director.

> "It does not consider that someone might have to use more than one funeral director and hence making things more complicated." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

> "Allow tick boxes for things that are not yet sorted for example funeral director hasn't been decided as I'm receiving assistance to make the funeral as low cost as possible." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

Job Start Payment

Comments specific to Job Start Payment concerned issues with supplying contact information for employers. Respondents said it could be difficult to provide this in the way set out in the application form, especially phone numbers. Respondents said there should be more flexibility to provide details relative to their circumstances.

> "Add an other option for the work address in case the work address may not be permanent." Respondent with experience of Job Start Payment

> "I understand that for security it is good to [have] a phone number for the employer however some people wont have that…maybe saying in that part of the application if you don't have a phone number for your employer put in your own. As long you have either an email address or phone number I dont think one should be optional and the other not." Respondent with experience of Job Start Payment

6.5.7 Help to apply

Respondents commonly referenced support to apply when reflecting on their experiences. Variously they reflected on help they did or did not receive from external stakeholders, Social Security Scotland and their friends and family.

Typically, the receipt of support had helped respondents: in the alleviation of stress; to articulate their circumstances; to better understand the application process. Knowing "how to say things" in the "right way" was often highlighted as a crucial aspect of the help they received.

Most described the help they received as being instrumental to their being able to make an application. Many said that without support they do not believe they could have completed an application.

Several respondents had applied on more than one occasion, highlighting that they were only successful once they had sought additional support. Only a small number of respondents continued to find the process stressful despite having help.

> First application got refused as Me and my partner filled it out. Reapplied with citizens advice filling it out as she understood the questions better than me as I found some questions confusing due to my condition." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I have had support from an Advocate from VoiceAbility there is no way I could have managed this application by myslef." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "found it quite easy with support from my family. Being badly dyslexic I would have struggled with out help from family" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I attempted to complete this myself, however I had great difficulty and found the online application frustrating and overwhelming. I called and was offered support from the Social Security Scotland team who support with filling in applications. They arranged telephone appointments and this was done ever several appointments and I was also allowed breaks during the appointments as well due to this being a very difficult and emotional process for me." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I was actually in hospital at the time of submitting my application.[...] I really struggled to do the application myself. I contacted social security scotland and they arranged for someone to come to the hospital to help me submit my application. I really appreciated this help because I really struggle with things like this. I can't process things properly and the in person advisor reassured me and really helped with the process. Both times I contacted social security scotland via the webchat service. Both advisors were really empathetic of my situation and helped provide the information I needed. I really appreciated this help." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

It was evident from some respondents that, despite the value of having support, sources of help were not always easy to access or clearly signposted. It appeared that some respondents did not know that support was available or where to find it.

Others faced barriers that prevented them from getting help with their application. Barriers identified include difficulties contacting Social Security Scotland over the phone[63], due to both accessibility issues (such as neurodiversity) and long call wait times.[64]

When suggestions for improvement were made, some said that clients would benefit from being more actively directed to external organisations for support. Others championed the wider use of Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service.

> "I had tried on a number of occasions to establish communication and support via the contact phone. Unfortunately, the call lines were always busy and after several attempts, waiting for the call to be picked up, I decided to attempt to complete the form myself. I am not upset that my submission did not reach the criteria, as I think my response was factually correct. However, without the experience guide from SS Scotland, I cannot validate that my responses would have been different if guided."[65]
> Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

6.5.8 Supporting information[66]

The process of gathering supporting information was another prevalent theme arising from respondents' experiences of applying for a benefit. While some highlighted areas which were positive about this process, the majority of those who mentioned supporting information provided constructive or negative feedback. Prominent themes include:

- Positive experiences
- Negative experiences with Social Security Scotland policies and processes surrounding supporting information
- Difficulties uploading information to the Social Security Scotland website;
- Issues in gathering supporting information from external stakeholders

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[63] References to communication modes in relation to accessibility can be found in sections 3.1.4 'Overall', 3.1.4 Overall, 4.4.3 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'
[64] References to call wait times can be found in sections 3.1.4 Overall, 4.4.4 'Webchat', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 6.5.7 'Application'

[65] References to call wait times can be found in sections 3.3.4 Overall, 4.4.4 'Webchat', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 6.5.7 'Application'. References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 Overall, 4.3.4 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

[66] References to supporting information can be found in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

Positive experiences

Respondents who had a positive experience generally commented on the ease at which they could upload documents, as well as it being clear what to include. Many described the process of providing supporting information as straightforward and well communicated.

Some were pleased that medical reports provided by friends and family were suitable to upload. These reports enabled respondents' to more fully explain their day-to-day experiences.[67] Others were grateful that Social Security Scotland could collect evidence on their behalf.

> "I found the option to provide additional information within eight weeks extremely helpful as typically after submitting I realised there were things that I should have mentioned." Respondent with experience of Adult Support Payment

> "Staff were quick to let me know what documents to upload and where i should do this, I was also contacted quickly when they required more information."
> Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

> "It was a long application to complete however it gives the opportunity to address the daily struggles with caring for my child needs and the effects it has in more depth. It also gives the parents the chance to explain fully and supporting statement from friends and family is relevant as they provide the evidence of this on a daily basis" Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Negative experiences with Social Security Scotland policies and processes surrounding supporting information

Respondents who had difficulty uploading or obtaining supporting information variously described the process as "difficult", "frustrating" or had them "going around in circles".

This was related to issues including: uncertainty in what constituted appropriate information to provide; difficulties obtaining supporting information from external stakeholders; guidance on supporting information that was unclear or misleading.

[67] References to the embedding of humanising processes into the service (including those that enable clients to express their individualism and unique circumstances) can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 7.4.4 'Decision'.

"Application form clearly said diagnosis wasnt necessary. The assessor repeatedly did not give me points due to not having a diagnosis for autism. If i had know, i would have provided evidence that i have been on the waiting list for an assessment for about 3 years. This has caused a lot of unnecessary stress." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"Information required was not clear not asked to send invoice for cremation and application was denied" Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

Some respondents reported not having enough time to gather the appropriate information to support their application. They also detail the challenges they faced when trying to update Social Security Scotland with these documents.

"[...]I was expected to supply utility bills for an 83yr. old with advanced dementia living in a care home. In addition to this I was threatened that if I did not supply these within 2 weeks I would forfeit my right to a grant. I was simply bullied." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

"At the time of my application i had a dead line for submition,but i was undergoing tests, that I didnt know the results, and couldn't submit them,or didn't know if I could at a later date.". Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Some of these findings are specific to benefit experience or the demographic characteristics of the respondents. For those who face barriers to acquiring evidence, this includes young respondents who found it difficult to provide identification and proof of address. As one respondent stated, it is "difficult for 16/17 year olds" who "don't usually have anything official to send".[68] Recently bereaved Funeral Support Payment applicants also report struggling to locate and access documents addressed to deceased relatives.

"Should be made more clear what things should be sent, because wasn't told or wasn't asked to prov(ide) evidence other than funeral director who I thought wou(ld) have shared information about opening new plots etc." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

[68] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.1.4 'Overall', 3.1.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 5.6.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

> "I applied previously but you said you could not confirm I lived in Scotland I sent an HMRC letter with my address on it as I'm at school and don't work I don't have anything else." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant[69]

The role of Social Security Scotland Staff in gathering supporting information was also viewed negatively. While some respondents were pleased that Social Security Scotland could collect evidence on the behalf of a client, others had a poor experience with this service. Several expressed concern that Social Security Scotland had not contacted their evidence provider when they understood that this was previously agreed. Others said that the conditions in which Social Security Scotland would collect this information were unclear; that a lack of follow up information left them wondering what had gone wrong, or if they could have helped.

> "As stated I have been assured on at least 4 occasions that the consultant dealing with my health condition would be contacted. This has not happened." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

As a result of this confusion, and/or their expectations not being met, these respondents often felt unfairly treated. Some were concerned that these issues had negatively impacted the decision they later received.

> "I asked you to contact my neurologist if you required supporting information and you did not and rejected the application. Amazing how you can supposedly understand my condition yet not collect the facts." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Don't know why you ask for employers details but never contacted them for confirmation about an employee, I actually think i gave 2 bits of information which we're technically the same information/Evidence i provided when i started my job." Respondent with experience of Job Start Payment

> "I was under the impression that SSS would independently communicate with my GP and consultant physician before making a decision on my claim. This has turned out to not be the case and I am in the process of getting help with the re-determination and possible appeal process." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[69] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.6.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

Some suggestions for improvement were made. For example, that guidance was more specific on what to include for each benefit, including exactly what Social Security Scotland would request. These requests were made alongside those advocating for email confirmation and updates on the status of gathering supporting information[70].

> "Please include a better link to submitting your Mat1 form for evidence and make clear its both sides of this form for processing. " Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Technical issues

Some respondents faced technical challenges in getting their supporting information to Social Security Scotland.

Many mentioned that the files they had were too large to upload; that they had problems in ensuring files were in the correct format; or that they were experiencing unexplained errors on Social Security Scotland websites. Some said that to upload supporting information required a level of digital literacy that not all applicants may possess.[71]

> "[…] the only thing that I could complain about is when unloading his documents after I submitted my claim it wouldn't accept the paperwork due to the format. I had to go onto the canva app and upload his picture on there and then save it and add it to the SSS portal. It was a faff but I am lucky I have the knowledge to do it. Not everyone would think to do that." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Had great difficulty in forwarding files to verify condition/medications/xray reports etc as the files were too large so they wouldn't send. Hence needed help which was provided by the individual who visited me at my home." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

The time taken to provide supporting information via Social Security Scotland websites, on top of an already lengthy application process, was referenced by several respondents. For example, a respondent had "spent hours" navigating the website while another "kept trying to submit the form for days".

When respondents faced technical difficulties, they often had to spend time contacting Social Security Scotland for assistance. While many found this support helpful, it was

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[70] See section 6.5.10 on this chapter for more insights on this topic.

[71] References to Social Security Scotland websites can be found in sections 6.5.5 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

often difficult to get through to someone due to long call wait times. Some resulted in having to post documents they had previously tried to upload online.

"I completed and submitted my application form. I then received a letter requesting further information, which I provided. By post (wage slip). I then received a letter from SSS saying I hadn't provided the information required, and that this might nullify my claim or reduce my payment. I spent 2 hours in total trying to contact SSS/ADP that day, to no avail. The web site just took me around in circles! Very frustrated." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

I was asked to provide proof of address and identity but the portal to send the documents wasn't working, I had to request an envelope sent out so I could send the documents back by mail, this significantly lengthened the process." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

When suggestions for improvement were made, the ability of Social Security Scotland websites to accept larger files appeared frequently.

"The upload limit and system is extremely frustrating. You need to accept larger attachments." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Issues in gathering supporting information from external stakeholders

Many respondents described issues and inconsistencies with external stakeholders when gathering evidence.

The majority referenced NHS and other health care providers. These external stakeholders were variously described as 'forgetting' to respond to request for supporting information; having trouble uploading information to Social Security Scotland websites; or providing information that was inaccurate or incomplete.

"I had a hiccup as my GP had forgotten to print out my diagnosis sheet. This was very unlike him." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I thought the wording around supporting documentation was unclear. I thought it was mandatory to include a supporting letter from my doctor but my doctor refused and said that this isn't routinely done. Please review this wording. I was able to provide enough documentation myself in the end." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Some respondents explained that they had seen several medical professionals, (particularly respondents with multiple medical conditions), and therefore no one medical professional knew them well enough to give an accurate report of their circumstances. Others said that GPs declined to provide supporting information as they did not perceive this to be their role.

Suggestions for improvement include those that advocate for Social Security Scotland to increase levels of engagement with healthcare professionals.

> "Getting supporting information is hard. For instance i only see some specialists once every so often or have seen them and no longer see them once diagnosed or sent to someone else. Same with doctor's they only see you at your worst then can be however long after that. Medication is easy enough to get for helping with support with application but i did struggle for supporting people to put on the application." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I waited almost 6 months for a decision. The delay was caused by my GP not using Sci-gateway. SSS also attempted paper copy by post which my GP practice say was returned but SSS say it was not received. [...] GP practice say they elect to not use Sci-gateway because it would involve the GP having to use their time to submit it electronically. GP's need to engage better with SSS [...] I hope that with engagement GP's can be better informed on the communication process with SSS for the betterment for all parties concerned." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

6.5.9 Emotional impact of applying for a benefit[72]

Many comments on the application process fore-fronted the emotional impact of making an application. Predominant themes include:

- Shame
- Vulnerability
- Distress on reflecting on personal circumstances
- Stress impeding the completion of administrative tasks
- Impact of the kindness and empathy of Social Security Scotland Staff

Several respondents highlighted experiencing shame, stigma, embarrassment or unease with applying for a benefit. This was particularly evident for those who had never

[72] References to the emotional impacts of engaging with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 6.5.9 'Application', 7.4.4. 'Decision', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer'

claimed benefits before. Moreover, for disability payment applicants who were newly diagnosed and coming to terms with their condition.

For some this made the process of applying feel distressing, “humiliating” or “degrading”. For these respondents it was particularly important to feel heard and reassured; they highlighted the role of supportive staff, thoughtful communications and straightforward processes in addressing stigma.

Many respondents described how reflecting on personal difficulties and challenges throughout the application could be emotive and distressing. This was particularly the case for respondents who had applied for a disability benefit, were recently bereaved or who had experienced trauma.

> “I spoke with my universal credit rep recently she called me and said I should apply. She listened. She heard my pain. She heard the guilt I felt. Having to be lower paid to not have a breakdown. She listened to what my therapist had to say. She asked why I had never applied before. I told her pride. I have hated every minute of this application and I regret ever swallowing my pride and trying.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “I should have filled this form out a long time ago but was embarrassed to do it. When I was helped by the lady Social Security Scotland she made it a much more comfortable process..” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

For some respondents, they began to engage with Social Security Scotland at a difficult moment in life, for example feeling stressed, unwell and in need of support. For these respondents, the application process could at times feel overwhelming. The emotional toll of the process was frequently cited as a barrier to completing an application.

> “Obviously at a time when you've just lost a loved one your emotions and head is all over place so any forms applications can trigger you but I suppose this is what it is to get help.” Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

> “I was upset about how events in the past that caused my problems continue to affect me now, how bad the problems now are, and the recalling of some of the events themselves continue to distress me.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Extreme difficult filling in each section, very overwhelming listing all negative points about your own child. I spent a very long time on each section and numerous times it had timeout and all information typed was lost. So, it was very soul destroying."
> Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

A few respondents explained how health conditions that are aggravated by stress, such as those associated with fatigue or having concentration/memory issues, made completing administrative tasks such as filling in forms difficult.

For others, they explained how life circumstances such as caring responsibilities rendered them time poor, over-stretched and stressed.

> "The form is long and that is difficult to complete when you are already dealing with a child with significant additional needs, home educating because there is no suitable education available and trying to juggle a job as well [...]" Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I suffer from stress and anxiety and although in hindsight the form was very clear and filling it in was ok the adding of evidence stressed me but that is on me as I am a bit of a techno phobe. Having been through the process I understand why it is what it is, my cognitive abilities are sufficient enough to comprehend what is being asked of me the anxiety and stress overwhelms me and triggers me mentally which then triggers me physically and wipes me out. So while I understand it is my health that is the issue, all forms normally do this to me automatically and the fact of it being electronic is a stressed too." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Overall, the role of kind and empathetic staff was highlighted as valuable in navigating the emotional impacts of applying for a benefit.

> "Although facing and acknowledging full on how much my life has changed and the challenges I face daily was mentally challenging the kindness, support and patience I had with with the staff helped me so much I am so grateful to them." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I was in such a bad place. The kindness and compassion shown by the lovely people I spoke with kept me strong and moving forward. I genuinely could not have done it without them." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

6.5.10 Communication and updates[73]

After applications were submitted, many respondents felt that Social Security Scotland was not communicative enough; that they did not provide enough updates relating to their application. Some felt that a lack of communication suggested Social Security Scotland did not care about their application.

> "To be kept more up to date with what is happening. If I hadn't persisted to know more, the application could have taken forever. Fortunately, it was dealt with promptly and efficiently in the end." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Poor experience and still no further forward despite first applying in June! No one cares!." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

However, for those who did receive regular updates on their application progress, they expressed feeling grateful and reassured that their application was progressing.

When suggestions for improvement were made, some respondents would have liked to receive confirmation emails or text messages. Others explained that they would prefer if everything were moved online for them to be able to view and access at their leisure, rather than waiting for letters.

> "Good communication from SSS via text of where we were in the process." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "The follow up mails and phone calls gave me assurance that I was on the right track." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "Would just be a lot easier to fill out everything online instead of waiting to receive letters." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[73] References to information received on application progress can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.5 'Webchat', 6.5.10 'Application', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

7 Decisions

This chapter presents insights on the experiences of clients who received a decision on their application. It will therefore only include benefits that require an application and exclude those who don't (case transfers and automatic payments).

It is worth noting that there are different 'types' of benefits (disability, family, etc.). The processes for applying are different in requirements and timelines for each due to the varying nature of the needs they cover.

7.1 Application processing timeframes

The first question in this section asked if respondents thought their application was handled within a reasonable timeframe. Two thirds (66%) of respondents agreed that their application was handled within a reasonable timeframe, while a fifth (19%) disagreed with that statement.

When looking across the different benefits respondents receiving a decision on their Funeral Support Payment (83%) and Five Family Payments (82%) were more likely to agree that their application was handled within a reasonable timeframe. Whereas respondents that applied for Job Start Payment (48%), Adult Disability Payment (62%) and Carer Support Payment (63%) were less likely to agree with that statement (See table 7.1 below).

Table 7.1: Application processing timeframe
All respondents who applied for a benefit

Benefit experience	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
Adult Disability Payment	62%	17%	21%	11,996
Child Disability Payment	65%	14%	21%	1,223
Carer Support Payment	63%	16%	22%	707
Five Family Payments	82%	9%	9%	2,339
Job Start Payment	48%	20%	33%	40
Funeral Support Payment	83%	9%	8%	795
Young Carer Grant	74%	14%	11%	297

7.2 Successful or unsuccessful applications

Two thirds (67%) of respondents who applied for a benefit in 2024-25 told us they were successful on their first attempt and a 6% were unsuccessful initially but later successful after a redetermination. That means that three quarters (74%) of respondents to this year's survey were successful in their applications while a quarter (26%) of respondents received an unsuccessful decision on their application (See Table 7.2 below).

Table 7.2: Application's outcomes
All respondents who applied for a benefit

<table>
<tr><th>Application was…</th><th>All applicants</th><th>All applicants (successful in the end)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Successful</td><td>67%</td><td rowspan="2">74%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unsuccessful then successful</td><td>6%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unsuccessful</td><td>26%</td><td>26%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td colspan="2">14,080</td></tr>
</table>

When looking at the outcomes of applications by benefit we can see that this is a diverse picture, as processes for applying for each of them vary in length and complexity. For most benefits, two thirds of respondents were successful on their first application. The extremes of that spectrum being Adult Disability Payment with two thirds (65%) of respondents being initially successful and Child Disability Payment with more than eight-in-ten (87%) being initially successful (See Table 7.3 below).

Table 7.3: Application's outcomes by benefit
All respondents who applied for a benefit

Benefit experience	Successful	Unsuccessful then successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Adult Disability Payment	65%	7%	28%	10,691
Child Disability Payment	87%	2%	11%	1,175
Carer Support Payment	72%	3%	24%	319
Five Family Payments	68%	5%	27%	1,406
Job Start Payment	58%	#	#	26
Funeral Support Payment	66%	5%	29%	227
Young Carer Grant	75%	9%	17%	236

7.3 Experience of receiving a decision

The survey then asked respondents to agree or disagree with some statements to understand what their experiences were of receiving a decision. Just under three quarters (73%) of respondents agreed that their decision was explained clearly, while 15% of them disagreed with that statement. A similar proportion of respondents (72%) agreed that they 'understood the decision' and 16% disagreed with that statement. (See Table 7.4)

Around two thirds (64%) of respondents agreed with the decision by Social Security Scotland, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed with it and 25% disagreed with the decision on their application. As it is to be expected agreement/disagreement is highly influenced by the success of the application with 96% of people who got a successful decision agreeing with their decision and 79% of respondents who were unsuccessful disagreeing with their decision.

Table 7.4: Experience of receiving a decision
All respondents who applied for a benefit

Thinking about the decision made on your application...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
It was explained clearly	73%	12%	15%	16,083
I understood the decision	72%	11%	16%	15,771
I agreed with the decision	64%	12%	25%	15,717

When looking at the agreement with these three statements Five Family Payments and Child Disability Payment have the higher level of agreement, both with 84% of respondents agreeing that their decision was explained clearly. Job Start Payment had the lower level of agreement with 58%.

Respondents with experience of Child Disability Payment and Young Carer Grant were more likely to agree with the statement ‘I understood the decision’ (85% and 84% respectively). Finally, Five Family Payments and Young Carer Grant had the higher levels of agreement with the statement ‘I agreed with the decision’ (81% both), followed by Child Disability Payment (79%). Adult Disability Payment had the lower level of agreement with 57%.

Table 7.5: Experience of receiving a decision by benefit
All respondents who applied for a benefit; percentage agree/strongly agreed

Thinking about the decision made on your application...	It was explained clearly	I understood the decision	I agreed with the decision	Total
Adult Disability Payment	68%	67%	57%	11,064
Child Disability Payment	84%	85%	79%	1,193
Carer Support Payment	77%	78%	73%	585
Five Family Payments	84%	84%	81%	2,257
Job Start Payment	58%	61%	60%	36
Funeral Support Payment	82%	83%	78%	668
Young Carer Grant	83%	84%	81%	280

7.4 Client Comments about decisions on applications

7.4.1 Summary

Anyone who had completed an application was asked to comment about their experience of receiving a decision.

Around 2,400 comments were analysed. Of these, around 2,000 were substantive responses, (meaning comments that referred to decisions and not other topics). These were coded and analysed thematically and by sentiment.

Four main themes stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- communication with Social Security Scotland
- emotional impact of a decision
- timing of the decision
- eligibility

Communication with Social Security Scotland: Many respondents, when commenting on the decision they received, mentioned the contents of decision letters, as well as the level of communication received from Social Security Scotland between submitting and receiving an application decision. Some of these comments were positive, variously highlighting the clarity, helpfulness and level of detail included in decision letters and from staff. Negative comments often mentioned a lack of updates between application submission and a decision being received.

Emotional impact of a decision: Many respondents reflected on the ways in which receiving a decision made them feel. Some described feeling relief or validation when hearing that their application was successful. Others felt unheard and anxious when they did not receive an award. A smaller number of respondents explained that, even when they agreed with a decision, the experience of applying for and receiving a decision was emotionally challenging.

Timing of the decision: The time taken to receive a decision was a significant theme in the comments, that gained both positive and negative responses.

Eligibility: Eligibility was also a theme linked to the decision-making process. Particularly, some respondents with experience of a disability benefit negatively commented on the points-based system for assessing disability, describing it as inaccurate and generic. Some commented that the approach should be more individualised, while others said the eligibility criteria fails to take into account health conditions that fluctuate in severity.

7.4.2 Full report

7.4.3 Communication with Social Security Scotland

Many respondents referenced the contents of decision letters. Some of these comments were positive, variously highlighting the clarity, helpfulness and level of detail included in decision letters. Others were positive as well about the inclusion of additional information signposting them to other sources of support.[74]

> "I felt that the letter explaining the decision was very well done. It gave me lots of detail about how the decision had been reached, what information has been used and how supporting information had helped. It made me feel we were being supported rather than having to 'prove' our child's difficulties." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I appreciated the clarity of the decision and explanation of the points process. I found the additional information about other support helpful. The language of the decision made me feel respected." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When comments about decision letters were negative, they often described inaccuracies, a lack of clarity, or an impersonal tone. Those with experience of Adult Disability Payment notably highlighted a lack clarity on the "points" based system used for assessing their claims.

> "My original decision wasnt clear as it had missing information. I need to ask for an update one as my care component information was missing. When reading decisions letter my eligibility wasn't clear" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "I feel like the point system is a little off and could be better explained as I felt that I should have got more points than I did on some parts but then I don't know how it gets scored so I cant comment" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

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[74] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.1.4 'Overall, 3.1.4 'Overall, 3.1.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 3.1.4 'Overall', 7.4.3 'Decision', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer'.

> "After being successful and reading through the points I get my basic condition hadn't been understood and wasn't referred to in the feedback." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Several respondents commented about their experiences communicating with staff when trying to get their decision. This could take the form of Social Security Scotland having reached out to the respondent directly, or a respondent having contacted Social Security Scotland to find out about their decision.

The majority of comments said that staff were helpful, respectful and friendly in their approach to communicating decisions and the decision process. However, a few Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment respondents felt that staff were not knowledgeable about their illness, disability or condition, which lessened respondent confidence in the decision-making process.[75], [76]

> "They explained to me that I had applied for the best start grant too early in the pregnancy and that I can reapply when I'm 24 weeks pregnant. She explained the reasons really well and I fully understood them" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

> "Just a massive thank you to the lady I had spoke with. Dealing with all the bills and things for my late mum some of the companies I had contacted didn't treat me very nicely at all, added stress onto my already stressful situation and had me in tears hiwever the lady I spoke with just helped me which was all I asked" Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

> "Having a decision maker that knew the disability would have been a great start. First thing she said was "what's that, i have never heard of it" so how can you possibly make a decision on something you know nothing about? Wait time is ridiculous and now having to wait for anoyher few months for the appeal." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

[75] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.
[76] References to staff manner can be found in sections 5.3.3 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 6.5.3 'Application', 7.4.3 'Application'.

7.4.4 Emotional impact of a decision[77]

Positive Emotional Impact

A lot of comments referenced the emotional impact that a decision had on a respondent. When comments were positive, some reflected on their “delight” at, or “appreciation” of, the material impact the extra money would bring to their lives.

Respondents also described how receiving a positive decision variously left them feeling respected, listened to and understood. Some described the decision as validating and, for those applying for a disability benefit, were pleased to have their disability recognised.[78]

> “I felt quite emotional receiving a letter acknowledging my disability. The letter treated me with dignity. I appreciated that, even though some things I had mentioned weren’t accepted, they were acknowledged and it was explained why they weren’t accepted. It was good that it listed the sections and the points awarded for each. I found it very helpful that suggestions were made of things that could help me. The letter was well written, respectful, easy to understand and gave the impression that the reviewer had taken care reviewing my case.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “It was very quick and is already making a massive difference, we will be able to continue our daughters on going therapy sessions.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

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[77] References to the emotional impacts of engaging with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 6.5.9 ‘Application’, 7.4.4. ‘Decision’, 8.2.3 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.5 ‘Transfer’

[78] References to the embedding of humanising processes into the service (including those that enable clients to express their individualism and unique circumstances) can be found in sections 3.3.5 ‘Overall’, 6.5.6 ‘Application’, 6.5.8 ‘Application’, 7.4.4 ‘Decision’.

"I am absolutely delighted I got the decision I did. This will have a massive impact on my life. I have been struggling with my conditions for years and staying in work was becoming more and more challenging as I travel on foot to work and my extreme fatigue and anxiety caused by my conditions was making my life extremely difficult. This decision allows me to now have transport to and from my place of work that I couldn't afford before. I can now continue to stay in work now that the physical demand on my body has become less. I feel that working people like myself struggling with conditions and going to work everyday are sometimes overlooked in today's society but please know that this decision really has went a long way to ensuring I continue to work and not burden the benefits system anymore than it needs to be. Thank you so much." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Mixed or negative emotional impacts

When comments were mixed or negative, some described feeling "distress" and "anxiety" as they waited nervously for a decision. Some said that in receiving a decision, this led to them feeling disappointed, let down, devalued, not listened to, and/or having had their time wasted.

Some comments mentioned feeling the decision they received was incorrect and a result of Social Security Scotland misunderstanding their circumstances.[79] For some of these respondents, the receipt of a no-award decision left them unwilling to reapply due to the "energy" required.

For those with experience of applying for a disability benefit, the receipt of a decision letter was described by some as triggering mixed emotional responses. It "made me cry", wrote one respondent, because although the decision outcome was positive, it came at a time of self "denial" about the decline of their health.

Some referenced that this was not the first time they had received a no-award decision on their application for the same benefit. For one respondent, having twice received a no-award decision, they were left feeling "really disappointed" at what they perceived as an "unfair" decision.

For some, receiving a no-award decision turned their thoughts to the next stage of the process. This includes dreading having to repeat the application process or undergo (or feeling too stressed to undergo) an appeal.

[79] References to respondents feeling misunderstood or mistrusted by Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall, 7.4.4 'Decision', 7.4.6 'Decisions', 10.3.3 'Discrimination', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

"As I was experiencing a decline in my health over a period of time, I didn't realise to what extent I had drastically changed. The world around me now doesn't make sense. I have family, friends and close colleagues to thank for pointing me in the direction of Adult Disability Payment. I must admit that seeing the decision in writing, although a positive outcome in terms of the benefit to me, made me cry as I am still in denial as to the change in me. I have to admit to myself that I am now unable to work. I am a linguist of five languages. I await a decision on my retirement which has taken many months of Occupational Health interviews. The benefit will be a huge help. Thank you. I deeply appreciate it." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"Twice [I've] applied for it an twice refused it [I've] had cancer and been through all the treatments and big operation , [I've] not been left the same physically and mentally and it does affect my daily life but I was refused even though I know people who get this adp and have not got the severe issues I have been left with after my cancer it seems very very unfair I had nobody call me to ask me what my daily life is due to my issues I can say honestly I'm really disappointed" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I thought it was an unfair decision, but I am too stressed to appeal the decision." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"It took to much of my energy and made me so unwell. I don't have the physical energy to reapply." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

7.4.5 Timing of the decision

Positive comments about timing

For some respondents, the decision appeared to be extremely quick compared to their expectations or the stated timelines. When respondents had received updates or contact between submitting their application and receiving a decision, they often expressed less concern about the length of time they had waited.[80]

[80] References to information received on application progress can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.5 'Webchat', 6.5.10 'Application', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

“I liked the way the decision was broken down and explained instead of it just being a "accepted" or "declined". I also liked that I was kept up to date via email about it being processed so I knew that it hadn’t been lost or forgotten about. I felt the whole process was very respectful and person centred so thank you” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

“i got the decision very very quickly after I applied. I had been advised it would be about 6-8 weeks before I would receive the decision, I received it within 1 week which was a very pleasant surprise!” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

“I recieved a decision very quickly and was updated by text and email frequently which was good” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

“Application decision took longer than usual (advised by SSS due to high number of applications) but was made aware of this by text so feel communication was really good and was kept informed” Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

Negative comments about timing

When comments about timing were negative, respondents reflected on the anxiety and stress caused by longer than expected processing times.[81] Some added that this was compounded by not hearing anything from Social Security Scotland between submitting their application and receiving a decision.

Some respondents highlighted that they were still waiting on a decision letter. For some, they had received payments before a decision letter, which caused confusion for some as to what the payment was for.[82] The time periods that respondents mentioned varied greatly, but their negativity about not having yet received a decision were consistent.

“I handed in the application and didn’t hear a thing for 6 months then money was put it my accout still without any letter or confirmation so didn’t know what it was for until a week later.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

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[81] References to payments can be found in sections 3.3.4 ‘Overall’, 7.4.5 ‘Decision’, 8.2.5 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.5. ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’.

[82] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 ‘Overall, 3.3.4 ‘Overall, 3.3.4 ‘Overall’, 3.3.5 ‘Overall’, 5.3.5 ‘Staff’, 7.4.5 ‘Decisions’, 8.2.4 ‘Transfer’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’.

> “I've never received notification of decision. I only know what payment I receive every 4 weeks and from that I know I'm not getting mobility allowance although I have great mobility issues.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “Again it’s 5 months later and still no decision or any contact with any sort of update on my daughters claim” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> “I still have never received confirmation that I was to receive anything until money came in my bank account, 5 days later was when I received my letters to tell me. I applied start of January and was never told until 18th February. I still have never received any information regarding online account for best start card” Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

7.4.6 Eligibility[83]

Having received a decision, some respondents reflected on the approach Social Security Scotland used to assess their eligibility.

Some Five Family Payment respondents said that eligibility criteria should include people not in receipt of any other benefits.

Many respondents with experience of a disability benefit negatively commented on the ‘points-based’ system for eligibility, describing it as inaccurate and generic.[84]

Some disability payment respondents said the approach used to determine whether, and what, applicants would be awarded was flawed and resulted in unfair, inaccurate assessments. Flaws identified by respondents include decisions made that: are based on application form questions that were irrelevant to the applicant; are based on a paucity of details requested on the applicant’s individual circumstances; seem to contradict published eligibility guidance.

Some suggested that the decision-making approach should be more individualised, for example, for Social Security Scotland to be more proactive in investigating peoples lived experiences. For those with experience of a disability benefit, some said the eligibility criteria needs to consider health conditions that fluctuate in severity.

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[83] References to eligibility can be found in sections 6.5.4 ‘Application’, 7.4.6 ‘Decision’, 8.2.6 ‘Transfer’, 10.3.6 ‘Discrimination’

[84] References to respondents feeling misunderstood or mistrusted by Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 ‘Overall, 7.4.4 ‘Decision’, 7.4.6 ‘Decisions’, 10.3.3 ‘Discrimination’, 10.3.4 ‘Discrimination’.

“I think it is unfair that people who are out working and have a job get penalised and don’t get offered the help from at least one of the grants all because they don't get any benefits” Respondent with experience of Five Family Payments

“I feel it shouldn’t go on points as even if u can still manage everyday tasks it doesn’t mean u aren’t struggling still with things we do everyday” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

“I feel my decision was unfair as when I checked for eligibility my condition was there and made clear that I could apply. If you have to be a certain deafness then it should state this.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

“The questions asked were completely irrelevant to the illness I have, therefore I wasn't able to give a full justification as to why I need this. I was also unsuccessful because of this. Not all disabilities and illnesses are the same, and I feel as though because I can still physically walk I was poorly treated and judged for this. The pain I experience and other severe symptoms make living a normal life difficult, but because I can walk unaided 80% of the time, I was declined. It is completely ridiculous and ableis” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

On the form it asks ' how many days do you experience this'. My answer was that it varies. It seems to me that an individual 's experiences need to fit neatly into a particular time frame. Illness and capacity to cope is variable and cannot fit neatly into a time frame; yet the negative, continuing effects are detrimental and can be unrelenting. The application process and questions asked does not take account of this. Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

8 Transfer of awards to Social Security Scotland

This chapter presents findings from respondents who experienced the transfer of their awards from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland. These respondents completed a modified survey which included additional questions focused on their experience of the transfer process in place of questions about applications or decisions.

15,800 survey respondents had experienced a transfer, which equates to over four-in-ten (43%) of all respondents. Respondents who had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment represent almost three quarters (73%) of this respondent group. Respondents who had their award transferred to Carer Support Payment make up over a quarter (27%) and Child Disability Payment only 0.1%. As noted in the Methodology chapter, the transfer of awards to Child Disability Payment concluded during this financial year and the small number of responses means they are not included in breakdowns of findings by benefit experience. This section therefore focuses on Adult Disability Payment and Carer Support Payment when splitting the data by benefit.

8.1 Experience of the transfer process

Of those who experienced a transfer, eight-in-ten (80%) agreed with the statement 'I felt informed about the process' and seven-in-ten (72%) agreed that they 'felt reassured about the process'. Respondents were asked if they had felt anxious about the transfer and if they felt supported during the process. For these statements, 'neither agree nor disagree' responses accounted for a much larger proportion.

Table 8.1: Views on the transfer process
Respondents who experienced a transfer of their award

Thinking about your Case Transfer, how much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
I felt informed about the process	80%	13%	7%	15,127
I felt reassured about the process	72%	19%	9%	14,851
Being Case Transferred made me feel anxious	47%	24%	29%	15,023
I felt supported during the process	48%	38%	14%	14,982

For respondents that had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment and Carer Support Payment a very similar proportion agreed that they 'felt informed about the process' (80% and 79% respectively); 'felt reassured about the process' (72% both); and 'felt supported during the process' (47% and 50% respectively). Half of respondents who transferred to Adult Disability Payment (51%) agreed they felt anxious about this process compared to just over a third (36%) of respondents transferred to Carer Support Payment.

Table 8.2: Views on the transfer process, by transfer type
Respondents who experienced a transfer

Agreed or strongly agreed that…	Award transferred to…	
	Adult Disability Payment	Carer Support Payment
I felt informed about the process	80%	79%
I felt reassured about the process	72%	72%
Being Case Transferred made me feel anxious	51%	36%
I felt supported during the process	47%	50%
Total	11,038	4,063

The survey then asked for agreement or disagreement on four statements about the communication clients received about the transfer of their award. Most clients should receive a letter from Social Security Scotland letting them know that the transfer process had started and one to let them know when it was concluded. An exception to this is when Social Security Scotland required further information because a review was due (See Section 6.4 on Consultations) or when a change of circumstances was required during the transfer. Clients should also receive communication from the Department for Work and Pensions about the transfer of their award. Respondents' answers may also reflect their experience of this communication.

Around three quarters of respondents agreed that the communication they received about their case transfer 'was clear and easy to understand' (77%), 'the tone was friendly' (77%) and 'it helped me to understand what was happening and why' (74%). A similar but slightly lower proportion (72%) agreed that the communication they received made them feel confident that they could approach Social Security Scotland if they had a query. In their comments, respondents raised a number of themes relating to communication about the transfer. These are discussed in section 8.2 below.

Table 8.3: Views on communication about the transfer process
All respondents who experienced a transfer

The communication I received about the transfer...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Total
was clear and easy to understand	77%	15%	8%	15,059
tone was friendly	77%	20%	3%	14,649
helped me to understand what was happening and why	74%	18%	8%	14,881
made me feel confident that I could approach Social Security Scotland if I had a query	72%	20%	8%	15,010

Over three quarters of respondents who had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment and Carer Support Payment agreed that the communication about the transfer 'was clear and easy to understand' (77% for both) and the 'tone was friendly' (77% and 78% respectively). Just under a quarter of respondents who had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment and Carer Support Payment also agreed that the communication 'helped (them) understand what was happening and why' (74% for both). Lastly, as slightly higher proportion of respondents who had their award transferred to Carer Support Payment agreed that the communication they received 'made me feel confident that I could approach Social Security Scotland if I had a query' (75% compared to 71% for Adult Disability Payment). See Table 8.4 below.

Table 8.4: Views on communication received from Social Security Scotland about the transfer process, by transfer type
Respondents who experienced a transfer

Strongly agreed or agreed that the communication…	Award transferred to…	
	Adult Disability Payment	Carer Support Payment
was clear and easy to understand	77%	77%
tone was friendly	77%	78%
helped me to understand what was happening and why	74%	74%
made me feel confident that I could approach Social Security Scotland if I had a query	71%	75%
Total	10,962	4,073

8.2 Client comments about the transfer process

8.2.1 Summary

Respondents who had their award transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland were asked to comment on their experience.

Around 3,500 comments were analysed. Of these, around 3,350 substantive responses were coded and analysed for both overall sentiment (positive, mixed, or negative) as well as theme.

Five significant themes stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are summarised below and then reported on in detail, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. The key themes were:

- Positive feedback about the transfer process.
- Mixed remarks about written communication including positive feedback about the tone of Social Security Scotland's letters and negative feedback about communication gaps or feelings of overwhelm.
- Challenges and problems during the transfer process.
- Benefit-specific issues such as changing payment dates for Carer Support Payment clients and reviews for Adult Disability Payment clients.
- Regardless of sentiment, a recurring theme linked the transfer process with feelings of anxiety.

Positive feedback: Over half of the comments analysed were 'positive' and praised: the relative ease of the transfer process; an "effortless" transfer with no interruption to payments; and made favourable comparisons between experiences with Social Security Scotland compared to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mixed comments about communication: Many respondents described letters as "informative", "easy to understand" and "friendly" in tone. Respondents liked that letters provided information on how to contact Social Security Scotland, with some stating they felt confident they could get in touch if needed. There were mixed opinions on the frequency of communication; some felt "reassured" whilst others felt overwhelmed.

Challenges and problems during the transfer process: Some respondents said the reasons behind the transfer weren't clear and others said they had felt 'stuck' between organisations during the transfer process. Some reported mistakes with personal details and inconveniences with different payments being paid to the same bank account.

Benefit-specific issues: There was considerable negative feedback from carers about: communication to clients who don't receive payments; changes to the payment cycle; and errors made by the Department for Work and Pensions. Respondents whose award transferred to Adult Disability Payment raised concerns about reviews of their awards.

Anxiety about the transfer process: Respondents repeatedly described how the transfer process had made them feel, specifically, feelings of anxiety that can accompany an important change. This theme is addressed throughout the chapter.

8.2.2 Full report

8.2.3 Positive feedback about the transfer process

Over half of the 3,300 comments that were coded and analysed were 'positive'. Much of the feedback provided by respondents was in the form of short, favourable statements.

There were many common words and phrases between comments. Some focussed on the respondents' emotional response, such as feeling "happy" or "stress free", whilst others focussed on the process itself, describing it as "easy", "simple" and "straightforward".[85]

For many, a particularly positive aspect of the transfer was that it had been "effortless" on their part. Respondents were pleased that the transfer had not required them to take any action, such as filling in forms. Many commented that the process had been "seamless" with no interruption to their payments. Others said there had been "no impact" of the transfer itself, that "nothing changed". Many said the process was "smooth" with "no issues".

> "I found it to be straightforward and without any stress." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Everything changed without me having to do anything, so it was all good." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "I have no complaints at all. I was kept informed and there was no change in benefit payments. It all went very smoothly." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Some respondents who reported a positive experience said they had nonetheless felt anxious at the prospect of the transfer. For some, any kind of change, especially relating to financial matters, can cause worry. Respondents said that their concerns had been eased upon experiencing a smooth transfer, with no need for action from them.

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[85] References to the emotional impacts of engaging with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 6.5.9 'Application', 7.4.4. 'Decision', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer'

"I admit that I was nervous when I got the letters. I had to get my niece to help me understand the letters. A bit silly as once she went through it with me. It was 'easy peasy'. Nothing needs to be improved." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"Because of my own disabilities and anxieties, I don't like dealing with ANY admin responsibilities. Nor do I make phone calls except extreme situations. This process took MOST of the anxiety away due to me not needing to do a single thing." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

There were comments from respondents who were pleased that their awards had been moved to Social Security Scotland. Some had negative experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions and felt that Social Security Scotland would be "different", particularly in how clients are treated.[86]

Reasons given by respondents for favourable comparisons focussed on a belief that respect for clients is at the heart of the Scottish social security system. Comments referenced: clearer and friendlier communication; feeling trusted and supported; and helpful and kind staff.

"I was actually relieved that my carers benefit was moving to Social Security Scotland as I very much appreciate their mission to treat people with dignity fairness and respect." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"The Department for Work and Pensions was a mess, difficult to speak to the right person and communication was awful. Social Security Scotland was so much better, everyone I spoke to was clear, very understanding and helpful, they spoke to me like a person, not a case number and kept me informed throughout." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

[86] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

8.2.4 Communication about the transfer[87]

Many respondents left positive feedback about the clarity and tone of letters from Social Security Scotland, with some saying it was clearer and kinder than letters from the Department for Work and Pensions. There were mixed opinions on the frequency of communication; some felt "reassured" whilst others felt overwhelmed.

Positive feedback about letters

There was a great deal of positive feedback about letters from Social Security Scotland about the transfer. Respondents described letters as "informative" and said they had provided them with the facts and details they needed to understand the transfer process.

There was also praise for the clarity of the information provided. Respondents said letters were "easy to understand" and used plain English. Respondents were pleased that information was conveyed in a way that respondents could follow and absorb. For some respondents, the quality of the communication they received had helped to alleviate misgivings or anxieties about the process.

> "Very easy to understand communication which explained everything." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "I found the system easy without all the mubble jumble of official jargon being to much for my brain to process." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "For me personally with a brain injury I could what my husband read to me it was good to know it was in plain English and to the point, and making us feel we didn't have to worry." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

When respondents reflected on the tone of letters from Social Security Scotland, comments were largely positive. The tone was described as: "friendly"; "helpful"; "personal"; "polite": and "respectful".

Some comments illustrated how the tone gave clients a positive impression of Social Security Scotland. Respondents who were happy with the tone of communication said

[87] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

this helped to reassure underlying fears about the transfer process and/ helped to build trust with the agency.[88]

> "I liked how [letters] were personalised using my first name. It felt much more personal to me. The information was easy to understand and was very detailed though put across in an easy way. All in all it gave me a lot of confidence with the new department." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "The information and tone of the letters were friendly and helpful. It helped me to understand the process and reduced my anxiety." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Feeling informed and getting in touch for help[89]

Many respondents reported feeling well informed and updated throughout the transfer process. Positive feedback highlighted the timing and the frequency of communication. Some said that letters had arrived with "enough notice" and at "key stages" during the transfer. Others were pleased to have received updates as the process progressed.

Some respondents emphasised that the communication and updates they received helped them feel "supported" and "reassured" throughout the process. Relating again to the theme of anxiety, some respondents said timely communication had helped to ease their apprehension about the transfer process. For these respondents, feeling well-informed and being provided with clear information had eased underlying concerns and allowed them to feel confident about the process.

> "Kept informed all throught the process." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "I was informed before the transfer that this was going to happen. And was notified at every stage of the transfer to what was happening and everything went very smoothly and I had no worries whatsoever of the transfer." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

[88] References to the trust respondents have in Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.
[89] References to information received on application progress can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 4.4.5 'Webchat', 6.5.10 'Application', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.4 'Transfer'.

"From start to finish I was kept informed so I was less anxious about the process. Felt taken care of." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Some respondents were pleased that communication from Social Security Scotland had included details of how to get in touch for help. Some said that when combined with the tone of the communication, being provided with these details made them feel comfortable and confident that they could contact Social Security Scotland if needed.

"It felt good, the letter explained what was happining if I had any queries I could just phone." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"The tone of your communication has been easy to understand and has made me feel you are approachable and friendly should I need to contact you." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Mixed feedback about communication

There were many comments relating to communication which were mixed in sentiment, meaning the respondents provided both positive and negative feedback.

A primary theme among mixed comments was the comparison between communication received from Social Security Scotland and from the Department for Work and Pensions.[90]

Having experience of both organisations, respondents were able to contrast the style, tone and content of information provided by each organisation about the transfer process. These comments mostly contrasted favourable feedback about Social Security Scotland's communication with negative feedback about the Department for Work and Pensions. Compared to communication from the Department for Work and Pensions, respondents said that letters from Social Security Scotland were friendlier, easier to understand and more respectful.

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[90] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

> “It was immediately clear to me that the tone of communication had shifted completely. Every piece of communication I've received has been a world apart from anything I receive(d) from the Department for Work and Pensions. The tone in their communiqué is always one of accusation, condescension and intimidation; yours has clearly been worded to be non-judgemental and supportive and *it shows*.” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

For respondents who had experienced a transfer to Carer Support Payment a substantial amount of feedback concerned a “confusing” letter from the Department for Work and Pensions, sent at the beginning of the transfer process. Many thought the language inferred that their awards had been “reassessed” and potentially terminated. This caused alarm and worry for respondents, many of whom reported contacting both the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland to clarify the status of their award. In contrast, written communication sent from Social Security Scotland was praised for its clarity and tone.

> “The letters from Social Security Scotland were friendly, clear to understand once my brainfog got around the letter, unlike the letter from the Department for Work and Pensions to inform me of the transfer. Their letter rabbled on about decisions and that their decision was not to continue the claim which made me panic as I thought I done something with wrong with updates or something else!” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> “In my experience, all the communications that came from Social Security Scotland were exactly what was required. The letters were clear, timely, and contained all the information I required. In contrast, some of the letters I received from the Department for Work and Pensions on the matter were unclear. One letter in particular from thr Department for Work and Pensions caused significant anxiety to me (and my wife, who I provide care for). Fortunately I was able to gain reassurance by referring to the Social Security Scotland correspondence and just ignored that particular letter. Many thanks to Social Security Scotland for making your part of the process client focused. The Department for Work and Pensions could learn much from your approach!” Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Negative feedback about communication

Some respondents were critical about the frequency of letters about the transfer. There was also some negative feedback that said letters were unclear and confusing.

There were mixed feelings regarding the quantity of letters sent to respondents informing them about the transfer of their award. As noted above, some were pleased with the frequency of communication which helped them feel "informed". However, some said they received too many letters, many of which repeated information that had already been provided. This felt overwhelming for some respondents, whilst others highlighted the costs associated with sending multiple letters.

> "There were too many repetitive letters, a lot of money could be saved if paperwork was reduced, I'm dealing with it for both of my children, the whole process is drawn out, time consuming and makes caring for them more of a chore." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Too much communication I received four or five letters telling me I was moving and what to expect and my husband got the same." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Relating to the timing of communications, there were negative comments from respondents who felt the letters about the transfer process had arrived in a confusing order. For some, the timing of letters from both the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland appeared "out of sync", making it more difficult to understand the information provided. There were suggestions for better alignment in the timing of communication from the organisations.

Although relatively few in number, some respondents reported receiving no communication about the transfer at all, or only after the process was complete.

> "Apart from the letters arriving the wrong way round one said about you would have had a letter - the letter in question arrive a couple of days later." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Letters were received out of sync. So I received a letter stating I've moved followed by a letter stating I'm going to move. This caused stress and anxiety." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred Adult Disability Payment

> "I didn't get any notification until the transfer had already been completed." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Lastly, there were comments from respondents who found communication unclear and difficult to understand. Some wanted more detailed information whilst others said the communication could have been more concise. It was not always clear from these comments whether respondents were describing information from the Department for Work and Pensions, Social Security Scotland, or both.

"I think more in depth information is required. Despite receiving a letter about transfer process, I didn't understand what that would mean as the information could have been followed up with more depth of information." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"Letters too long. Too much information that's not always easy to understand." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

8.2.5 Challenges and problems with the transfer process[91]

Although most feedback about the transfer process was 'positive' in sentiment, some respondents raised a variety of issues and concerns about the transfer process.

Predominant issues facing clients include the emotional impact of change and feelings of anxiety. Others experienced a lack of clarity as to reasons behind the transfer, which, for some, was compounded by a lack of information available from Social Security Scotland helpline staff.

Some reported feeling "stuck" between agencies during the process with regards to reporting changes to their circumstances. Lastly, there were reports of errors with personal and contact information, and issues with preferred bank details for payments.

Anxiety and emotional impact of the transfer process

Respondents were candid about the emotional impact a change, such as the transfer of an award, can have. Comments described how a change of this nature can be challenging and give rise to feelings of concern. Many respondents were clear that these feelings were part of their overall experience, regardless of whether the transfer had been 'smooth'. Some said they had felt "anxious", "concerned" or "worried" despite experiencing a smooth and seamless transfer.

"Although the process was easy to understand the reasons why it was changing, it still made me feel anxious because change can do that." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

As an important source of financial support, some respondents said it was 'natural' to feel concerned that the transfer would be smooth and payments would continue.

[91] References to the emotional impacts of engaging with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 6.5.9 'Application', 7.4.4. 'Decision', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer'

Some said this type of change could be particularly difficult for those with mental health conditions.

A lack of trust resulting from poor experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions or other 'official' bodies could also lead to worry about errors and delays in the transfer process. For some respondents transferring to Adult Disability Payment, previous experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions (such as health assessments) caused concern that the process would require significant effort from clients, such as completing detailed forms or processes.

> "Do not forget that the change over is not good for people who have mental health problems as it's basically made me ill, my partner is so confused about everything he has bipolar and he doesn't know what is going on so please think about it please." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "It's always terrifying when benefits change not always a nice process with assessments in the past. Made to feel horrible and not spoken to as a person." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Lack of clarity

As well as anxiety, the transfer process felt like a confusing time for some respondents. Some reported a lack of clarity on the reasons for the transfer process. In their comments these respondents asked "why?" the transfer was necessary. Some respondents also said that it wasn't clear what the impact of the transfer was for them, or what "difference" the transfer would make.

There were also comments from those who wanted more information or reassurance about any financial impact of the transfer. Some said the information they had received about the transfer had not provided answers to these questions.[92] Again, it was unclear if respondents were referring to communication from Social Security Scotland, the Department for Work and Pensions, or both.

Some expressed concern about the administrative costs of a project that wasn't clearly justified. Others were satisfied with their experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions and saw no reason for the transfer.

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[92] References to payments can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.5. 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

"I just got a letter saying that Disability Living Allowance was moving from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland and that I don't need to do anything. I think it should have mentioned as to why it was moving as that wasn't mentioned." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"Just did not fully understand transfer and what it means to me." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"I received a letter informing me what was going to happen, but there was no reassurance that my income would not go down, which was a worry for me and made me anxious about it." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"I do not understand the reason for the change and do not see a need for it. Would have preferred things to stay as they were." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"I didn't know why the change was taking place as I was perfectly happy with the service I received. More staff being employed to perform the same task. More t[iers] of government, more costs." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

A few respondents described getting in touch with Social Security Scotland via phone or web chat for further information about the transfer of their award. Some respondents said that staff were unable to provide information or answer questions about transfer-related issues. Respondents were unhappy with staff's lack of knowledge; that they couldn't provide the answers and support they needed.[93]

"I feel too many staff do not have the information being requested in the transfer from PIP to Adult Disability Payment. Explanations on the intricacies are too varied to be of any use. A client should not have to make multiple phone calls to have the information to satisfy of carry the query forward." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

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[93] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

> "I spoke to two people on support line, this did not give me the information or a complete picture of how the transfer would take place and affect the family's money. There was a lack of solid information and understanding of the process even from the staff." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Feeling "stuck" between two government agencies

The process of transferring awards to Social Security Scotland can take several weeks or months to complete. During the transfer period, a client may experience a change in their circumstances, personal details or contact information.[94]

There were comments from respondents who felt 'stuck' between organisations during the transfer process.[95] Some described feeling uncertain about how significant changes impacting their eligibility should be handled during the transfer process. For example, respondents who had awards transferred to Adult Disability Payment and experienced a worsening of health conditions, or respondents who reach retirement age during the transfer of their award to Carer Support Payment.

Some respondents reported feeling unsure which organisation to get in touch with to report these changes. Others had tried to report a change or provide an update but had felt 'passed between' the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland.[96]

> "Relatively seamless. Only complaint was when time from transfer to completion I was without a clear route to relate changes affecting me, for months neither service would listen to changes affecting me." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I'm in a situation where I have been case transfered and I am also in the process of getting my State Pension. So I feel in limbo at the moment. I don't know how this will affect things." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

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[94] References to a change in circumstance can be found in sections 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.
[95] References to respondents feeling stuck between the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.
[96] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

Errors with personal information and contradictory practices around payments

There were comments from respondents who reported mistakes in the use of their personal information, (information such as addresses and bank details). A few respondents said that letters about the transfer of their award had been sent to old addresses. There were also a couple of comments from respondents who reported errors in the use of their personal details, such as names and details of representatives. A small number of respondents said their payments had been sent to incorrect bank accounts following the transfer.

> "I was unaware that my case had been transferred and only found out when I called about my renewal of my benefit. I found out that my address was completely wrong and all my information was sent elsewhere." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "Firstly, [the process could be improved] if it was a clean transfer off complete notes. They had my name wrong as the spokesperson for my special needs son. It took several calls to get this fixed." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

A few respondents whose awards transferred to Carer Support Payment raised an issue with how their payments are paid. This affected those who experienced a transfer of their award from the Department for Work and Pensions who already receive a benefit from Social Security Scotland.[97]

In such cases, respondents who previously managed their money between multiple bank accounts (i.e. one account being paid into from the Department for Work and Pensions, and another paid into by Social Security Scotland) found that the payment of transferred benefits were automatically paid to the same bank account as other Social Security Scotland administered benefits. Some said it was inconvenient for different payments from Social Security Scotland to be paid into the same account, as it made budgeting more difficult. Moreover, it appeared to contradict Social Security Scotland's own rules that state some benefits must be paid into a dedicated bank account.

[97] References to payments can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.5. 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

> "The only thing that wasnt helpful is that I have 3 accounts, one for benefits (I am full Universal Credit and don't work because of my son) one for bills to be paid out of and one that is my budget weekly spending, the last was the account my Carer's Allowance was paid into as I budgeted it into my weekly spending (safe money to spend) but when it switched I had to change the account it was paid into because you don't allow money to go into diffrent account and they all have to match so I now have to switch that money back every week before I can spend it so it takes a bit more effort and working out on my end." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Seamless experience. My only point is that my bank account was changed automatically because I have my daughters Child Disability Payment paid into my account as I am her appointee. So now both payments get paid into the same account and the rules stipulated that I have to be able to show that the Child Disability Payment gets paid into a separate account!!" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

8.2.6 Benefit-specific issues with the transfer process

This section covers themes relating to issues or problems with the transfer process that are unique to those with experience of individual benefits.

Respondents who experienced a transfer to Carer Support Payment raised a number of issues which caused frustration, confusion and anxiety. These concerned: communication to pension-age clients who do not receive payments; changes to payment dates; and errors with other benefits and entitlements. These themes are described below.

A further theme specific to Carer Support Payment, relating to communication from the Department for Work and Pensions, was covered in section 4.2.3 above.

Respondents whose award transferred to Adult Disability Payment raised issues concerning reviews of their awards.

Pension-age clients whose award transferred to Carer Support Payment[98]

There were hundreds of comments from pension-age respondents with negative feedback about the process of transferring from Carer's Allowance to Carer Support Payment.

The eligibility rules for Carer's Allowance and Carer Support Payment mean that clients who qualify for these benefits, but whom receive the State Pension, may not receive

[98] References to Carer Support Payment and 'underlying entitlement' can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.5.6 'Application', 8.2.6 'Transfer', '10.3.6 'Discrimination'.

payments (rather they receive 'underlying entitlement' only).[99] Throughout the comments, respondents who receive the State Pension shared their disagreement with policy rules which mean they do not receive payments.[100]

Pension-age respondents said communication about the transfer was unclear and caused confusion. There was a pronounced strength of feeling in many of the comments. Respondents remembered that their Carer's Allowance payments had stopped when they started receiving the State Pension and thought the transfer did not apply to them. Pension-age clients who do not receive payments may not have received communication about Carer's Allowance for long periods before the transfer of their award. Comments reflected this with some respondents saying they had not received payments for many years.

> "I retired ten years ago therefore I don't think Carer Support Payment applies to me and haven't been paid since I retired." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Some respondents felt the communication was misleading. There were respondents who had been hopeful that the transfer communication signalled a change that meant the re-instatement of payments. Some said it felt upsetting to get communication re-confirming that they would not receive payments, and that the letters about the transfer should have been more tailored to their specific circumstances.

> "It confused me as I do not get a financial [payment] as now pension age. I thought that the change suggested I now would. Phoned for clarity and told rules stay same. The letter was a bit 'one size fits all'." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

[99] Clients cannot receive the full amount of Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment and the State Pension at the same time. This is because they are classed as overlapping benefits. These clients do not receive Carer's Allowance Supplement or Carer Support payments, but will have what is known as "underlying entitlement" to the benefit. Having underlying entitlement can enable pension-age carers to get other sources of support. These clients' awards were included in the administrative transfer of benefits to Social Security Scotland and so received communication notifying them about the transfer.

[100] References to eligibility can be found in sections 6.5.4 'Application', 7.4.6 'Decision', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 10.3.6 'Discrimination'. References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

> "It was a bitter sweet thing for me as my husband's carer having given up my work to care for him a year early where I did receive Carer's Allowance to then have it disqualified as my State Pension came into being last March…The [transfer] letter itself was kind and explanatory but felt like a sting again." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Many of these respondents got in touch with Social Security Scotland to understand why they had been contacted. Some respondents felt this had been a "waste" of their time. Some said the volume of correspondence was bothersome for what they considered an "administrative" exercise with no real impact for them. Many of the respondents felt that letters and communication about the transfer to pension-age clients had been a "waste" of public funds. Some felt that overall, the transfer process for pension-age clients who do not receive payments had been a futile exercise.[101]

> "I had no idea what was being transferred when lettered about the change, and after waiting for your call centre to answer (45 mins) I was informed that my case for a zero allowance was transferred. A lot of action and time on my part for nothing." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I am a State Pension holder and do not qualify for Carer's Allowance like many hundreds of thousands who have received correspondence at an alarming cost to the taxpayer…A fortune was spent sending us something before and in the future that doesn't change anything as we have an underlying benefit???" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I feel it was a complete waste of time as you stopped me getting the Carer's Allowance 15 years ago, when I became a pensioner! I have phoned about this and was told I was still counted as a carer although I didn't get any allowance, so what was the point of it all?" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

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[101] References to communications sent by Social Security Scotland and their impact on respondents (positive and negative) can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall, 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.5 'Staff', 7.4.5 'Decisions', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

Changes to payment cycles for Carer Support Payment[102]

Another issue raised in comments from respondents whose award transferred to Carer Support Payment concerned changes to payment cycles and dates. There was a considerable volume of negative feedback on this topic.

Many clients had received Carer's Allowance payments from the Department for Work and Pensions every four weeks. After the transfer, these clients would have received their first payment of Carer Support Payment five weeks after their last payment from the Department for Work and Pensions.[103] Comments from respondents revealed a lack of clarity around this change.

There were respondents who felt they had lost out on a week's worth of their award as a result of the transfer process. Respondents said the first payment of Carer Support Payment was for four weeks but had been expecting a larger payment to cover five weeks. Respondents felt the money was "missing" or "lost". Others thought the payment was "late" or "delayed". Respondents described feeling "cheated" and "robbed". Some were unhappy with what they considered a 'penalty' of the transfer process.

> "I am not being paid for the week of the crossover, so how do I claim for the week I'm missing ??? I am not happy and feel cheated that I have lost one weeks money because of the transfer. Carer's Allowance is extremely badly paid and to loose one weeks money makes a huge difference for me." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I felt completely aware of when and why the process was occurring what I did not and cannot understnd is why I lost one week of caring "pay". So, I paid the admin charge!?" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Some respondents said the letters they had received about the transfer should have made it clearer that payments were calculated differently. Respondents criticised the letter saying it had been "misleading" and should have more explicitly explained the change. Others said there should have been more emphasis on the information about payments in what they described as a long and detailed letter.

Many had got in touch with Social Security Scotland to query the amount. There was mixed feedback about the support received from staff. Some respondents still felt

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[102] References to payments can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.4.5 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.5. 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

[103] This is because the two organisations make payments in slightly different ways. Payments are worked out to make sure that clients do not lose any money. The Department for Work and Pensions pays Carer's Allowance for the previous three weeks plus one week in advance. Social Security Scotland pays Carer Support Payment for the previous four weeks.

unsure about the amount they had been paid after speaking with staff. Others were happier with the explanation, although noting that this should have been made clearer in the written communication.[104]

> "Letter said I would not lose out on any money but had to wait 5 weeks and got same amount and was expecting 5 weeks money. Man on phone when I called about it didn't really explain it apart from they pay it differently." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "Did not understand that there would be a gap in the date my carers payment would normally go into the bank….I was eventually advised by Social Security Scotland that the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland pay differently. It would have been helpful if this were explained in advance…It helps with budgeting and also would have saved me having to call both the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland, hence saving call handlers time, stress to myself and time taken." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Respondents described the impact of the five-week period between payments. The payment change caused some respondents stress and anxiety. Some described financial hardship and said it was difficult to make ends meet during the period. Others said it had made budgeting more difficult and caused difficulties in paying household bills on time. Some respondents took on debt to help them bridge the gap. Respondents whose award had been transferred around the end of 2024, said the timing of the five-week period between payments had been particularly difficult at Christmas time.

> "Carer's Allowance is my main income so this left me with Direct Debit for bills unpaid and I had shopping ordered from Tesco that got cancelled because the money wasn't in my account as expected. Making me wait an extra 7 days for my monthly payment and acting as if it's no big deal shows how uncaring and high handed Social Security Scotland are. I can't buy a week's shopping if I don't have the money until after the week is over." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

[104] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

"I received my benefit one week later than my usual payment which left me stressed and very anxious and had to borrow money for that week as it is my only source of income". Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"Absolutely shocking to do it in December, I had been waiting and relying on my payment being made on the 16th to finish my daughter's Christmas shopping, because you changed it to five weeks for the first payment I had to do the last of my shopping on the 23rd with my disabled daughter in tow (she would've been in school on the 16th). It completely messed up plans, even down to sending cards/gifts to family members in the post. It had a major knock-on effect on a lot of things and would just like to say you shouldn't mess with people's money at this time of the year. It was a worry I could've been doing without." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Errors with benefits paid by the Department for Work and Pensions for those whose award transferred to Carer Support Payment[105]

The last subtheme in this section concerning respondents whose award transferred to Carer Support Payment relates to errors with benefits paid by the Department for Work and Pensions.[106]

Respondents who receive Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions reported issues with these payments following the transfer of their carer benefit to Carer Support Payment. Many said that invalid deductions from Universal Credit had meant they received less money than they should have from the Department for Work and Pensions. Deductions had been made for the amount of both Carer's Allowance and Carer Support Payment when clients are only in receipt of one of these benefits at any one time, including during the transfer process. There was a mix of feeling among respondents, with some still reporting an overall satisfactory transfer experience despite these errors, whilst for others, these issues resulted in them having a much poorer opinion of the process.

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[105] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

[106] References to the impact of Social Security Scotland processes on other interlinked benefits and services can be found in sections 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.7 'Barriers'.

"Everything has been positive on Social Security Scotlands side and it is much appreciated. The only negative is on the Department for Work and Pensions's side whereas they have taken in full both Carer's Allowance and Carer Support Payment from my Universal Credit this month and are yet to fix it after 1 week so far." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"Universal Credit messed up the transfer and docked me nearly £100 claiming I was claiming two benefits which was impossible as one replaced the other!" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Some respondents reported challenges in dealing with both the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland about this error. As described in section 8.2.4, respondents described feelings of frustration at being 'caught between' the two organisations. Respondents reported feeling stressed as a result and described the impact on their mental health.

When suggestions for improvement were made, respondents felt there should be better links between government bodies. Also, that Social Security Scotland check with clients that they are experiencing a smooth transfer experience.[107]

"My Universal Credit statement has come through for the second time with deductions for both Carer's Allowance and Carer Support Paymen despite me being told I did not need to do anything. I am now in a position where I am being told by Social Security Scotland to phone the Department for Work and Pensions who tell me to phone Social Security Scotland. Extremely stressful process." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

"In the future it may be worth Social Security Scotland maintaining contact with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding the transfer to make certain that they don't make that mistake again, or following up with benefit recipients to see if the transfer went smoothly." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

[107] References to respondents feeling stuck between the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

Adult Disability Payment transfer issues

The remainder of this section describes issues raised regarding the transfer to Adult Disability Payment.

A number of respondents raised issues relating to the transfer coinciding with review process. Some respondents were surprised and felt uneasy about a change to their expected review date. Others said that although they had been told by the Department for Work and Pensions that they would not need a review, Social Security Scotland had now informed them that a review was necessary.

These respondents wanted more information on the reasons for these changes. A few respondents specifically mentioned that changes to the timing of their review had impacted their ability to get or maintain an accessible car leased through the scheme with Motability Operations.[108] There were also comments from respondents who would have liked to receive more information about the review process as part of the communication they received about the transfer of their award to Adult Disability Payment.

> "Case was transferred in March then recieved a letter telling me I'm being reviewed in June [2025]. Even although PIP told me it wasn't until June 2026." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "I had been given an open ended (lifetime) award, I now see that there is a Review Date. Why is this? I am a person with both terminal and life-limiting conditions, why do I have to prove all of this again? I find the prospects of this both worrying and degrading." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> "It was a disaster wish I'd never transferred the whole experience has been very stressful because of change in circumstances due to deterioration of my health and going through a review which was the reason I had to change over…I have lost out with the £750 help towards payment with Motability for a car because you couldn't provide me with a letter stating I was entitled to the higher rate of Motability component to enable me to join the service as my car failed it's MOT in November I am in a very rural area and cannot access public transport and it has been very expensive for taxis to and from hospital appointments and I've also been house bound with no social interaction for almost three months." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

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[108] References to the impact of the Department of Work and Pensions on respondents' experiences with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.2 'Staff', 8.2.3 'Transfer', 8.2.4 'Transfer', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

"The transition was easy and straightforward. I never worried about the paperwork. I would have liked more information regarding what happens when my current claim is up for renewal and I am passed retiral age." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

Lastly, there was feedback from respondents with issues around change of circumstances forms.[109] Some who had submitted forms or information about their circumstances said these forms had then gone missing. Others were waiting to receive forms from Social Security Scotland.

Some respondents were concerned that Social Security Scotland had issued reminders to provide information that they had already submitted, while others were frustrated that forms they were required to complete had yet to arrive.

"Once I had completed this [the forms] and sent it off, I had a letter to say it had not been received. I called and was told they would look into it and be in touch. Another letter to say it had not been received, called again to be told my information was "missing " followed by yet another letter!" Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

"I never received the change of circumstances form and have had to phone up about this after receiving emails that said I was late in completing it." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment

[109] References to a change in circumstance can be found in sections 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer'.

9 Barriers

Social Security Scotland aims to provide a service that is accessible for all the people of Scotland. However, we recognise that sometimes unintended obstacles may exist. We sometimes refer to those obstacles as 'barriers'. All respondents were asked if they had faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland[110].

This section presents the results on how many said they had experienced barriers, the kinds of barriers faced, and whether those affected sought help.

9.1 Experience of barriers

Just under a quarter (23%) of respondents said they had experienced some form of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland.

When looking across the different benefits, respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment were more likely to have faced some form of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland (27%), whereas those with experience of receiving Funeral Support Payment or Carer's Allowance Supplement were less likely (15% and 16% respectively) to have experienced a barrier (see Table 9.1 below).

Table 9.1: Whether respondents faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland by benefit
All respondents

Benefit experience	Faced a barrier	Total
Adult Disability Payment	27%	12,285
Child Disability Payment	21%	1,237
Carer Support Payment	22%	729
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	21%	11,569
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	18%	4,214
Five Family Payments	22%	2,416
Job Start Payment	20%	41
Funeral Support Payment	15%	804
Young Carer Grant	19%	307
Carer's Allowance Supplement	16%	869
Winter Heating Payment	20%	1,908
Child Winter Heating Payment	22%	172

[110] "Did you face any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland?" Response options included "No (I didn't face any barriers)", as well as a list of types of barriers that may have been faced, which are included in Table 13.2.

Respondents were provided with a list of barrier types, which are shown in Table 9.2. Respondents could select one or more types of barrier. Just over three quarters (77%) of respondents said they did not face any barriers. Under one-in-ten respondents across all benefits said 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to' (8%); the same proportion (8%) said 'I could not get the information or updates I needed'; 6% said 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when I wanted to'; and 6% said they experienced a different barrier. This last option will be analysed later in this chapter to understand what other barriers our clients faced, see section 9.3.

Table 9.2: Which barrier respondents faced when getting help from Social Security Scotland
All respondents

Response options	All applicants *
No (I didn't face any barriers)	77%
I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to	8%
I could not get the information or updates I needed	8%
I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when I wanted to	6%
Another barrier not listed above (please write in)	6%
Total	35,762

*This is a question where respondents could select multiple options so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

There was some variation across the different benefits. Respondents with experience of Five Family Payments were more likely to select 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to'. Respondents with experience of Young Carer Grant and Carer Support Payment most frequently selected 'I could not get the information or updates I needed'. Lastly, respondents with experience of Child and Adult Disability Payment selected 'I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when I wanted to' most frequently. Respondents who had their award transferred to Adult Disability Payment selected another barrier as their main choice. Across most benefits 'I could not get the information or updates I needed' was the most selected option.

Table 9.3: Which barrier respondents faced when getting help from Social Security Scotland by benefit
All respondents who faced a barrier

Benefit experience	I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to	I could not get the information or updates I needed	I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when I wanted to	Another barrier not listed above (please write in)	Total
Adult Disability Payment	25%	26%	31%	18%	3,365
Child Disability Payment	17%	33%	35%	14%	255
Carer Support Payment	19%	42%	19%	20%	157
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	16%	21%	22%	41%	2,453
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	18%	27%	24%	31%	760
Five Family Payments	32%	30%	22%	17%	519
Job Start Payment	#	#	#	#	8
Funeral Support Payment	27%	38%	16%	19%	118
Young Carer Grant	21%	44%	25%	11%	57
Carer's Allowance Supplement	17%	33%	24%	26%	138
Winter Heating Payment	20%	23%	27%	30%	373
Child Winter Heating Payment	13%	37%	29%	21%	38

9.1.1 Barriers across different population groups

Some respondent groups were more likely to tell us they had experienced a barrier when getting help from Social Security Scotland. Of the total who told us they identified their gender 'in another way', 48% of them said they experienced a barrier compared to 24% of men and 21% of women. Men were more likely to select they 'could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when they wanted to', and people who identified either as a woman or in another way selected the 'another barrier' option most frequently.

Respondents who told us they had a long-term health condition were also more likely to say they had experienced a barrier compared to those who said they didn't have a long-term health condition (24% compared to 19% respectively). Respondents with a long-term health condition were more likely to select they ‘could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when they wanted to’ and ‘another barrier’ option.

Respondents who told us they had refugee status in this country were also more likely to have experienced a barrier compared to those who don’t have refugee status (35% compared to 22% respectively). Respondents with a refugee status in this country selected the option ‘I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland how I wanted to’ in a much higher proportion (40%) compared to the following option which was ‘I could not get the information or updates I needed’ (24%).

Lastly, when looking across the age bands from 16 to 24 years of age to 65 or over, we can see a gradual drop in the percentage of respondents saying they had experienced a barrier with 29% of respondents aged 16 to 24 saying they experienced a barrier, falling to 20% of respondents age 65. Younger respondents most frequently selected ‘I could not get the information or updates I needed’. For those aged 45 and over ‘I could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when (I) wanted to’ becomes the most frequently selected barrier.

It is worth noting that this is a voluntary survey, therefore, its respondents are not a statistically representative of the Social Security Scotland’s clients. Findings regarding population groups should be taken with that important caveat and require triangulation with other data sources to be substantiated. Chapter 2 of this report compares the statistics equalities publication with this survey’s respondent characteristics and signals where there are differences between both populations.

9.1.2 Telling Social Security Scotland about barriers faced

The last question on this section asks what action respondents took with regards to the barrier they experienced. Most respondents (54%) who experienced a barrier said they had not told Social Security Scotland about the barrier they faced; one-in-five (21%) said they had told Social Security Scotland but they weren’t helped to overcome it, and one-in-ten (11%) said they told Social Security Scotland and they were helped to overcome it. See Table 9.4 below.

Table 9.4: What action was taken after experiencing a barrier
All respondents who told us they faced a barrier

Did you tell Social Security Scotland about the barriers you faced?	Respondents who faced a barrier
Yes - they helped me overcome them	11%
Yes - but they didn't help me overcome them	21%
No	54%
Prefer not to say	14%
Total	8,026

9.2 Client comments about their experience of barriers

9.2.1 Summary

For those who reported having experienced a barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland, they were invited to comment on their experience. Around 500 comments were analysed. Of these, around 120 responses were substantive and therefore coded and analysed.

Five significant themes stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- **Accessible communication** (including physical and/or mental health related accessibility issues, call wait times, a lack of updates, and postal enquiries not being responded to)
- **Inconsistencies in information communicated by staff and/or published guidance and written correspondence**
- **Lack of benefit awareness** (including a lack of signposting from other organisations and service providers)
- **Supporting information** (including difficulties in obtaining it, loss of information submitted online, and hurdles facing adoptive parents, pension recipients and young carers)
- **Pre-existing benefits** (the intersection of Social Security Scotland benefits and services with those of the Department for Work and Pensions, including impact on payments for Universal Credit)
- **Social Security Scotland helping respondents to overcome barriers** (including provision of British Sign Language interpreters, and staff making adjustments for neurodiverse respondents who face communication barriers in their daily lives)

Suggestions for improvement were also made. These relate to the need for an online portal to gain application progress updates, view submitted information, and/or change personal details or submit changes of circumstances.

Benefit specific findings When findings were more specific to benefit experience, these include those with experience of applying for Child Disability Payment. Some detailed a lack of signposting from medical professionals to the eligibility criteria for, and/or availability of Child Disability Payment. This was most problematic during the period of a child's medical care before they receive a formal diagnosis, or while they experience a "temporary disability".

Demographic specific findings When the demographic characteristics of respondents comes into play, those with caring responsibilities, being time poor, are feeling especially disadvantaged by long call-wait times and 9-5 p.m. helpline opening hours.

In relation to obtaining supporting information, adoptive parents and pension recipients are finding it difficult to provide adequate sources of evidence that satisfy Social

Security Scotland processes. A small number of responses also suggest that children applying for Young Carer Grant are likely not to have identification documents, due to being non-bill payers and/or facing their own disabilities.

9.2.2 Full report

9.2.3 Accessible communication

Most often cited as a barrier to communicating with Social Security Scotland were the call wait-times for the agency's helpline. Various intersecting factors were identified by respondents. These include deficiencies in others forms of communication facilitated by Social Security Scotland, such as long wait times to be connected to the webchat service, and a lack of response to written communications.

For those who experience physical and/or mental health issues, some explained how the day-to-day barriers they face, in relation to communication, intersect with Social Security Scotland's services.

An online portal was identified by some respondents as a means to overcome communication barriers.

Call wait-times[111]

Around a third of all respondents cited call wait times as a barrier. Long wait times were variously described as "too long", "extreme" and "making you feel like giving up". A small proportion said they could never get through to a member of staff.

Some felt this communication barrier was exacerbated by restrictive helpline opening hours and/or getting "cut off" during a call. For others, a lack of response to letters they sent to the agency, long queues for the webchat service, and/or a lack of written updates from the agency, worsened its impact.

> "When calling helpline it takes ages to get a member of staff. I always wait d at least 30 mins for an answer" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I could not get through on the phone so wrote a letter, no reply" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Adult Disability Payment

> "Phones are no answered and I was on hold 3x for over 35 mins before I gave up calling. Text service and web chat is not great either as there are never advisors available" Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

[111] References to call wait times can be found in sections 3.3.4 Overall, 4.4.4 'Webchat', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 6.5.7 'Application'

The immediate, felt impact of long call-wait times was variously described as "frustrating", "stressful", "horrendous".

More long-term impacts of long call-wait times include respondents being left in an information void.

"Time spent trying to get through on phone very frustrating and stressful." Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

"Delays on the telephone line and getting cut off whilst waiting is immensely frustrating" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

"I have been very busy as my father passed away just before Christmas and as a carer am generally busy. I did try to find any online help but could not find what I needed and haven't had time to hang on a queue to call. I had presumed I would have be written to with my final calculation, but have received nothing." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

Physical and/or mental health related accessibility barriers

Numerous communication barriers were identified by respondents that intersect with the physical and/or mental health issues they experience in their day-to-day lives.[112]

One communication barrier is hearing impediment, which is a barrier to telephone conversation.

Difficulties/inabilities of respondents to speak to members of staff, i.e. "selective mutism", can also stem from experiences of stress and anxiety, making speaking to strangers difficult.

Speech impediments were also listed as barriers, alongside difficulties with comprehension. Neurodiversity was also identified by some as an interrelated factor.

"Hard of hearing so did not call" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[112] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 Overall, 4.3.4 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

"I su[ff]er with really bad anxiety and found answering the phone calls really difficult" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I can't communicate with people as I have selective mutism" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I have a speech impediment" Respondent with experience of benefit being transferred to Social Security Scotland

"I find it difficult to understand and am slower to take on board the information they give" Respondent with experience of benefit being transferred to Carer Support Payment

Beyond conversations with staff, anxieties and traumas are variously described as a barriers to engaging with the application process. i.e. "I have been too stressed to apply".

"I was so anxious about making the steps in the 1st place. My condition has been this way for more than 5 years but I have been too stressed to apply" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"barriers in facing the process (autism, ptsd)" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

An online portal was identified by some respondents as a means to overcome communication barriers which face those for whom directly speaking to a member of staff is challenging.[113]

"It would have been extremely helpful if I could log in to check application status, outstanding support requests, as making phone calls is challenging for me." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

[113] References to the need for an online portal can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.5 'Barriers'

9.2.4 Inconsistencies in information communicated by staff and/or published guidance and written correspondence

Some respondents identify inconsistencies in the information communicated by differing members of staff.[114] Others identified instances where staff said they would do something, like provide a call-back or send a form, but that these promised actions were not delivered.

> "I was given wrong information from live chat" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "I spoke to someone online about getting me a new appeal form for Scottish child payment, but instead he sent me the wrong form. I think your staff was not really paying attention to the people when they're on calls" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "I was told wrong information twice but finally got someone who explained properly" Respondent with experience of benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

> "Just had to make a few phone calls to them 2 [o]ut of 4 people were helpful another 2 referred me to wrong departments" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

For others, information was received in Social Security Scotland's written communications/accessed via its websites that conflicted with information provided by members of staff or previous actions delivered by the agency.

> "I had applied sent all my paper work and was getting payments then I got a letter saying I had to resubmit my documents which I know was sent in error so I ignored it, but sending unnecessary letters costs money" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "Barriers to concise information from staff consistent with website" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

[114] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

The impact of receiving inconsistent information could, for some, have impacted on their benefit payments. A handful of respondents said that conflicting information had resulted in either an overpayment, or an overall reduction in payment.

> "I called SSS to advise of a c.o.c and was advise it wouldn't make a difference to my payment then 3 months in the payment stopped, I hadn't noticed but was then sent a letter advising of an overpayment?" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "Conflicting information resulting in me receiving less money and being sanctioned" Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

When respondents' demographic characteristics are taken noted of, a small number of respondents found that inconsistent information was provided to them regarding their status as a 'guardian'.[115]

> "Staff aren't properly trained in guardianship. Passed from pillar to post and given inaccurate information" Respondent with experience of benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

9.2.5 **Lack of benefit awareness**

Various factors are attributed by respondents to their lack of awareness around benefits and eligibility. For each, lack of awareness was experienced as a barrier to accessing Social Security Scotland services.

These factors include a lack of signposting from other organisations and service providers such as NHS and medical professionals.

Respondents stress the negative financial implications of lacking benefit awareness, with suggestions for improvement centring around the need to simplify, and make more accessible, information about benefit eligibility.

General lack of awareness

Some respondents said that their general lack of awareness around benefits and/or eligibility, was a barrier to accessing Social Security Scotland services.

> "I didn't know I was entitled to Scottish child payment. I was completely unaware it existed" Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

[115] References to the experience of guardians and/or adoptive parents with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 9.3.5 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

> “Didn’t know these benefits were available .” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> “I wasn’t aware the carers payment existed” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

It was not until others had intervened, such as friends, or organisations within the charity sector, that some respondents were signposted to benefits and services.

> “Word of mouth from a friend directed me to financial support called " bereavement support ". Maybe this could be handed out when the death is registered” Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

> “I wasn’t even aware that I was eligible for a benefit, I went to Citizens Advice for something else and they told me to apply.” Respondent with experience of Winter Heating Payment

Lack of signposting in other professions

For those with experience of applying for Child Disability Payment, it is notable that respondents perceived a lack of benefit signposting from medical professionals. Several explain that, while their child may have been eligible for Child Disability Payment before receiving a formal diagnosis, (or while they were experiencing a “temporary disability”), this period for making a claim was lost as they were not made unaware by medical professionals of their child’s eligibility.

The impact of not knowing - of not having been told about benefit eligibility from medical professionals in the earlier period of a child’s treatment - is described by one respondent as a cause of their “finances hav[ing] depleted hugely” as they became an unpaid carer.

> “We had no idea that we could have applied when my daughter was first ill with anxiety, depression and anorexia. It was only after the formal diagnosis for autism that we learned we should apply as she was diagnosed disabled.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"I wasn't made aware of financial assistance at point of diagnosis." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

"None of the medical or other professionals i have dealt with have ever pointed out that i may have been entitled to claim any disability payment for my child. As i have been unable to work due yo caring for them, my finances have depleted hugely over several years because i did not know there was any help available for mental health issues or things which could be deemed temporary disabilities." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Suggestions for improvement centre around the need to simplify, and make more accessible, information about benefit eligibility. Suggestions include simplifying the array/amount of benefits available; providing a central online portal for people to explore their eligibility across a range of benefits[116]; for people to automatically be made aware of the benefits they are entitled to.

"Too many different benefits to understand what they are all for and if they are relevant. Simplify your system please" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

"Information in what is available is poor to start with. Needs a portal where people can go to start to find the information they need. Blood and stone comes to mind" Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

"My lack of what I am entitled to is the biggest hindrance to help, I shouldn't need to ask help should be automatic" Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

9.2.6 Supporting information[117]

Various barriers to obtaining and submitting supporting information were identified by respondents.

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[116] References to the need for an online portal can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.5 'Barriers'

[117] References to supporting information can be found in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

For some, not knowing about the need for supporting information, or of the process for uploading it, posed a barrier. For others, their reliance on medical or educational professionals placed additional barriers associated with the timeliness and credibility of that information.

Social Security Scotland websites loosing uploaded supporting information proved a technological barrier to providing supporting information. For others, their self-identified demographic characteristics were notable in the barriers they faced in obtaining supporting information. This includes pension recipients, adoptive parents and children who are carers.

Not knowing of the need for supporting information

For some, the barrier lay with not having received information on, or become aware of the need for, supporting information.

Several comments suggest there was the expectation that Social Security Scotland would contact applicants when supporting information was required. For others, guidance on uploading supporting information was not noticed / not visible to them as they went through the application process.

> "SSSdid not write me to tell me they required more information" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "The decision was made without any futher contact or request for detailed information. The limited tick box application allows assumed decisions" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I am still not sure how I missed the information on uploading supporting information. I am still not sure when I should have spotted that people are available to help you fill in forms" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Reliance on third parties to provide supporting information

When respondents were reliant upon supporting information provided by medical and educational professionals, the time it takes to source this information could become a barrier.

> "Relying on other professionals to provide supporting information has been a barrier for my daughter. It wasn't helped that they contacted the school during the summer holiday." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Delays in receiving reports from the NHS has resulted in issues with SSS, this should not be happening" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

> "Getting information in a timely manner from some of the medical professionals who deal with my health problems proved a real problem" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Sometimes, sources of information provided by medical professionals were seen by respondents to outweigh the credibility of their own, self-reported experiences (in the eyes of Social Security Scotland). When information provided by a medical professional was deemed incorrect by the respondent, this posed an additional barrier to accessing benefits and services.

> "condition downplayed by health professionals and they were believed over what I reported" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Went to a review & the person blatly lied about my ability's" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Problems uploading supporting information

When the online infrastructure for uploading supporting information didn't work – when uploaded evidence was lost – these errors were experienced as barriers.[118] As reported on in section 6.5.6 in the 'Application' chapter, a loss of supporting information could result in 'frustration', could make applicants reliant on the help of others prolong processing times.

> "When I sent my p45 and other information via the website, they didn't receive it so had to send a second time but eventually they got it, they said it was an error on their side" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "Your online portal does not work or your system lost most of my supporting evidence. A rather large barrier." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Demographic based barriers to sourcing supporting information

When the self-identified demographic characteristics of respondents becomes a factor in determining what barriers face respondents, three groups stood out in the comments.

The first demographic group are parents of adopted children. The "burden of proof", i.e. Social Security Scotland's requirements for supporting information, were deemed too high by one respondent, while another felt the length of time taken for Social Security Scotland to "confirm" their child was due to the child's adopted status.[119]

> "Discrimination against adopted parents and children. Higher burden of proof for no reason." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "It took a while to confirm my child because they are adopted." Respondent with experience of Carers Allowance Supplement

Pension recipients also self-identified as facing barriers to providing supporting information. One respondent wrote that the request for evidence for pension income "was not clear", while several found it difficult acquiring evidence of pension income.

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[118] References to Social Security Scotland websites can be found in sections 6.5.5 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

[119] References to the experience of guardians and/or adoptive parents with Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 9.3.5 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

> "Requested evidence of pension income was not clear, asking for something which was difficult to source through the relevant pension groups" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "I receive a pension but do not get payslips therefore had difficulty in providing the proof required" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

A single respondent who identified as a child said they could not source the correct supporting information because they were not a bill payer.[120] The situation, they suggest, was compounded by themselves being a disabled carer.[121]

> "Not the correct id due to being a child with no regular bills and being disabled myself." Respondent with experience of Young Carer Grant

9.2.7 Pre-existing benefits – the intersection of Social Security Scotland services with those of the Department for Work and Pensions

Barriers were present when Social Security Scotland services intersected with those provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

As explored in section 8.2.5 in relation to the transfer process, problems notably arose in relation to Universal Credit payments, with barriers linked by respondents to errors in communication made between the two government departments.

Universal Credit

When problems were reported to arise with payment of Universal Credit (administered by the Department for Work and Pensions), these affected respondents with experience of their benefit being transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to Carer Support Payment (administered by Social Security Scotland).[122]

> "Carers allowance switched to carers support and universal credit refused to pay me since I was on 2 benefits which I wasn't. It was sorted by myself" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

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[120] References to supporting information can be found in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 6.5.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers', 9.3.6 'Barriers'.

[121] References to experiences of young / child respondents can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.5 'Overall', 4.4.3. 'Webchat', 6.5.4 'Application', 6.6.8 'Application', 9.3.6 'Barriers'

[122] References to the impact of Social Security Scotland processes on other interlinked benefits and services can be found in sections 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.7 'Barriers'.

> "Only with UC in regards to me apparently being paid twice for the same benefit which infact was a simple name change" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

For one respondent, their comment suggests that a lack of communication between Social Security Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions was a contributing factor.

> "I would have like them to be able to communicate with the dept supplying income support" Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment[123]

For another, they reported that the transfer to Carer Support Payment resulted in the loss of the case worker they previously communicated with. There is a desire among respondents for Social Security Scotland to make available a single point of contact with whom a client can have regular, consistent communication.

> "It's disappointing that by switching to carers component I can no longer communicate with the case worker I had." Respondent with experience of their benefit transferring to Carer Support Payment

Social Security Scotland helping respondents to overcome barriers[124]

Some comments referred to practices, put in place by Social Security Scotland, which reduced or removed various barriers faced in day-to-day life.

Day-to-day barriers faced by respondents include mobility barriers (due to disability or caring responsibilities), and communication barriers (due to neurodivergence, physical disability, or difficulties with reading and comprehension).

Respondents recognised several practices, put in place by Social Security Scotland, that helped alleviate the barriers they face.

For those who faced mobility barriers, these beneficial practices include the provision of online meetings that reduced the need for carers to leave dependents, and home visits that enabled disabled respondents to attain face-to-face help from a member of the agency's staff.

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[123] Income support is a benefit that was replaced by Universal Credit

[124] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 Overall, 4.3.4 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

“Being able to attend an online meeting was great & removed a barrier for me (having to arrange care for my parent). Great option for carers.” Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

“Because I'm confined to a wheelchair and the house it ws quite difficult but i had a home visit from the a d p and thi helped me very much. Thank you” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

The provision of webchat, British Sign Language and interpreter services were noted to have helped respondents overcome communication barriers, notably those associated with hearing impediments. The patience and understanding of Social Security Scotland’s staff were also, generally noted to aid communication.

“Your webchat service is what removed my barrier to effective communication” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Carer Support Payment

“Access information and staff through Contact Scotland BSL. Interpreter and staff reduced barriers.” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Social Security Scotland

“I have dyslexia, your staff were very understanding” Respondent with experience of their benefit being transferred to Social Security Scotland

Websites that allowed for online applications to be filled out slowly, incrementally - that could be saved and returned to - also reduced barriers associated with reading and comprehension.

“sometimes struggle to read information, and understand it, being able to complete a bit of the form and save it as i went helped” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

10 Discrimination

This section presents results on respondents' experiences of discrimination when dealing with Social Security Scotland. The understanding of 'discrimination' in this section of the survey is broad. It can mean people feeling discriminated by policy eligibility, by processes, by staff, etc. The intention of this is to capture a breadth of experiences where people might be feeling excluded or unseen, so to help the organisation continuously improve by listening to its clients.

10.1 Experiences of discrimination

Respondents were asked if they felt they had been discriminated against at any point during their experience with Social Security Scotland. One-in-twenty (5%) respondents said they had experienced discrimination, with a further 5% selecting the 'prefer not to say' response option. Respondents with experience of applying for Adult Disability Payment had the highest rate, with 8% of them agreeing they experienced discrimination. Respondents with experience of receiving Carer's Allowance Supplement had the lowest levels of agreement, both with 2% agreeing they had experienced discrimination (see Table 10.1 below).

Table 10.1: Experience of discrimination by benefit
All respondents

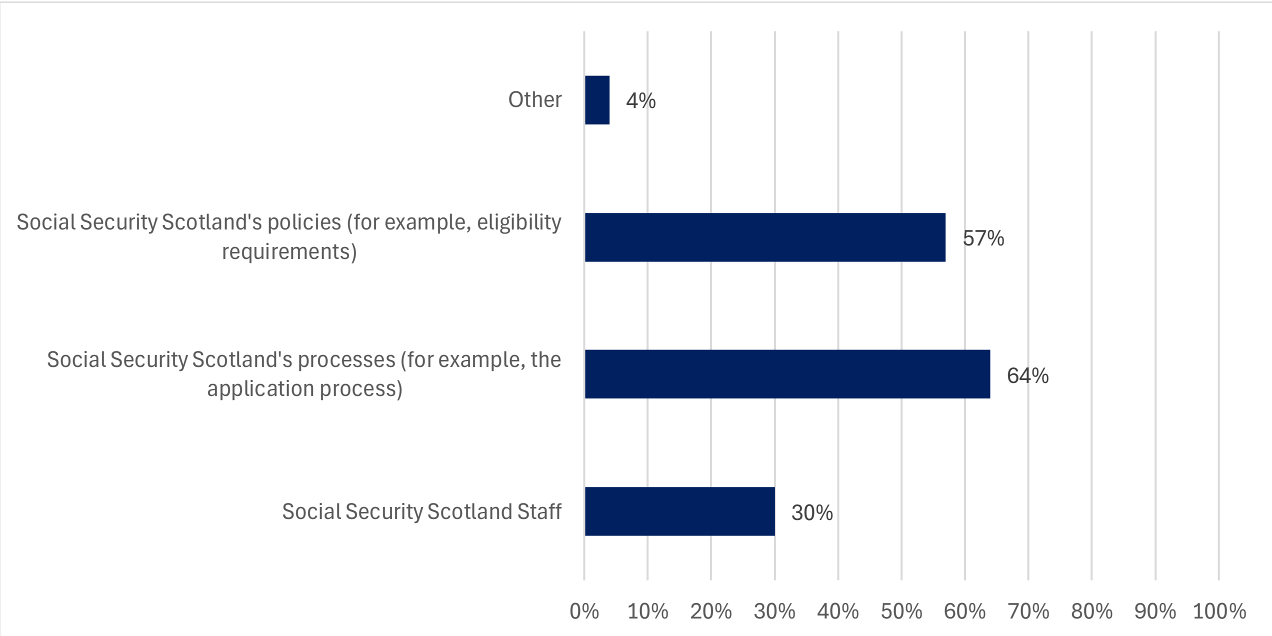
Benefit experience	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Total
Adult Disability Payment	8%	85%	7%	12,176
Child Disability Payment	4%	93%	3%	1,226
Carer Support Payment	3%	94%	3%	725
Transfer to Adult Disability Payment	3%	93%	4%	11,423
Transfer to Carer Support Payment	3%	93%	4%	4,175
Five Family Payments	5%	89%	6%	2,390
Job Start Payment	#	95%	#	41
Funeral Support Payment	4%	93%	3%	798
Young Carer Grant	3%	93%	4%	304
Carer's Allowance Supplement	2%	96%	2%	865

Benefit experience	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Total
Winter Heating Payment	4%	91%	5%	1,898
Child Winter Heating Payment	#	95%	#	171

10.1.1 Nature of discrimination

Respondents who had experienced discrimination were asked who or what they felt was discriminatory towards them. They could select more than one option if they wished. The most commonly chosen source of discrimination was Social Security Scotland 'processes', selected by almost two thirds of respondents (64%) who said they had experienced discrimination. Over half (57%) of respondents said that the source of the discrimination they experienced was Social Security Scotland 'policies', and just under a third (30%) said Social Security Scotland 'staff' (see Figure 10.1 below).

Figure 10.1: Who or what respondents felt discriminated by
All respondents who said they experienced discrimination

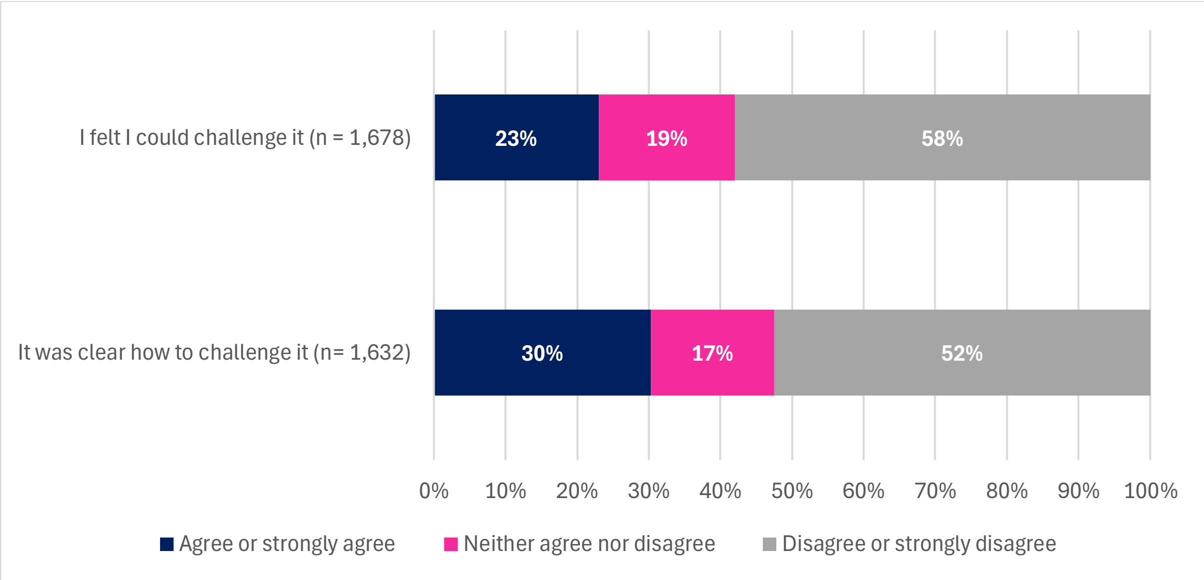


10.2 Tackling discrimination

The survey asked if people told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination they experienced and just under three-in-ten (28%) said they had told Social Security Scotland, six-in-ten (59%) said they hadn't while almost one-in-six (13%) said they preferred not to say.

The survey also asks respondents to agree or disagree with two statements to understand how clients felt about challenging the discrimination they faced. Over half of those who told us they had experienced discrimination disagreed with the statements 'it was clear how to challenge it' and 'I felt I could challenge it' (52% and 58% respectively). Around a quarter (19% and 30% respectively) agreed with these statements, as Figure 10.2 outlines.

Figure 10.2: Whether respondents knew how and felt able to challenge discrimination
All respondents who said they experienced discrimination



10.2.1 Discrimination across population groups

As with the previous chapter on barriers it is important to take the same precautions when attributing experiences to different population groups when the data is not statistically representative and not intended for that purpose.

Some respondent groups were more likely to tell us they had experienced discrimination when getting help from Social Security Scotland. Of the total of people who told us they identified their gender 'in another way', 16% of them said they experienced discrimination compared to 5% of men and 4% of women. All gender identities were more likely to have felt discriminated by policies and processes than staff.

Respondents who told us they had refugee status in this country also were more likely to have experienced discrimination compared to those who don't have refugee status (8% compared to 5% respectively). The highest source of discrimination selected by respondents with a refugee status in this country was 'Social Security Scotland staff' (63% compared to 27% for respondents who did not have refugee status).

10.3 Client comments about their experience of discrimination

10.3.1 Summary

For those who reported having felt discriminated against when dealing with Social Security Scotland, they were invited to comment on their experience.

Around 500 comments were received, coded and analysed.

Four significant themes stood out from the comments. These themes and related subthemes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. These relate to:

- Misrepresentation
- Disability or health condition discriminated against
- Accessibility
- Policy eligibility

Suggestions for improvement were made, which include the provision of new or alternative methods of communication. These include video calls for the visually impaired to enable communication via a British Sign Language interpreter. Calls were made for the provision of staff who specialised in communicating with clients who identify as neurodivergent, while the provision of email and a “more accessible” version of webchat were listed as communication formats that would lessen discrimination.

Benefit specific findings Certain respondents reported facing discrimination particular to their benefit experience. Five Family Payment respondents were notable in reporting that the eligibility criteria discriminated against working families and the self-employed. Respondents reported that they felt worse off, financially, than families who received qualifying benefits.

Demographic specific findings Respondents who identified as living with mental ill health were notable in experiencing forms of discrimination associated with a lack of recognition/understanding of their lived experience of disability. Discrimination was felt to: occur in interactions with staff; be embedded in the contents of application forms; exist within the eligibility criteria for disability benefits.

10.3.2 Full report

10.3.3 Misrepresentation[125]

When describing their experience of discrimination, respondents frequently described feeling misrepresented during their interactions with Social Security Scotland.

This tended to centre on negative interactions with staff and the emotional effect these had for respondents. More generally, these perceptions focused on aspects of the application and decision-making processes where respondents felt the information they provided, and experiences they expressed, were misrepresented or misconstrued.

Several commented that they had not been listened to, or that the challenges they faced had been trivialised, in turn resulting in an unfair decision.

Many felt that they had been assessed poorly and overlooked because of assumptions made about their circumstances, because of poor staff knowledge and/or that information relayed to staff had been misrepresented.

For respondents who experienced a disability or health issue, some described being perceived by Social Security Scotland as more able than they saw themselves, or not "disabled enough".

> "Felt my son had no symptoms to the caller, the questions were not related to my son, this should be broken down to a better procedure. And the final letter was basically calling my son a waste of time even to apply for this." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "i also do not feel like my other health condition was taken i to account to the extent i explained and it almost felt that my having been pregnant and a new mum made me more able in the eyes of social security than i actually am." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Some respondents focused specifically on interactions with staff, where they felt they were wrongly perceived. Some described feeling silenced or undermined by staff while trying to communicate their circumstances.

Some respondents described stigmatising attitudes they had come across while dealing with Social Security Scotland staff. Some perceived staff had made judgements about them based on the way they were dressed, or their history of drug and/or alcohol addiction. As one respondent described their experience of the redetermination process,

[125] References to respondents feeling misunderstood or mistrusted by Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall, 7.4.4 'Decision', 7.4.6 'Decisions', 10.3.3 'Discrimination', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

there were “judgemental comments around alcohol that were not relevant to the claimant”.

Respondents variously described these interactions as making them “feel so small”, “shut down”, “like a liar”, “uncomfortable”. The manner of staff members was variously described as “rude” “not understanding”, and “confrontational”.

> “When I went to a review the lady put down a load of lies about what I could & couldn’t do just can’t get over how someone like that could be aloud to make people feel so small she didn’t even listen to me or my daughter.” Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> “Staff member was confrontational and said I wasn't told things that I was told - made a liar. Mental Health/disability issues disregarded. Spoke to in a horrible tone before advisor even knew issue and kept cutting me off when I tried to explain why it wasn't my error, it was SSS error. I was completely ignored and treated unprofessional.” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> “The advisor I spoke to on the phone was complaining about clients trying to get benefits just so they could get a mobility car.” Respondent with experience of having their benefit transferred to Adult Disability Payment

> “… I was mistreated due to attending a hearing unaware of what it actually was. I had no representation, I was dressed casually and as I had no childcare for my youngest Son, I had no other option than to bring him. At that time, I had undiagnosed ADHD and Fibromyalgia and going through trauma therapy. I understand he was unaware of these issues, however, he humiliated me in front of the panel by suggesting I treated the hearing like a “social work meeting” which in my opinion was to shame me, ...” Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> “Because soon as a mention my drug addiction the woman attitude changed straight away so disgusting how quick she changed.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

After receiving a decision, some respondents commented that decisions were based on information that had been misunderstood or misrepresented.

Some said that the supporting information they had provided (including contact information to other sources of supporting information) had not adequately been considered. Some felt they were perceived as lying or attempting to fraudulently claim benefits, because the information they provided had not been understood.

Others identified a lack of knowledge, or a lack of trust by Social Security Scotland's staff, as the source of their feeling misrepresented and misjudged in the decision-making process.

For respondents who experienced physical and/or mental health disabilities, it was notable that some felt the health challenges they faced had been trivialised. Others said that they were perceived by Social Security Scotland as more able than they saw themselves, or not "disabled enough".

Respondents variously described feeling 'mistrusted' and "made out to be lying" by Social Security Scotland. Some felt "embarrassed" while others said they felt "discriminated against". Others said the decision left them feeling that Social Security Scotland considered them to be "irrelevant", while others felt "overlooked", "patronised" or "invisible".

> "I feel that I am made out to be a liar as you could not or would not use all the information or contacts I provided and even denied that I'm seeing a NHS provided counselling service as i could not find the persons name to give it to you although I gave the service details…" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I feel the decision made against me was based on the fact that I'm a recovering drug addict." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "My initial application was rejected because according to SSS, my child's circumstances and diagnosis was not peculiar! (She has not spoken in public for 2 years). She had a diagnosis from the GP, nursery had raised concerns, she was seeing speech and language therapist, I attached supporting letters from all these agencies including from her health visitor. I was advised to defer her transition to P1 as the SLT said she would surely regress. I felt discriminated against. A SSS Agent called me on 2 separate occasions and was asking me questions in a manner that suggests suspicion or distrust." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "Staff were poorly informed on how immigration status and experience of domestic violence affected my application..." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I felt like I was patronised and like I was claiming benefits fraudulently as the letters were confusing and very blunt in their tone..." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I was made to feel guilty for claiming and as though I was trying to cheat the system when I was caring for my terminally ill uncle" Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

10.3.4 Disability or condition

For those living with, or caring for an individual with a disability, a number of prominent themes arose on the topic of discrimination when making an application.

- Application forms and processes: Some reflected on the contents of the application form, which was described by some as better catering for those with physical disabilities.
- Interactions with staff: Others described interactions with staff in which they felt their experience of disability had not been understood; or that staff lacked empathy or adequate training in speaking to with those with additional communication needs.
- Invisible health conditions and the application process: Comments also describe ways in which the process of applying for a benefit failed to capture respondents' experiences of invisible, complex and less understood conditions, particularly mental health problems and neurodiversity.

Application forms and processes

Application forms and processes were cited by many respondents as a source of discrimination. Primarily, this related to the extent to which respondents felt they could adequately articulate their circumstances, and how far they felt these circumstances were recognised and responded to by Social Security Scotland.

Several respondents reflected on the challenges of applying for a benefit as a disabled parent or caregiver. For these respondents, the application form did not provide a suitable space to communicate their own disability status. Neither could they adequately communicate their disability status in relation to the person receiving care and the interrelated challenges this presented.

Some respondents who identified as disabled carers / parents left comments that described difficulties coping with the administrative burden of applying for a benefit while delivering care to their loved ones. Moreover, some described the complicated systems of support associated with living in a household with multiple disabilities or conditions and the impacts these had on benefit claims.

These comments tended to consider the application process as one that lacked recognition of their experiences of disability.

> "Managing to organise and manage phone call communication whilst also supervising my two boys for whom the applications were for felt impossible at times. Ultimately, I think there needs to be some thought around accessibility of communication, not just due to phone reception but also given that those who apply for Child Disability Payment are parenting or caring for children with disabilities at the same time as trying to manage the admin." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I am disabled and have ADP - this makes my care for my disabled child difficult and affects his disability but there is no way to refer to this or it to be taken into account for CDP. I also received a recent review for my ADP - which is enhanced for both living & mobility and have an accessible vehicle. By default this helps with my disabled child. However my review period is for 12 months, which means I will not be eligible to apply for a new accessible vehicle in July 2025 as I will have less than 12 months until my review in Sept 25. This is surely an error and indirect/direct discrimination." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

Several respondents felt that the application form failed to adequately provide space to capture the mental and social impacts of disabilities. Moreover, that these experiences were perceived as less important to Social Security Scotland than physical symptoms. Respondents said that a disproportionate amount of the form accommodated issues surrounding mobility and physical health over less visible conditions.[126]

> "As noted before, the eligibility criteria and the questions on the application largely focus on physical disabilities and how they affect your life. There is little consideration for mental disabilities and how they affect your life and make you disabled. The latter are just as debilitating but it feels that they are not given as much importance. I was rejected for PIP with my OCD because of the application/eligibility/criteria being focused on the physical aspects of disability. ADP considered this better, much better, but still not enough consideration for how mental disabilities affect your life. " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "As described before it's all aimed at physical health rather than mental health I can do everything for myself but still suffer from severe trauma ptsd this is discriminatory against mental health which is wrong in this day and age" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

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[126] References to inclusivity in application form contents (namely physical and mental health recognition) is explored in sections 6.5.6 'Application', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

Interactions with staff

Some respondents reported that staff at Social Security Scotland had not recognised the disabling impact of their condition or had not adequately captured this in the application process.[127], [128]

> " My application was based on my extremely poor mental health and my failing physical health. The person who called me took ZERO notice of my plea to make my application base mostly on my mental health. This is just WRONG, it is not her job to make that decision. I am BEREFT!" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "The first time I applied: the woman on the phone asking me questions was rude and in the decision letter she commented that I was in a "good mood" so how could I be depressed. Because of her I've lost out on YEARS of ADP. I would like that woman's name so that I can lodge a formal complaint. You clearly don't educate your staff about mental health if that woman is the type of person who is still employed " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I've stated this in a previous question. Mental health is overlooked mainly because people don't understand what it can do to people. It reduces their quality of life to a point where they don't really have one. The physical and mental capacity of those struggling is overlooked because unless you have suffered it, you can't understand it. " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Similarly, respondents said that Social Security Scotland did not understand the impact of their neurodiversity on their everyday lives. Moreover, that the application form did not provide a suitable space to describe their experiences.

Invisible health conditions and the application process

Some also felt that staff were poorly informed on issues affecting neurodivergent applicants. This was particularly the case for autistic respondents and those with ADHD.

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[127] References to respondents feeling misunderstood or mistrusted by Social Security Scotland can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 7.4.4 'Decision', 7.4.6 'Decisions', 10.3.3 'Discrimination', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

[128] References to staff knowledge can be found in sections 3.3.5 'Overall', 5.3.3 'Staff', 5.3.5 'Staff', 6.4.1 'Consultation', 7.4.3 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 8.2.6 'Transfer', 9.3.4 'Barriers', 10.3.4 'Discrimination'.

> "As previously stated, the questions do not enable autistic people to capture all of their difficulties and challenges which have a significant impact on their lives, whether that be direct or indirect. " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> " It seems extra-difficult to describe day to day life as a person living with ASD and be fully understood, the way the form does not really cater for this." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

When respondents did not feel the application process was inclusive to their circumstances, they often reported feeling marginalised, "ignored" and overlooked, and/or having experienced "prejudice".

> "Invisible disabilities are less likely to receive diagnoses from medical professionals, have less available evidence to show their existence and receive greater prejudice against them than visible disabilities. " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "The questions are vague and rarely mention mental health, made me feel like I didn't count, like I wasn't worth recieving help." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

10.3.5 Accessibility

Another prevalent theme relates to accessibility. Namely, inequalities in the ease of access to Social Security Scotland's services and communications which were experienced as discriminatory.

For some respondents, Social Security Scotland did not provide a service which they felt catered to, or recognised, a respondents' accessibility needs. For others, their needs were met inconsistently or in an untimely manner, resulting in delays that were considered unfair, and feelings of stress and anxiety.

These comments have been broken down into three themes:

- Rural challenges: The experiences of respondents who live rurally.
- Communication formats: The experiences of those who have a preferred communication format, for example relating to a disability or condition as well as digital skills.
- Clarity and understanding: The experiences of those who needed additional support to make sense of the communications they received from Social Security Scotland.

Rural challenges

For respondents who live rurally, some face barriers to communicating with Social Security Scotland because of network and connectivity issues. Moreover, rural respondents may have poor geographical access to face-to-face support and other tools needed to support an application.

Some respondents said they felt they were facing discrimination because of their rural locality. "I felt I was being blamed" wrote one respondent as they talked about the poor "[phone] reception" they experienced and the impact this made on communicating with Social Security Scotland.

Another described being treated unfairly as their geographical isolation, coupled with their physical disability and poor local transport, meant a trip the "mainland" to secure Social Security Scotland services would result in pain and inconvenience. Yet, they wrote that the message from Social Security Scotland was that they "would have to" visit the mainland if their application form was not filled in in a particular way.

Another respondent related how problems with Social Security Scotland's websites, coupled with no option for emailing the agency, meant that their only option to provide information was via post. The time it takes to receive and send post from rural locations, they explained, causes lengthy delays, so that when faced with limited communication options rural applicants face "discrimination".

> "I also live rurally and so phone reception is really tricky. I know it's frustrating when reception is poor but often I felt that I was being blamed or, again, made to feel my honesty was somehow in question, from the response I got." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

> "I am physically disabled and live on an Island which hasn't had a Ferry Service and is often cancelled due to poor weather, but I was told if my form didn't show what you wanted it too, I *would have to* visit you on the mainland???? Travel also hurts me!!!!!." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "Living rural and your online doc tool not working they asked me to post it. I didn't have access to printer we had horrendous snow. I could[n't] leave my husband who was very unwell. I asked to email answer was No. Asked to speak with manager told no too busy. Took 6 days for an reply envelope to arrive. This is discrimination on rural living." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

Communication formats[129]

As with the respondent quoted immediately above, various comments reported a lack of accessible communication options provided by Social Security Scotland, which respondents classified as discriminatory.

Communication formats necessitated by respondents include large print letters, email, and video calls for British Sign Language users. When these communication formats were not available respondents felt discriminated against.

Discrimination was also associated with experiences of digital exclusion, hearing and visual impairment, physical disability, and neurodiversity, among others; with some feeling pressured to use communication methods they were not comfortable with or were unable to use.

Neurodivergent respondents notably expressed difficulties with the accessibility of communications with Social Security Scotland. Phone calls could be seen as particularly problematic, with alternative routes being perceived as of a poorer quality.

> "The inability of SSS to timely send required letters and communication in our preferred format (large print) or to provide requested alternative methods of communication (email), contravenes SSS' own charter and is discriminatory." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I waited 50 minutes to speak to someone then was told to go away and fill in the form despite telling them I had a hand injury and couldn't write." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I'm dyslexic I cannot read or understand what I'm reading. Everytime you need me to do something you email me??????." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I kept being told to go online." Respondent with experience of having their award transferred to Social Security Scotland

[129] References to communication modes and accessibility can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 3.3.4 Overall, 4.3.4 'Webchat', 6.5.7 'Application', 9.3.3 'Barriers', 9.3.7 'Barriers', 10.3.5 'Discrimination'

> “The application form is designed for neurotypical people and the questions are asked in such a way that anyone that is neurodivergent won't always fully understand the type or level of details needs to help support their application.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Of note are comments from those with additional communication needs, associated with physical and mental health conditions and/or neurodiversity, who felt pressurised into using the helpline service. For some, this was seen as the preferred, or insisted, method of communication by Social Security Scotland.

Others, who faced barriers in accessing online forms and services felt pressured into using these online communication formats; this despite lacking digital skills or not having digital access.

Being pressurised into using a communication format they were not comfortable with, or able to use, was recognised by these respondents as a form of discrimination.

> “Failing to provide alternative communication methods is inherently discriminatory. It's extremely surprising that a new service *for people with disabilities* has been set up as if everybody can make and receive phone calls. This is a huge barrier for many, *many* disabled people: the Deaf and hard of hearing, obviously, but also a very large proportion of autistic people, those with social anxiety, ADHD, etc. The policy that staff are not allowed to communicate by email is also a bad one. Phone calls are *less* secure and have far less scope for privacy than emails, and email communication is far more accessible to many people.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “age / methods of information and Appling all done remotely and insisted methods of phone - not helpfull to those unable to use/hear over phone and dont know BSL - not up to date with remote/computer or other device methods of filling forms/website logging in remembering passwords and which sites for example gets upsetting,frustrating and annoying among other things.” Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> “It was also assumed that I had a computer and was computer literate. As it happens I am but to make such an assumption is wrong and discriminatory especially towards the elderly or disadvantaged. Most people dealing with you come under this category.” Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

When suggestions for improving the service were made, they focused on providing new or alternative methods of communication. One respondent with hearing impairment suggested video calls to enable them to communicate via a British Sign Language interpreter.

Others, who identified as neurodivergent, stressed the need for tailored solutions to communication barriers. Having dedicated links to sources of help who specialised in neurodiversity, plus access to email and a "more accessible" version of webchat were all listed as communication formats that would lessen the discrimination they felt.

> "Being deaf can't hear / people Won't speak to the interpreter . Mayb you should have video calls so it can be turned on and see the person to believe it is them."
> Respondent with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement

> "A lot of info is via phone . I have Autism so don't like communicating on phones . Maybe either special links or places to go to to help with firms . I know there is CAB but can take up to 3 months for an appointment and not always Austic trained. I would love an assistant to help me with forms etc , every day life." Respondent with experience of having award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "either make the webchat accessible or provide generic email addresses for your teams so I don't have to go through the stress and anxiety of the phone call. It's unfair and it does discriminate against people like me who struggle with stress of voice telephone, automated menus and the repetitive music and messages when on hold. If you can understand what I've said, it would be greatly appreciated."
> Respondent with experience of having award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "As before - I'm autistic. I can't use the phone well. Live chat is pain. Snail mail is stupid. I should be able to type a question and get a reply when I'm available.."
> Respondent with experience of having award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Clarity and understanding

Some respondents self-identified as needing additional support to make sense of the communications they received from Social Security Scotland. A lack of accessible support was defined by some as discriminatory.

For those who felt they needed things communicated more clearly, they variously described the information they were provided with, and Social Security Scotland processes more generally, as too complicated and exceeding their level of understanding. Some of these respondents described not finding quality support to overcome these challenges.

When respondents related these issues to the theme of discrimination, some pointed to aspects of the application process which they felt were discriminatory. For example, some did not feel that they could adequately describe their circumstances without support due to complexities in the process (this theme is explored in the chapter on 'Application' section 5.4.12).

Others described the language used by Social Security Scotland to communicate decisions as complicated and unclear. Again, a lack of support to understand the information shared was cited in relation to these respondents' experiences of discrimination.

> "Lack of help to express my disabilities." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I struggle to articulate the issues I am facing and to complete the complex process of the questions." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "Not explained at a level that i was able to understand." Respondent with experience of having award transferred to Carer Support Payment

> "I need information which is clearly expalained and easy to understand. I asked several times for someone to explain i was told i need to apply for a redetermination which seems like a waste of time if they wont explain it. All i want is an explanation i can understand." Respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment

10.3.6 Concerns around policy eligibility[130]

Several respondents reported concerns regarding eligibility criteria and decisions across several benefits. Key themes concern:

- Income thresholds and qualifying benefits:
- Eligibility ratings for certain disability symptoms and treatment choices

Income thresholds and qualifying benefit

These comments tended to highlight areas of eligibility which were perceived by respondents as discriminatory, particularly in relation to qualifying benefits and income thresholds.

[130] References to eligibility can be found in sections 6.5.4 'Application', 7.4.6 'Decision', 8.2.5 'Transfer', 10.3.6 'Discrimination'.

Many describe feeling penalised due to not receiving a qualifying benefit such as Universal Credit. This was particularly the case for respondents who had applied for Five Family Payments.

Eligibility criteria were often deemed unfair or insensitive to respondents' personal circumstances. Some said they felt worse off than those who were receiving an underlying benefit; that by working in paid employment it had left them in a worse financial position.

> "When reading my decision letter I felt like I was being discriminated by as someone who works. Was not aware that this was a benefit that you could only get if you were already on benefits. Was very disappointed, there needs to be more help and support out there for self employed individuals/sole traders on low incomes when pregnant." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "Working parents don't get any help but people on benefits get everything." Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

> "We both worked our whole life. Eiligible eventually for full state pension, yet those who haven't, have more access and eligibility than us to benefits. If I'm awarded Carers I'll lose it when I collect the pension I paid for, whereas if I received other benefits I'd be better off. That's discrimination." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "I feel I have been discriminated against due to the fact that I have worked all my days. I had an accident at work and after a year off work the company retired me due to ill health. When I applied for benefits I was told that because I had a pension I would need to use that to live on . I know stand to loose my house making me homeless because my pension was to pay my house off . The government has forced people into pensions but at no time have they ever said that this would effect my ability to access benefits." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Those who did not receive a qualifying benefit due to their income were not the only group who felt excluded. Immigration status and relatedly, resource to public funds, were highlighted as barriers to accessing a qualifying benefit.

> “The policy stated immigrants under family visa cannot claim public funds. I did not claim for myself, but rather claim on behalf of my son who is a British citizen, and his father also a British citizen. Our Universal Credit was denied, due to them considered my husband application as a single claim, even though he is married to me. Single claim means that his salary was too high for a single man(he is married though).So whatever we claim for later was denied too. It's like a domino effects. The way I see things here is that my child has no benefit for being a British citizen, coz all his rights was denied due to his mother immigration status. I came here legally under spouse visa, was denied to claim for my child's right but someone else came here illegally was given everything and protected by the government.”
> Respondent with experience of Five Family Payment

Some respondents with experience of applying for Funeral Support Payment also felt that the eligibility criteria were unfair. Most prevalent were those who had what they considered a small amount of funds set aside for funeral costs, resulting in an unsuccessful application. For these respondents, the threshold was not high enough meaning they were still unable to afford the costs of organising a funeral.

> “Having small plan in place rendered us void from really get the help we needed ,and familystepped in to help with the costs .in hindsight my mum should have spent the money and not tried to protect her family from the financial burden associated with her death” Respondent with experience of Funeral Support Payment

Similarly, some respondents who received other benefits that disqualified them from receiving a Social Security Scotland benefit felt that the criteria was unfair. For example, those applying for Carers Support Payment who are in receipt of Employment Support Allowance.

> “Because I receive esa I cannot get carers allowance yet if I went and got a job and was paid under the amount allowed I could get carers allowance as esa doesn’t pay much more than the amount why is this a barrier to getting paid carers allowance.”
> Respondent with experience of having award transferred to Carer Support Payment

Concerns around eligibility for Carer Support Payment for those of pension age were particularly prevalent. For most of these respondents, they felt that this policy equated to age-based discrimination. They also detailed that despite receiving a pension, their caring responsibilities had not changed. For some, the level of care they provided was becoming more demanding with time and age.

Many of these comments expressed feeling as though their caring responsibilities did not matter. These respondents felt that there should be a distinction between their pension as separate from the costs of caring for a loved one.[131]

> "I feel discriminated upon because I cannot receive some kind of Carers Allowance because I have a State Pension. I only required some support so I could have a short break from my full time Carer duties." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "Age discrimination in carers allowance being stopped at age 66 when my husbands care needs have increased and my income has reduced" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

> "As I have reached state pension age my carer's allowance has stopped but I still meet the critearia to care for my mother but there's no information as to any benefits I might be able to claim" Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

Some respondents felt that their time had been wasted due to eligibility criteria not being clear.

> "I recently earned just over the threshold and have been subjected to numerous hurdles. I was asked to provide payslips, which I submitted, only to be asked for more documents, including a P45 and an email from my employer. Even after providing all of this, it still wasn't sufficient, leading to further delays. If you don't intend to grant me the benefit I am entitled to, please be transparent about the reason. Don't make me go through endless steps just to reject my claim. If I weren't caring for my dad, the state would likely have to pay much more than the carer support benefit rate." Respondent with experience of Carer Support Payment

Eligibility ratings for certain disability symptoms and treatment choices

Some respondents highlighted how certain health symptoms were unfairly weighted by Social Security Scotland's eligibility criteria. Others felt discriminated against due to their choices for treating health related issues.

[131] References to Carer Support Payment and 'underlying entitlement' can be found in sections 3.3.4 'Overall', 7.5.6 'Application', 8.2.6 'Transfer', '10.3.6 'Discrimination'.

As touched on in previous sections, some respondents with experience of applying for a disability benefit raised concerns about how their circumstances were weighted by the eligibility criteria.

Neurodivergent respondents and those with mental health problems notably expressed feeling as though their condition specific symptoms were disregarded.

> "As explained, I don't feel you treat people with mental illness fairly. The process you have is a points system. I can (now) look after myself. At the start off my diagnosis everything was a massive struggle (some things I do still struggle with but not as much). I was in a full time job before this illness but I've had to sadly give it up as I'm just not coping 100% yet. I've never, ever claimed anything and I would never wish this illness on anyone yet I now feel I'm being discriminated against simply because I'm able to 'look after myself'. " Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I feel like my reasons related strongly with depression were accepted but my reasons strongly related with autism were dismissed which made me feel upset and invalidated" Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

> "I have severe adhd anxiety, depression and mental health which have all been diagnosed my a phycologist, this affectes my day to day living and this was not taken into account..." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Several respondents said they had experienced discrimination due to their approach to managing their disability or condition. For example, whether they take medication, have a treatment plan in place, or regularly attend appointments.

Some respondents felt they were scored unfavourably due to their choices of treatment, resulting in an unfair decision. Some of these respondents preferred holistic or alternative therapies, which they felt were perceived as less legitimate by Social Security Scotland. These respondents felt that their right to choose a treatment route to suit their needs had been disregarded.

Some also said they had been treated unfavourably due to a decision not to take any medication for their condition. They tended to feel that Social Security Scotland would perceive a decision not to take medication as evidence that their condition was 'not serious enough' to qualify for a disability payment.

One respondent mentioned that barriers to accessing healthcare providers had left them without treatment plans, and that this, and that the absence of a plan had been interpreted as them being able to cope with their ill health, despite this being the case.

"In the decision letter you clearly discriminate against someone who doesn't take medication for a condition or symptoms no matter how severe it is, when they are not able to. That goes against a person's choice in how they manage their own well being and fails to consider if the person is able to take traditional meds, which I can't without severe contraindications. You clearly have a tick box that everyone needs to meet or fit into, and this does not represent all people, all health conditions, all symptoms and all situations. We are not all the same! And I expect as a minimum to be treated as an individual and for my individual circumstances to be treated fairly, not disregarded because it's too complicated to consider and doesn't fit into your perfect box." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"My medical diagnosis was ignored in the process of my application. I have been rejected because my medication list does not include medication for my condition. I would like to highlight that Social Security Staff should not be forcing people to take medication and also that not every condition required medication." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I was deemed to not suffer mental ill health or anxiety as I opted not to take medication. My decision states that I was not awarded as not on mental health medication, I struggle with severe anxiety everyday." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I feel that I was discriminated against because I am not on medication and, I do not attend my GP often. I feel this lead to staff "believing" that I was not "unwell enough" to be eligible for the benefit. I gave reasons for the lack of medication (adverse reactions) and lack of medical appointments (there's not a lot they can do for me) and explained that I use holistic therapies and physiotherapy to help relieve my symptoms." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

"I felt I was treated in the process as if my anxiety, fibromyalgia and irritable bowel syndrome was not a problem because I don't have any treatment plans in place but this is simply because I am incapable of attending appointments I struggle to make them for myself I also found that when I did have treatment plans they didn't work for me so I try to just manage these by myself." Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

11 Changes across the year

This section looks at the progression on some of the main measures of this survey and their variation across the financial year. This is the first year that the survey has started collecting data continuously for some of its benefits. This process started mid-July 2024. This means that data was not fully continuous across all benefits and, therefore, response volumes fluctuated through the year according to fieldwork for benefits collected manually. That being said, it is still possible to appreciate some trends and this reporting will set the parameter for future years when most data will be collected continuously and, therefore, spread more evenly across the year.

Responses have been grouped every two months. Given that data collection through automatically issued invites started on 12 July, the period 'June-July' only contains data for those 19 days. In future years these periods will all contain two months worth of responses. It is worth noting that clients get invited to complete the survey once they receive a decision on an application, the transfer of their award from Department from Work and Pensions is complete or they receive a pre-qualifying payment like the Winter Heating ones. This means that at least some of their experience is likely to have taken place some weeks or months before they share their views with us, so, for example, a fluctuation of a rating in the period August-September would likely be a result of something taking place in a previous date.

Lastly, most benefits are available throughout the year, the only exception are the winter benefits (Winter Heating Payment and Child Winter Heating Payment) which for obvious reasons are only collected at the end of winter.

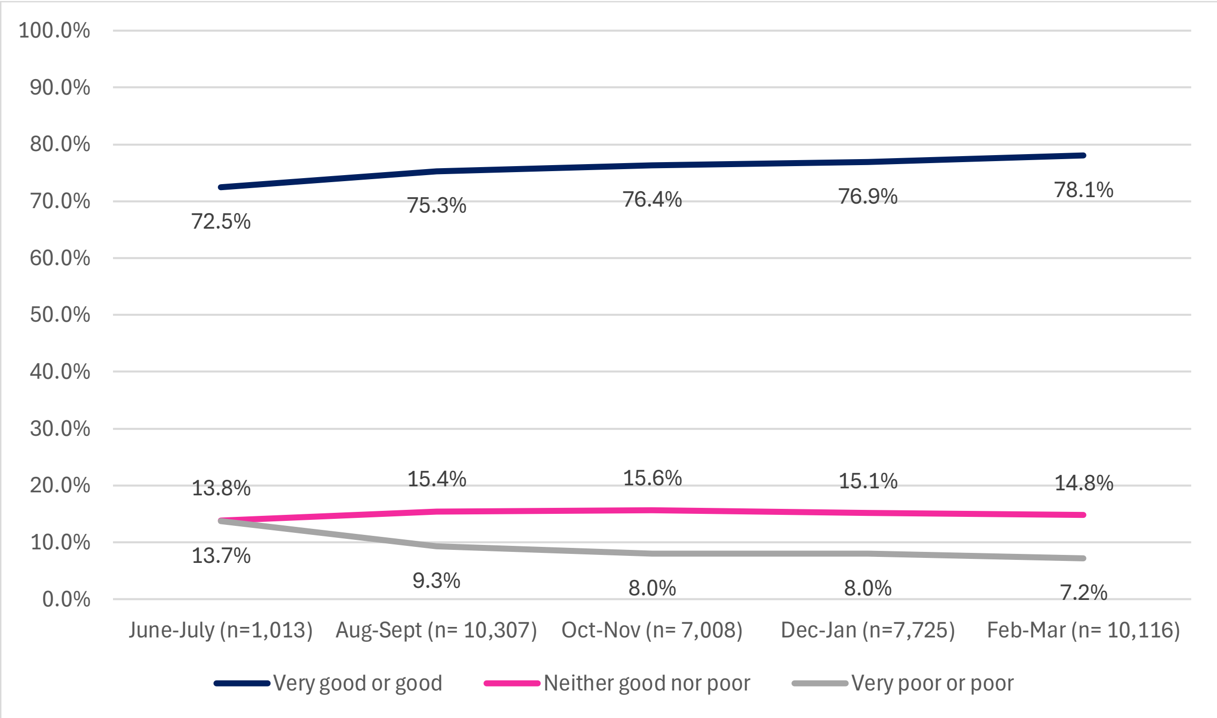
The measures included in this section are:

- Overall experience of Social Security Scotland
- Overall experience of Social Security Scotland's staff
- Overall experience of the application process
- Agreement with the statement 'it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete your application'
- Agreement with the statement 'the application process was clear'
- Agreement with the statement 'my application was processed in reasonable time'
- Percentage of clients who experienced a barrier
- Percentage of clients who experienced discrimination

11.1 Overall experience of Social Security Scotland across the year

All respondents to this survey are asked what their overall experience was with Social Security Scotland. We can see an upwards trend in the overall experience of respondents with 72.5% rating their overall experience as very good or good in June-July 2024 to 78.1% in February-March 2025. Simultaneously, the proportion of clients saying their overall experience was poor or very poor decreased from 13.7% in June-July 2024 to 7.2% in February-March 2025.

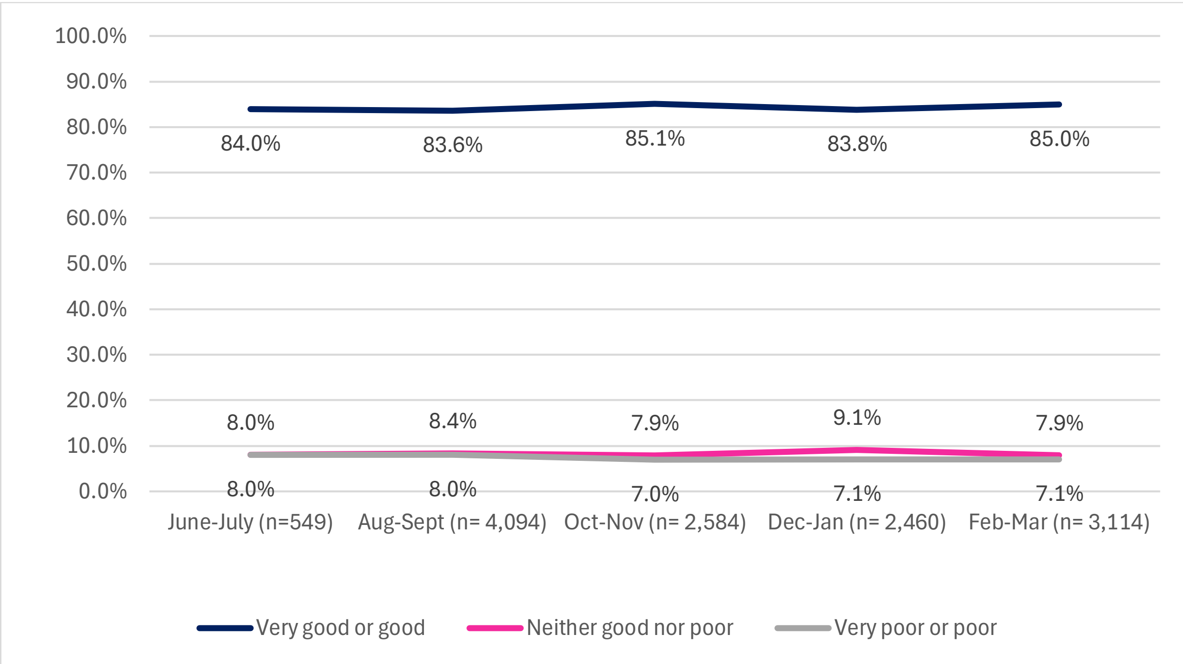
Figure 11.1: Overall experience rating 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents



11.2 Overall experience of Social Security Scotland's staff across the year

This survey asks how the overall experience of clients is with our staff. The proportion of clients rating their experience with our staff as very good or good remained consistent across the year fluctuating between 83.6% of agreement to 85%. The same is the case for respondents who said their experience of staff was neither good nor poor, or poor or very poor with minor fluctuations.

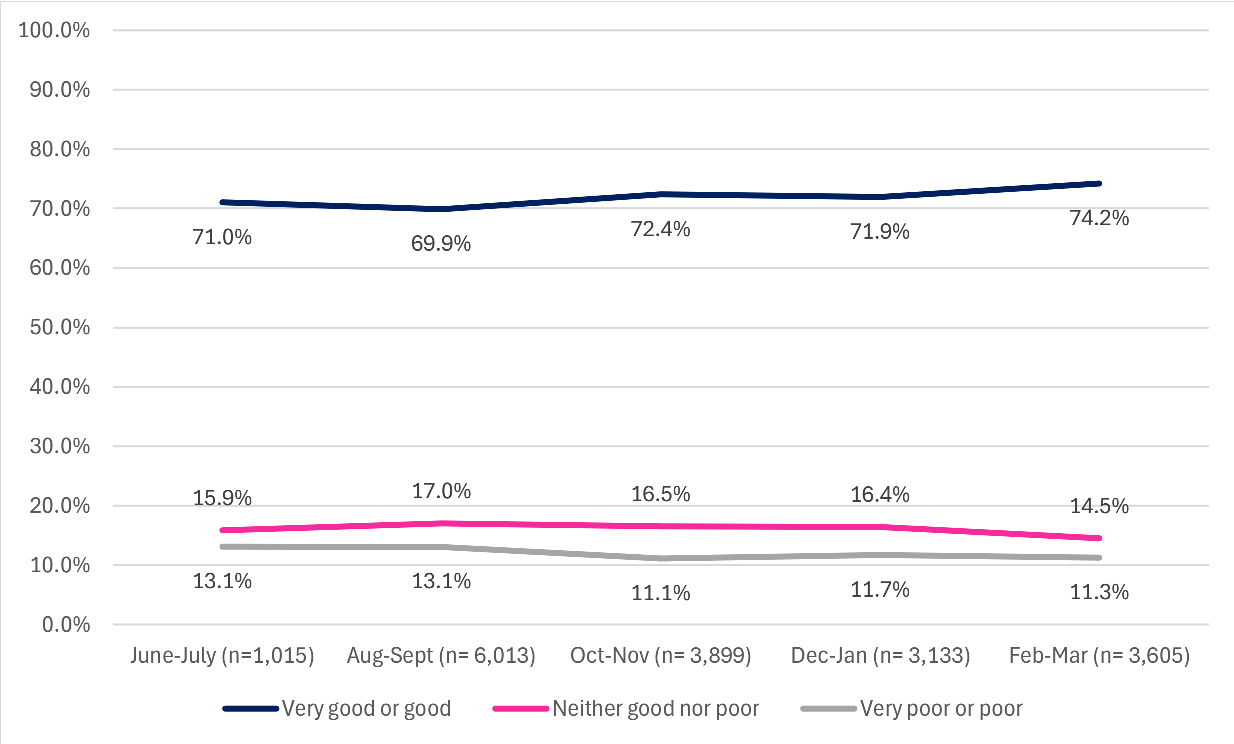
Figure 11.2: Overall experience with Social Security Scotland's staff 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents



11.3 Overall experience of applying for a benefit across the year

At the end of the application section the survey asks for a rating of the overall experience of applying for a benefit(s). This rating had a slight upwards trend from 71% of respondents rating their experience as very good or good in June-July 2024, to 74.2% of respondents in February-March 2025. The proportion of respondents rating their experience of applying for a benefit(s) as very poor or poor simultaneously went slightly down from 13.1% to 11.3% in those same periods.

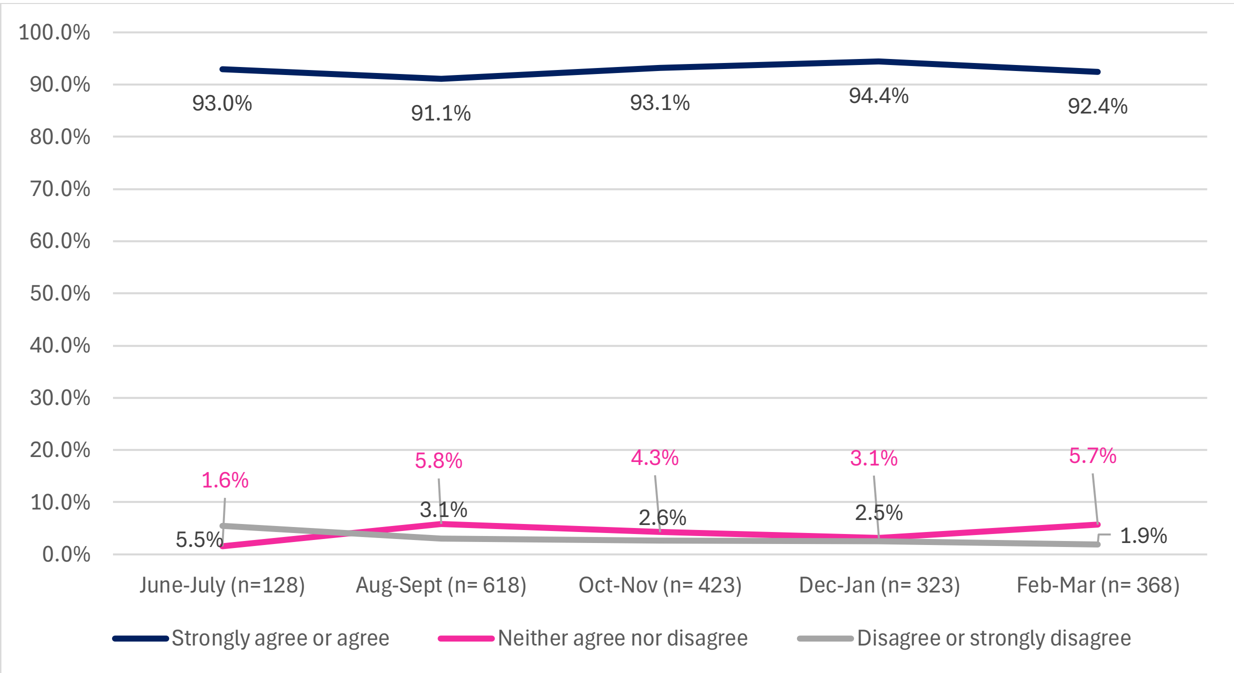
Figure 11.3: Overall experience of applying for a benefit 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents who applied for a benefit



11.4 Agreement with ‘it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete your application’ across the year

As part of the application section of this survey clients were asked to agree or disagree with the statement ‘it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete an application’. The agreement with this statement stayed consistent with only very small fluctuations. The disagreement with it went downwards from 5.6% in June-July 2024 to 1.9% in February-March 2025 while the proportion of respondents remaining neutral had the opposite direction going from 1.6% to 5.7% on those same periods. This would indicate a small shift from disagreement to a more neutral view on this aspect of the service.

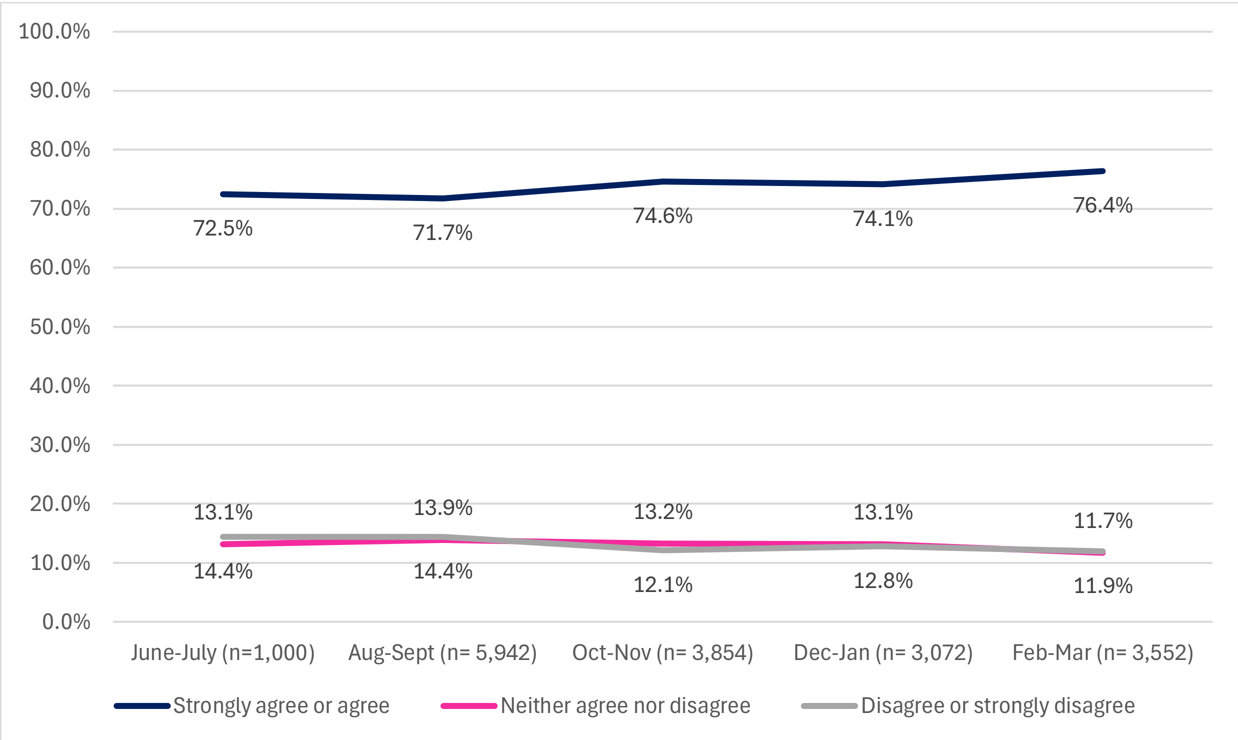
Figure 11.4: Agreement with ‘it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete your application’ 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents who applied for a benefit



11.5 Agreement with ‘the application process was clear’ across the year

Continuing with the application process, clients were then asked how much they agreed with the statement ‘the application process was clear’. There is a slight upwards trend in the proportion of respondents agreeing with this statement across the year going from 72.5% in June-July 2024 to 76.4% in February-March 2025. At the same time the options ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘disagree or strongly disagree’ go gradually downwards and agreement raises.

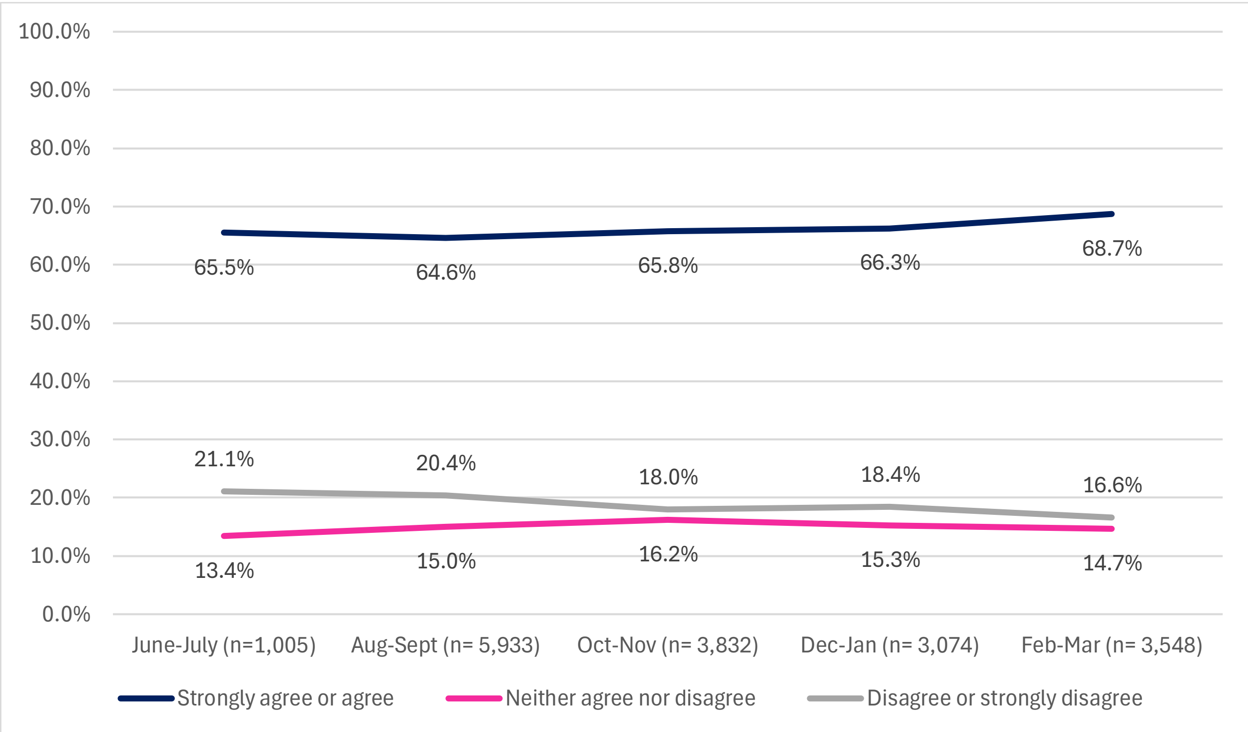
Figure 11.5: Agreement with ‘the application process was clear’ 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents who applied for a benefit



11.6 Agreement with ‘my application was handled in a reasonable time’ across the year

In another statement regarding the application process clients were asked to agree/disagree with whether their application was handled within a reasonable timeframe. The agreement with this statement goes slightly upwards from 65.5% in June-July 2024, with a small dip in August-September 2024 to 64.6% and then upwards again to 68.7% in February-March 2025. Disagreement has an inverse movement going slightly up from 13.4% in June-July 2024 to 16.2% in October-November 2024 and then down to 14.7% in February-March 2025.

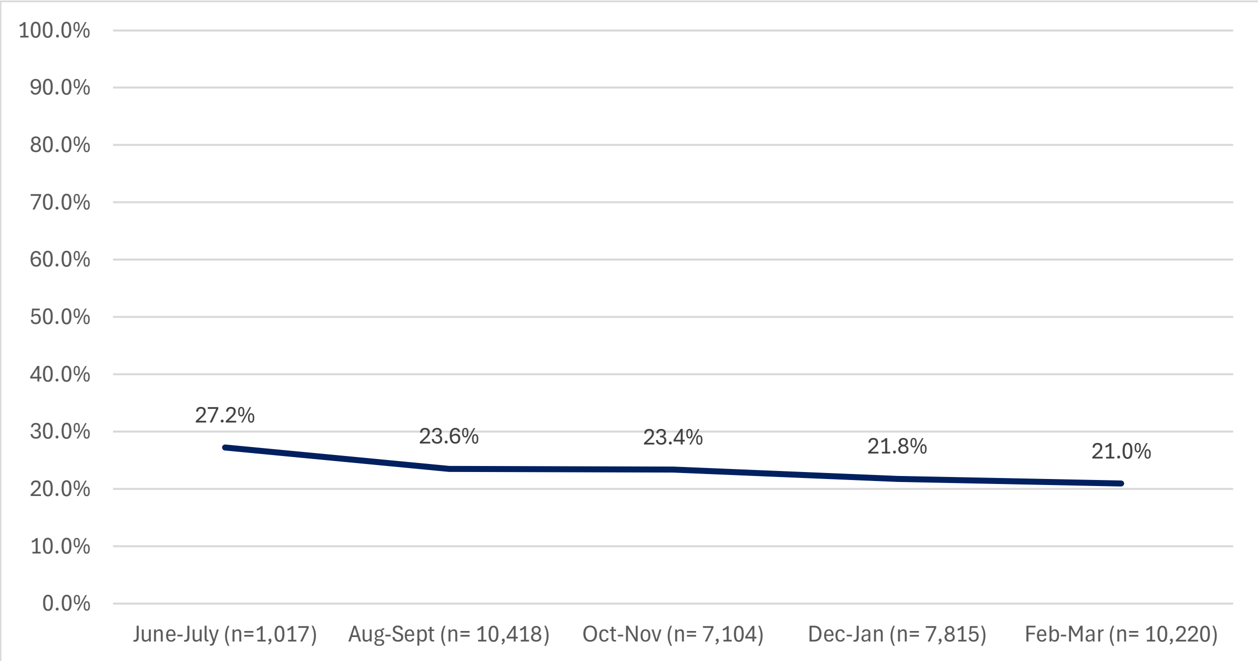
Figure 11.6: Agreement with ‘my application was handled in a reasonable time’ 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents who applied for a benefit



11.7 Level of barriers across the year

All clients are asked if they experienced any kind of barriers while using our services. There is a downward trend from the first bimonthly period (June-July 2024) with 27.2% of respondents telling us they experienced a barrier with a drop to 23.6% in August-September 2024 and it continues to lower to 21% in February-March 2025.

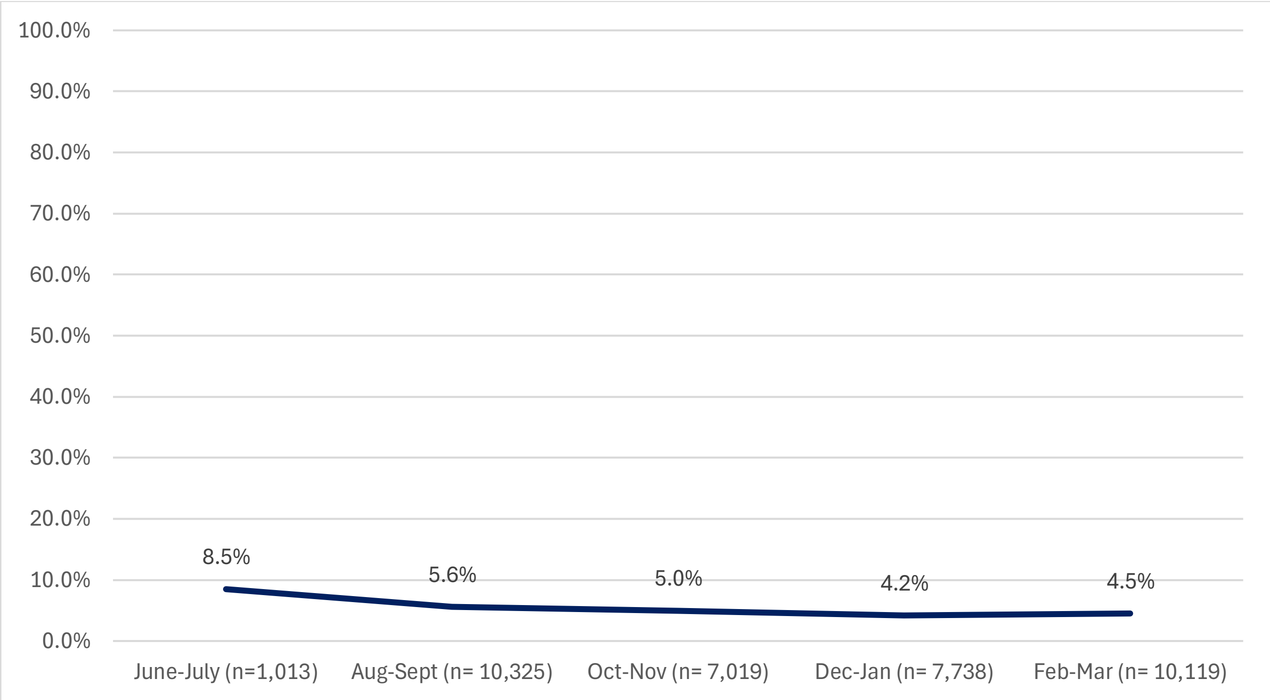
Figure 11.7: Level of barriers faced getting help from Social Security Scotland 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents



11.8 Level of discrimination faced across the year

Just like with barriers, all respondents are asked if they experienced any discrimination while using our services. There is a consistent downward trend going from 8.5% of respondents saying they experienced discrimination in the period June-July 2024 to 4.5% of respondents in February-March 2025.

Figure 11.8: Level of discrimination faced 2024-25, bi-monthly periods
All respondents



12 Intersectional analysis of respondents characteristics

12.1 Priority groups

The Scottish Government has defined six ‘priority family groups’ that are at a higher risk of poverty:

- lone parent families
- minority ethnic families
- families with a disabled adult or child
- families with a younger mother (under 25)
- families with a child under 1
- larger families (3+ children)

For the purposes of further understanding the experiences of these groups, additional analysis was conducted on Client Satisfaction Survey findings. Initially, this involved understanding which of the priority family groups each respondent was part of. Of all respondents in the 2024-25 Client Satisfaction Survey, 79% are in one or more priority family groups.

Methodology

For some priority groups, the Client Satisfaction Survey data makes it easy to identify[132]. However, for some priority groups a suitable question does not exist in the Client Satisfaction Survey. This is true for the priority family groups ‘lone parent families’ and ‘families with a younger mother (under 25)’. To identify these groups proxy questions were used.[133]

Some respondents may not be identified as being in a priority family group due to their responses in the survey. This is particularly likely to be the case where a respondent falls into a priority group but has answered the relevant question with “prefer not to say” or has skipped a question. There are a multitude of reasons why people might select ‘prefer not to say’ or skip a question but one possible reason could be that they are in a priority group, but they do not want to share that information. The use of proxies may also further limit the identification of some respondents being within priority family groups.

Due to the nature of the benefits that Social Security Scotland offers it is highly likely that priority family groups are overrepresented in regards to the overall population.

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[132] For example, respondents who selected “3 or more” to the question “how many children and young people under 16 years of age live in your household?” were identified as being in the ‘larger families (3+ children) priority family group.

[133] Lone parent families identified using: “children in household” is greater than zero and Adults in Household equals 1. Families with a younger mother (under 25) identified using: Gender identity equals female, age band is 16-24 and children in household greater than zero. Minority ethnic families: at least one respondent identified as belonging from a minoritised ethnicity in the UK.

However, the purpose of this analysis is to highlight, in Client Satisfaction Survey data: the incidence of each priority family group; and the overlap between each priority family group.

Table 12.1: Percentage of all respondents in priority family groups
All respondents

Priority Family Group	In no groups	In 1 group	In 2 groups	In 3 groups	In 4 or more groups	Total
Percentage	21%	69%	8%	1%	0.1%	
Total	7,663	25,393	3,064	430	39	36,589

Table 12.2: Percentage of respondents by priority family group
All respondents in a priority family group

Priority family group	Percentage	Total
Lone Parent Families	15%	2,967
Larger families (three or more children)	16%	1,419
Families with a child under one	6%	164
Families with a younger mother (under 25)	5%	299
Families with a disabled adult or child	77%	26,195
Minority ethnic families	5%	1,923

Table 12.3: Percentage of respondents in each priority family group by group count
All respondents in a priority family group

Priority Family Group	In 1 group	In 2 groups	In 3 groups	In 4 or more groups	Total
Lone Parent Families	31%	56%	12%	1%	2,967
Larger families (three or more children)	27%	49%	22%	2%	1,419
Families with a child under one	22%	41%	31%	7%	164
Families with a younger mother	37%	48%	13%	2%	299
Families with a disabled adult or child	89%	10%	1%	0.1%	26,195
Minority ethnic families	33%	55%	10%	2%	1,923

Table 12.4: Overlap between priority family groups
All respondents in a priority family group

Priority Family Group	Lone Parent Families	Larger families (three or more children)	Families with a child under one	Families with a younger mother	Families with a disabled adult or child	Minority ethnic families	Total
Lone Parent Families	100%	31%	33%	23%	12%	22%	2,967
Larger families (three or more children)	14%	100%	37%	8%	13%	29%	1,419
Families with a child under one	6%	12%	100%	18%	5%	7%	164
Families with a younger mother	3%	2%	11%	100%	3%	5%	299
Families with a disabled adult or child	59%	46%	37%	39%	100%	52%	26,195
Minority ethnic families	10%	22%	12%	11%	4%	100%	1,923

12.2 Seldom heard groups

In 2024 an evidence review was published by The Scottish Government setting out the current seldom-heard groups across the Scottish social security system and the barriers they face to accessing their entitlements. The seldom heard groups definition used was based on the five seldom heard groups identified in 2019 by the Seldom Heard Voices Programme: mobile populations, vulnerable groups, end of life, carers and care experienced, and survivors of abuse.

The breakdowns presented below will contribute to building an evidence base on these seldom heard groups, and therefore, help support the Scottish Government in the implementation of its Benefit Take-up Strategy by providing information that will help develop new approaches to support people to access social security benefits.

The population that is serviced by Social Security Scotland is by its own nature prone to be part of one of these groups. This is evidenced by the high percentage of respondents (97%) to the Client Satisfaction Survey that fall within the definition of seldom heard groups in 2024-25.

It is worth noting that the Client Satisfaction Survey captures some portions of these groups in the process of meeting its mandated objectives. Additionally, it does not provide a representative sample of these groups in the total Social Security Scotland client population. Therefore, this should not be taken as the main source for this data.

Table 12.5: Presence of seldom heard groups in the respondents
All respondents

Seldom heard Group	Seldom heard sub-groups captured through proxies*	Seldom heard sub-groups not captured	Percentage out of all respondents	Total
Minoritised ethnic communities	Member of established ethnic minority communities Refugees Gypsy/Traveller communities	Migrants	6.7%	1,931
People with disabilities and/or chronic ill-health	People with mental health conditions Bereaved families People with learning disabilities and/or difficulties	People with a terminal illness (other than the ones already included as applying to a disability benefit through SRTI) People with a stigmatised illness People with fluctuating and/or less visible conditions	87.4%	29,925
Children and families	Young parents Single parents Carers Care-experienced Large families	Kinship carers	41.2%	15,066
Vulnerable people	Veterans	Survivors of abuse Homeless/precariously housed people Prisoners (recently released) Socially isolated/house-bound older adults	4.2%	1,547

***Important note on calculations:**

- for ‘Minoritised ethnic communities’ responses include those who responded to ethnicity question and reported belonging to a minoritised ethnicity in the UK, and also respondents who said yes to refugee status;
- for ‘People with disabilities and/or chronic ill-health’ responses include those who responded ‘yes’ to the 'do you have a long-term health condition' question, those with experience of Adult Disability Payment, Child Disability Payment or Funeral Support Payment;
- ‘Children and families’ includes households with one adult and at least 1 child (lone parent), households with only one adult between 16-24 years of age and at least 1 child (young lone parent), households with 3 or more children (large families), people who reported being care-experienced and people who said they were an unpaid carer for at least one other person;
- ‘Vulnerable people’ only includes data from people who reported serving in the armed forces as the rest of the characteristics are not available in this survey.

13 Next steps

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

We are also planning for the future of the survey. The financial year 2025-2026 will see the introduction of new benefits such as Pension Age Disability Payment, Pension Age Winter Payment and two-child limit lifted for family payments. This next financial year should also mark the conclusion of the transfer of awards from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The bi-annual publications for specific benefit families (disability, family, carer and case transfer) will begin to include comparisons to previous periods now data collection is continuous and data periods comparable. As the transfers of awards from the Department for Work and Pensions comes to an end so will the dedicated biannual reports with the last one being published at the end of 2025. That publication resource will now be dedicated to a carer benefits biannual report now that Carer Support Payment has been launched.

The Client Satisfaction invites will continue to issue surveys automatically to clients applying for a benefit and sent manually to people receiving automatically awarded benefits and for people experiencing a transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions.

14 Glossary

This is a glossary of some of the terms and acronyms used in this report. The intention is to use as little acronyms and 'jargon' as possible, but sometimes it is unavoidable and also part of natural language in open text comments left by respondents.

- **Automatically received/paid benefit OR Automatic Payment** – benefits that are paid because there is underlying entitlement to them such as Winter Heating Payment, Child Winter Heating Payment and Carer's Allowance Supplement.
- **Benefit experience** – the benefit for which the respondents were invited to the survey. Respondents may have experience with other benefits, but the data presented here is for one in particular and the survey questions they received were tailored as such.
- **Case Transfer** – Process in which the award of a client was transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland.
- **DWP** – Department for Work and Pensions
- **Helpline** – the Social Security Scotland free phone line that offers a range of support to clients regarding benefits.
- **Local Delivery** – it is a localised service that's available in multiple locations across Scotland with Social Security Scotland client advisers who provide a range of support regarding benefits.
- **SSS** – Social Security Scotland
- **Webchat** – the online chat hosted in Social Security Scotland's website that offers a range of support to clients regarding benefits.

Annex A

Point of contact survey analysis

As part of the application process for all benefits administered by Social Security Scotland, clients are asked to rate their experience of making an application using a 'point of contact' survey.

This survey in distinct from the Client Satisfaction Survey, with respondents being asked to fill in the survey at point of contact (i.e. straight after completing a benefit application) rather than in the weeks or months after receiving a decision or payment. However, this survey provides a contextual backdrop to the Client Satisfaction Survey analysis on the topic of 'making an application'. With over 150,000 responses to this 'point of contact' survey, the response size is over four times that which makes up the Client Satisfaction Survey (36,589 responses to the Client Satisfaction Survey for this financial year). Both quantitative and qualitative questions were asked of 'point of contact' respondents, some of which can be directly compared to Client Satisfaction Survey results.

Survey method and results

The 'point of contact' survey asks applicants to rate their experience on a five-point scale ranging from very good through to very poor. Clients are further asked if there was anything Social Security Scotland could do to improve the experience of applying for a benefit. These questions are asked at the end of the equalities questionnaire which is the final part of the application. Qualitative analysis is covered in section 6.4.

Around 155,650 applicants left an experience rating across all benefit applications. These are further explored below by benefit[134] and application mode by: telephony; online; postal. An additional channel of 'Other' is included in overall analysis but not in any breakdowns as it includes only 7 responses[135].

The majority of respondents rated the application process as either 'very good' (55%) or 'good' (33%). When these figures are placed in comparison to Client Satisfaction Survey results (when respondents were asked to rate their overall experience of making an application using the same five-point scale), we see the 'point of contact' survey scored higher. Around three quarters of Client Satisfaction Survey respondents (72%) who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit said their experience of the application process overall was 'very good' or 'good', compared to 88% of 'point of contact' respondents.

In the 'point of contact' survey, those who had completed an application for a five family payment, Job Start Payment or Young Carer Grant were most likely to rate their

[134] Applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Food are combined in the equalities data.

[135] Other channel includes aggregated figures for 'Local Delivery', 'In Person', 'Transferred from Department for Work and Pensions' and 'External System'.

experience as 'very good' or 'good'. Conversely those with experience of applying for Pension Age Disability Payment or Adult Disability Payment were least likely to rate the experience as 'very good'. There was some further variation between benefits as set out in Table 1A below. These figures are comparable to those from the Client Satisfaction Survey (see Figure 6.1- Chapter 6).

Table 1A: Views on the application process by benefit
Point of contact survey respondents, row percentages

Benefit experience	Very good	Good	Neither poor nor good	Poor	Very poor	Total
Adult Disability Payment	35%	41%	21%	2%	1%	36,883
Child Disability Payment	48%	38%	12%	1%	0%	9,545
Carer Support Payment	63%	26%	10%	1%	0%	8,277
Best Start Grant/Foods	63%	30%	7%	0%	0%	44,752
Scottish Child Payment	61%	31%	7%	0%	0%	40,149
Job Start Payment	60%	34%	6%	0%	0%	1,801
Funeral Support Payment	62%	24%	14%	0%	0%	7,720
Young Carer Grant	62%	31%	7%	0%	0%	6,163
Pension Age Disability Payment	31%	46%	18%	4%	1%	397
All respondents	55%	33%	11%	1%	0%	155,687

Looking back to the point of contact survey (as outlined in Table 1A) those who applied by telephone were most likely to rate their experience as 'very good' (73%), compared to 53% of online and 40% of postal applications. Those applying by post were more likely to rate their experience as 'neither poor nor good' (51%). No direct comparison can be made to measures taken in the Client Satisfaction Survey, however it does provide useful contextual information for understanding how client experience is impacted by application channel.

Table 2A: Views on the application process by benefit
Point of contact survey respondents, row percentages

Benefit experience	Very good	Good	Neither poor nor good	Poor	Very poor	Total
Online	53%	35%	11%	1%	0%	142,723
Postal	40%	9%	51%	0%	0%	847
Telephony	73%	14%	12%	0%	0%	12,094

As outlined in Table 3A there was some variation in positive ratings for experience of completing an application depending on the channel used. For example, those who applied for Best Start Grant / Foods online (94%) were far more positive than those who applied by post (33%). However, those who applied for Scottish Child Payment rated their experience similarly by online or by phone (93% respectively). As online is by far the most popular method of application, some caution should be exercised when comparing the different application channels.

Table 3A: Views on the application process by benefit
Point of contact survey respondents, row percentages

Benefit experience	Application channel		
	Online	Postal	Telephony
Adult Disability Payment	76%	78%	#
Child Disability Payment	86%	#	
Carer Support Payment	91%	62%	89%
Best Start Grant/Foods	94%	33%	91%
Scottish Child Payment	93%	48%	91%
Job Start Payment	93%	#	92%
Funeral Support Payment	91%	44%	77%
Young Carer Grant	93%	80%	85%
Pension Age Disability Payment	78%	#	
All respondents	88%	49%	88%

The views expressed in this report by Client Satisfaction Survey respondents do not necessarily represent those of Social Security Scotland, the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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