



Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Measuring Our Charter 2023-24

How Social Security Scotland and the
Scottish Government are delivering on
Our Charter commitments.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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What is the Charter Measurement Framework?

This framework is a co-designed list of measures relating to the commitments set out in [Our Charter](#). It was designed in 2019, and this is the fifth year it has been published with data. It has two purposes. First, it shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are delivering the commitments. Second, it helps Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government improve.

Please note, the Charter Measurement Framework is not the only data published by Social Security Scotland. Statistics can be found at [Social Security Scotland - Statistics](#), and research publications at [Social Security Scotland - Social Research](#).

Who developed the framework?

The Charter Measurement Framework (the framework) was co-designed. This means that the Scottish Government worked together with Social Security Scotland and a diverse group of people with lived experience of the social security system to write the framework. Groups who represent people with lived experience (partner organisations) were also involved. And the Scottish Commission on Social Security gave valuable advice and input to the framework.

Social researchers then analysed the information and used it to produce the framework. The original [Charter Measurement Framework](#) document provides an overview of the measures included in the framework.

What does the framework measure?

The framework has four sections that match up with the sections of Our Charter. The first three sections are about how Social Security Scotland operates and delivers benefits. These measures are designed to tell us how the organisation treats clients, if staff are well supported, how the systems are working and how clients are experiencing the systems. The final section is about Scottish Government commitments, which relate to policy making about benefits and what the system as a whole should do. The measures in that section are designed to tell us what is being achieved over the longer term.

Our Charter and the Charter Measurement Framework are reviewed every five years. The first review has recently been completed and the refreshed charter and framework have been published. The 2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework will report on this new revised list of measures.

When is the framework filled in and published?

We publish the framework annually alongside Social Security Scotland's Annual Report and Accounts. Where possible, data in the framework covers the previous financial year. This year that means from the beginning of April 2023 to the end of March 2024.

The information needed to fill in the framework (data) comes from a variety of different research and statistics sources. The main ones for the first three sections are:

The Client Survey 2023-2024

All references to Client Survey respondents in this report refer to the [2023-24 Social Security Scotland Client Survey](#). The Client Survey offers Social Security Scotland's clients the chance to share their views and experiences of the service they received.

The survey was open to everyone who had received a decision on an application, had completed a Case Transfer or received a payment for the first time that didn't require an application between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. A total of 36,914 responses were received for the 2023-2024 Social Security Scotland Client Survey. This equates to around 9.3% of the 394,337 invites sent.

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.

The framework report does not compare results relating to 'all' Client Survey respondents from 2022-23 to 2023-24. This is because 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 years.

However, the framework does provide 2021-22 and 2022-23 Client Survey data¹ alongside this year's data when outlining results based on benefit experience, where relevant and possible. Results are only included in tables for years where the benefits were live and there was enough data to report.

¹ Changes to the design and analysis of the Client Survey from 2021-22 onwards mean that results prior to this are not comparable with data collected since this point. Further information on this is provided in the [2021-22 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

Comparisons at this level are more robust. That said, consideration should be given to changes to the delivery of each benefit across the years which may have influenced experiences or views. For example, in 2023-24, most respondents had experience of applying for Adult or Child Disability Payments or being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment. This is a substantial change from last year when these benefits were just being introduced. This has an impact on the overall benefit experience reflected by the following results, so careful consideration is required when making inter-year comparisons.

To keep the tables concise, the number of respondents to each Client Survey question is not listed in the framework. These can be found in the Client Survey report. We do, however, highlight where the number of respondents to a question was fewer than 100 for a particular benefit or demographic breakdown.

This symbol '#' in a table showing Client Survey results indicates that a value is suppressed due to a small number of respondents in a group. A very small number respondents to the 2023-24 survey told us that they had experience of Job Start Payment. As a mitigation for risk of disclosure, Client Survey findings for 2023-24 are not presented by experience of Job Start Payment throughout the framework. Responses from these respondents are included in overall figures for each measure.

Finally, this year for the first time, written responses from the Client Survey have been used to provide insight into clients' experiences and views for measures that ask for 'examples of' experiences. These respondents are referred to as 'Client Survey respondents with experience of x benefit' in this report.

Charter research 2023-24

Research was conducted for this year's framework with staff and partner organisations. We invited all Social Security Scotland staff to take part in a survey in February and March 2024. This resulted in 1,490 survey responses (approximately 36% response rate). Separately, we conducted focus groups with 6 Client Experience staff who work on reviews, re-determinations, appeals, complaints, compliments and suggestions. Finally, we sent a survey to people who, as part of their job, support clients to use Social Security Scotland's services or collaborate with Social Security Scotland. This got 229 responses. The findings provide rich insight into and examples of specific participants' experiences but should not be taken as representative of all Social Security Scotland staff and partners. References to 'staff' or 'partner respondents', or 'Client Experience staff participants', in this report refer to this research. Full analysis of this research can be found in the [Charter Research 2023-24 report](#).

Other sources for the first three sections are:

- **People Survey** – an annual survey of all Social Security Scotland staff. [The 2023 People Survey](#) ran from 19 September to 23 October. 3,020 people responded, and this was a 74% response rate.
- **Statistics** – Social Security Scotland routinely publish information as part of quarterly Official Statistics releases. These releases include, for example, information on benefit applications and payments that have undergone detailed quality assurance and are produced in line with the standards set out of the Code of Practice for Statistics. All Official Statistics in this framework cover financial years, except where a benefit went live part way through a financial year. Statistics included in the framework each year draw on the latest available published data. This includes updates to data for previous financial years where applicable.
- **Management information** - In addition, Social Security Scotland collect and utilise management information in order to support business processes and monitor how well systems are working. Management information has not been quality assured to the same standard as Official Statistics.
- **The Annual Client Panel Survey 2023** – the [first annual survey of Social Security Scotland Client Panel members](#). The 2023 survey ran from 20th November to 20th December 2023 and asked respondents about their experiences during the last 12 months (note, this survey looks at the calendar year 2023, while the Charter Measurement Framework concerns the 2023-24 financial year). 1,182 panel members responded, and this was a 14% response rate. Respondents to this survey are referred to as ‘Annual Client Panels Survey respondent’ in this report.

More detail on all these sources can be found at Annex A.

The fourth section describes relevant activity undertaken by the Scottish Government which supports the Charter commitments.

Where possible, the data we collect for the framework is analysed by protected characteristics. This is essential so we can assess whether Our Charter is being delivered comprehensively to different groups.

Such breakdowns are provided in this report only when there is a notable difference between groups. For the Client Survey, the [Supplementary Tables publication](#) released alongside the 2023-24 Client Survey Report provides additional results and breakdowns not presented in the framework report for key survey measures. The demographic background of Client Survey respondents did differ across each benefit group. For example, we know that respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment or Funeral Support Payment were more likely to be older and living with a

disability or long-term health condition. Therefore, trends showing variations in responses by benefit experience may be a factor behind some differences in results seen across demographic groups.

Other statistics in the report are either not linkable to characteristics, or numbers were not high enough to do so.

Reading the framework

The next page gives an ‘at a glance’ overview of how Social Security Scotland is performing in each section. It gives a few important pieces of data and information.

Each section of the framework represents a section of Our Charter. Each section has questions that will be answered by the data measures. For example, ‘Are clients experiencing a service that reflects the human rights values as set out in Our Charter when interacting with Social Security Scotland?’

Below this, a heading sets out the ideal situation we want to achieve, for example, ‘Clients receive good service’.

Finally, the measures contain data and information that addresses the questions and demonstrates whether or not the ideals are being achieved. Where possible, figures are provided for previous years for context.

The measures in the first three sections which ask for ‘examples’ rather than statistics appear in text boxes in this document. The heading in these boxes is the measure as it appears in the original framework. The content in these boxes is from the Charter research unless stated otherwise.

We have avoided acronyms throughout this document to make it easy to read. This includes replacing acronyms with the full words in quotes from participants. This does not affect the meaning of the quotes.

A People's Service

Social Security Scotland's Service is Person-Centred

89% of Client Survey respondents who had been in contact with staff 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they were treated with kindness.



97%

of 2023 People Survey respondents said they understand their customers' or service users' needs.

Processes That Work

Social Security Scotland involves clients in designing services that are supportive, accessible, simple, quick and flexible

69% of Client Survey respondents who had applied for a benefit 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the application process was clear.



Clients requested a re-determination or internal review in fewer than 13% of applications.

Is Social Security Scotland delivering what the Charter promised?

68%

of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland was an honest organisation.

A Learning System

Social Security Scotland's service evolves in response to the needs and preferences of its clients

61% of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland was an open organisation.



The new social security system is helping tackle poverty in Scotland and is designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence and with the respect and dignity of individuals at the heart of it.

A Better Future

The Scottish Government will develop and maintain social security policy so that it is as fair as possible



A People's Service

Are clients experiencing a service that reflects the human rights values as set out in Our Charter when interacting with Social Security Scotland?

Staff attitudes reflect an understanding of; and values dignity and respect as set out in Our Charter

45% of Client Survey respondents said they had been in contact with a member of staff. Of those:

- **Measure 1:** 89% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they were treated with kindness.
- **Measure 2:** 79% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they felt trusted by staff.²
- **Measure 3:** 85% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that staff listened to them.
- **Measure 4:** 83% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that staff made them feel comfortable.

Tables 1-4 show measures 1-4 for each benefit, including previous years' findings where possible.

² The measure is based on whether clients felt trusted by Social Security Scotland staff as can be seen in the original outline of the [Charter Measurement Framework](#) so that is shown here. The [2023-24 Client Survey report](#) contains further findings on whether clients trusted Social Security Scotland staff and the organisation as a whole.

Table 1: Client Survey respondents' views on whether they were 'treated with kindness', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	93%	90%	94%
Best Start Grant	95%	94%	93%
Best Start Foods	95%	93%	94%
Funeral Support Payment	94%	94%	93%
Young Carer Grant	94%	89%	95%
Job Start Payment*	86%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	97%	91%	94%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	93%
Scottish Child Payment	96%	94%	94%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	94%	92%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	95%	92%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	93%	87%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	92%	91%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (56)

Table 2: Client Survey respondents' views on whether they 'felt trusted', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	85%	82%	84%
Best Start Grant	90%	87%	87%
Best Start Foods	90%	87%	89%
Funeral Support Payment	88%	89%	86%
Young Carer Grant	93%	82%	90%
Job Start Payment*	83%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	88%	87%	87%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	82%
Scottish Child Payment	91%	88%	88%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	88%	82%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	89%	83%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	84%	75%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	84%	81%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (52)

Table 3: Client Survey respondents' views on whether 'staff listened to them, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	93%	89%	91%
Best Start Grant	93%	90%	91%
Best Start Foods	93%	89%	92%
Funeral Support Payment	92%	93%	90%
Young Carer Grant	96%	84%	93%
Job Start Payment*	85%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	94%	92%	88%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	84%
Scottish Child Payment	94%	91%	92%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	89%	86%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	92%	87%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	88%	81%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	92%	88%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (54)

Table 4: Client Survey respondents' views on whether 'staff made them feel comfortable', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	89%	84%	89%
Best Start Grant	92%	90%	90%
Best Start Foods	92%	89%	90%
Funeral Support Payment	91%	92%	89%
Young Carer Grant	94%	82%	92%
Job Start Payment*	82%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	90%	93%	92%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	85%
Scottish Child Payment	93%	91%	91%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	90%	86%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	92%	88%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	88%	80%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	88%	86%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (56)

Measure 5: Examples of treatment that made clients feel comfortable, kindness, trust, listening AND examples of treatment that was less so AND Social Security action taken

Client Survey 2023-24 responses included written comments describing client experiences with staff. Overall, feedback about interactions with staff was positive. Many praised the attitude of the staff they had talked to. Respondents said staff were kind, patient and made them feel comfortable and listened to.

“Collette, who came to assist me with the form was wonderful. She really helped take the stress and difficulty out of the situation. She helped me to understand the questions when I was struggling. It's a great service you provide that I would have had real problems without [...]” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“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.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Scottish Child Payment**

“The person I dealt with was understanding of my condition as I can stutter and take long pauses between words. She made me feel comfortable as my anxiety level was not through the roof when speaking with her. She asked if I was ok and able to continue which I really appreciated.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

Similarly, a majority of respondents to the Annual Client Panel Survey 2023 were positive about their experience with Social Security Scotland staff. Responses described staff as kind, caring and patient.

“To the member of staff who took my call. She was very patient and I could hear the care in her voice. As much as I hate being on the phone, I felt as comfortable as I possibly could with her.” **Annual Client Panel Survey Respondent**

Measure 5: Examples of treatment that made clients feel comfortable, kindness, trust, listening AND examples of treatment that was less so AND Social Security action taken (continued)

“When they contacted me to discuss my daughter’s disability benefit application I was sobbing on the phone and the staff member was so kind and caring and didn’t rush me and checked I was okay before he ended the call.”

Annual Client Panel Survey Respondent

On the other hand, some Client Survey 2023-24 respondents found staff were unfriendly and described feeling dismissed or not listened to.

“No kindness or friendliness detected, the call taker used words 'you can imagine how many applications we need to process' and 'I have no idea how long it will take'. It made me feel a little bit like I was a burden on the system.”

Client Survey Respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment

“I have had positive interactions with staff however that has been overshadowed by a phone call with a case manager when applying for my sons Adult Disability Payment. I felt as if I was being interrogated. The same questions were asked repeatedly presumably hoping I would give a different answer at some point. I was told my son’s anxiety was irrelevant and generally made to feel like my son’s disabilities did not matter because they are not physical. In the end he received an award level that I felt was appropriate but the comments on the award notice only referenced what was said on the call and not the application and some of my remarks were referenced out of context. I still feel upset about what happened.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Disability Payment**

“I found the whole experience humiliating. The staff were not sympathetic and made me feel 10 times more depressed than when I started. It was very clear they had made their minds up before my hearing was even heard. Its disgusting what they put me through. As professional people who are dealing with vulnerable people their whole approach is appalling and made even worse by the fact that had already made a decision. Absolutely disgusting” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Clients do NOT experience discrimination

Measure 6: 89% of Client Survey respondents said they did not feel discriminated against at any point during their experience with Social Security Scotland. 6% of respondents said they had been discriminated against, and 5% preferred not to say.

Respondents aged over 55 were more likely to say they did not feel discriminated against than respondents aged 16-54 (92% compared to 86%).

White respondents were more likely to say they did not feel discriminated against than ethnic minority respondents (90% compared to 84%). For ethnic minority respondents, 7% said they had been discriminated against (compared to 5% of white respondents), and 9% said they preferred not to say (compared to 5% of white respondents).

Table 5: Client Survey respondents who did not feel discriminated against, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	96%	94%	96%
Best Start Grant	91%	89%	87%
Best Start Foods	91%	88%	87%
Funeral Support Payment	92%	90%	90%
Young Carer Grant	92%	90%	93%
Job Start Payment	87%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	95%	96%	96%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	89%
Scottish Child Payment	93%	93%	89%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	94%	92%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	96%	92%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	90%	85%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	94%	93%

Of the Client Survey respondents who said that they had been discriminated against:

- **Measure 7:** 22% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'I felt I could challenge it'. Some groups were less likely to agree they could challenge discrimination, these were:
 - respondents aged 25-34 compared to respondents aged 16-24 and 35-44 (18% compared to 25% and 26% respectively)
 - respondents with a disability or long-term health condition (19% compared to 33% of those without a disability or long-term health condition)
 - white respondents (20% compared to 40% of ethnic minority respondents)
- **Measure 8:** 27% said they told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination they faced.

Tables 6 and 7 show measures 7 and 8 for each benefit. The number of respondents experiencing discrimination in previous years was too small to provide benefit breakdowns.

Table 6: Whether Client Survey respondents felt they could challenge discrimination, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who experienced discrimination; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement*	19%*	#
Best Start Grant	41%	33%
Best Start Foods	38%	38%
Funeral Support Payment	#	#
Young Carer Grant	#	#
Job Start Payment	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	#	#
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	#
Scottish Child Payment	38%	40%
Child Disability Payment applicant*	32%*	22%*
Child Disability Payment case transfer*	48%*	#
Adult Disability Payment applicant	25%	17%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer*	28%*	30%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (2022-23 - Carer's Allowance Supplement: 32; Child Disability Payment applicant: 44; Child Disability Payment case transfer: 50; Adult Disability Payment case transfer: 72) (2023-24 - Child Disability Payment applicant: 65)

Table 7: Client Survey respondents who told Social Security Scotland about discrimination, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who experienced discrimination; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	36%*	#
Best Start Grant	25%	25%
Best Start Foods	24%	28%
Funeral Support Payment	#	32%*
Young Carer Grant	#	#
Job Start Payment	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	#	#
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	#
Scottish Child Payment	21%	27%
Child Disability Payment applicant	32%*	36%*
Child Disability Payment case transfer	41%*	#
Adult Disability Payment applicant	29%	22%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	35%*	37%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (2022-23 - Carer's Allowance Supplement: 39; Child Disability Payment applicant: 53; Child Disability Payment case transfer: 54; Adult Disability Payment case transfer: 79) (2023-24 – Funeral Support Payment: 38, Child Disability Payment applicant: 66)

Measure 9: Examples of good practice AND examples of discrimination (if any) AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Client Survey 2023-24 responses included written comments describing fair treatment and supportiveness by Social Security Scotland staff. Some said that Social Security Scotland successfully demonstrated its values: dignity, fairness and respect.

“Just well done for being so incredibly better than Personal Independence Payment and treating people like me with dignity and making me feel like I'm worth caring about! Gold star for appreciating that medical professionals involved in my care understand my struggles more than a random person asking stupid questions that do not demonstrate anything!” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“All personal contact has been very good; kind, fair and person-centered. Advisors listened carefully when I described my difficulties following a brain-injury and made appropriate adjustments to their conversations with me, speaking more slowly and clearly, allowing me lots of time to process and reply, encouraging and re-assuring me; I always came away from the experience feeling that I'd been properly acknowledged and treated as a human being. Thanks to everyone for their patience, understanding and kindness. I really appreciate it.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

"I am so grateful to the professionalism, understanding and kindness shown to me by the persons of Social Security Scotland in dealing with my application for adult disability application as they demonstrated Social Security Scotland values of dignity, fairness and respect." **Client Survey Respondent**

The Client Survey 2023-24 asked about any experiences of feeling discriminated against by Social Security Scotland. Most responses were from disabled respondents. Respondents variously described discrimination against particular health conditions, especially those that relate to mental health or ‘invisible’ disabilities. Some respondents described how biases in the application process, as well as errors in assessment, led to unfair decisions on benefit applications. Several respondents commented that they were made to feel “not disabled enough”, as though their ability to cope with their health condition was misconstrued as them not needing support.

Measure 9: Examples of good practice AND examples of discrimination (if any) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“on the whole, whoever is making decisions about disability have no understanding whatsoever about the struggles and impairments that many autistic and neurodivergent people face on a daily basis. It is quite frankly discriminatory. We may function on one level, but at a cost of severe mental health problems and burnout.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I feel when you’re applying on a mental health basis you’re discriminated. They don’t take mental health as serious and severe as physical health. Mental health is an invisible illness unless you try to take your own life. Mental health illness is very serious having a massive impact on people’s daily life/quality of life just as much as someone with a physical disability and more understanding/training from your decision makers on mental health is required.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I’m not sure if it falls under discrimination, but to have not been awarded even basic adult disability going through chemo, operations and radiotherapy, I feel like there is a serious flaw in the assessment process. To be made to feel like I was not awarded because I wasn’t ‘incapacitated’ enough, or not dying, is very frustrating.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Clients experience good service

52% of Client Survey respondents said they had experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit. Of these:

- **Measure 10:** 47% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that they got enough updates during the application process.
- **Measure 11:** 63% said they agreed with the decision(s) on their application(s).³

Tables 8 and 9 show measures 10 and 11 for each benefit, including previous years’ findings where possible.

³ This includes a small proportion who received more than one decision and disagreed with one or more of these, even if agreeing with others.

Table 8: Client Survey respondents' views on whether they 'received enough updates during the application process', by benefit experience

All respondents who had applied for each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods and Scottish Child Payment	n/a	66%	73%
Best Start Grant / Foods	69%	55%	69%
Funeral Support Payment	74%	71%	71%
Young Carer Grant	76%	61%	66%
Job Start Payment*	65%	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	72%	77%	76%
Child Disability Payment	62%	53%	39%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	46%	36%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (94)

Table 9: Whether Client Survey respondents agreed with the decision received, by benefit that the decision was received for⁴

All respondents who had applied for each benefit; % who said they agreed with the decision received on each individual benefit, row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	88%	84%
Best Start Foods	84%	79%
Funeral Support Payment	85%	87%
Young Carer Grant	91%*	93%
Job Start Payment	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	95%	91%
Child Disability Payment	89%	85%
Adult Disability Payment	81%	71%

* Number of respondents for 2022-23 fewer than 100 (88)

64% of Client Survey respondents said they had received one or more benefit payments from Social Security Scotland. Of these:

- **Measure 12:** 97% of Client Survey respondents who had received a payment said they were paid when Social Security Scotland told them they would be paid.
- **Measure 13:** 97% of Client Survey respondents who had received a payment said they were paid the amount Social Security Scotland told them they would get the first time.

97% of respondents receiving relevant benefits⁵ said they got the right amount 'every time'.

Tables 10-12 show measures 12 and 13 for each benefit, including previous years' findings where possible.

⁴ This data shows agreement with decisions for each benefit applied for individually regardless of whether respondents agreed or disagreed with decisions about any other benefits applied for. This data is not comparable with data collected in 2021-22 due to a change in the way the data was collected. In 2021-22 respondents were asked whether they disagreed with any decisions they received across all applications made, whilst in 2022-23 respondents were asked specifically and individually for each benefit they applied for.

⁵ Funeral Support Payment and Job Start Payment are one-off payments, and so this measure is not applicable. Whilst Young Carer Grant, Best Start Grant, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Child Winter Heating Payment are recurring benefits, they are only paid once a year (or twice for Carer's Allowance Supplement) and so survey respondents should have only received one payment.

Table 10: Whether Client Survey respondents received payment when Social Security Scotland said they would, by benefit experience
All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit;
% who said 'yes', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	98%	97%	98%
Best Start Grant	96%	94%	90%
Best Start Foods	96%	93%	87%
Funeral Support Payment	95%	96%	88%
Young Carer Grant	98%	91%	91%
Job Start Payment*	93%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	97%	97%	98%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	78%
Scottish Child Payment	97%	96%	89%
Child Disability Payment	95%	98%	98%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	99%	99%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (55)

Table 11: Whether Client Survey respondents received the right amount first time, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit; % who said 'yes', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	98%	97%	98%
Best Start Grant	97%	94%	89%
Best Start Foods	95%	92%	87%
Funeral Support Payment	94%	97%	92%
Young Carer Grant	100%	95%	95%
Job Start Payment*	98%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	98%	99%	99%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	93%
Scottish Child Payment	96%	95%	90%
Child Disability Payment	98%	99%	99%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	99%	98%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (56)

Table 12: Whether Client Survey respondents were paid the right amount every time, by benefit experience⁶

All respondents with experience of receiving payments for each benefit; % who said 'yes', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Foods	93%	90%	87%
Scottish Child Payment	95%	97%	92%
Child Disability Payment	98%	99%	99%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	99%	99%

⁶ The 2021-22 Client Survey asked if respondents were paid the right amount every time in relation to all payments received from Social Security Scotland as a whole in the year. In 2022-23, the approach was updated so respondents were asked about experiences of payments for individual benefits separately, with the 'every time' question omitted for non-recurring payments. As a result, caution should be used when comparing results between years.

How well are Social Security Scotland staff delivering the Charter commitments?

Clients find staff knowledgeable and approachable

45% of Client Survey respondents said they had been in contact with a member of staff. Of those:

- **Measure 14:** 79% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits.

Table 13: Client Survey respondents' views on whether staff were knowledgeable about Social Security Scotland benefits, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with Social Security Scotland staff, % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	87%	84%	89%
Best Start Grant	91%	86%	88%
Best Start Foods	91%	86%	89%
Funeral Support Payment	88%	91%	86%
Young Carer Grant	96%	82%	90%
Job Start Payment*	84%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	91%	93%	86%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	83%
Scottish Child Payment	92%	87%	89%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	86%	81%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	86%	84%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	84%	75%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	81%	82%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (55)

52%⁷ of Client Survey respondents said they had experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit. Of those:

- **Measure 15:** 76% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the decision on their application was 'explained clearly'.
- **Measure 16:** 37% disagreed with at least one decision received on an application.⁸ 38% of them said they asked Social Security Scotland to look at a decision they disagreed with again.⁹

Tables 14-16 show measures 15 and 16 for each benefit, including previous years' findings where possible.¹⁰

⁷ In 2022-23, 70% of respondents said they had experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit. This proportion for this reporting period is lower due to an increase in case transfers and inclusion of more automatically awarded benefits.

⁸ This figure includes respondents who had applied for more than one benefit and agreed with one (or more decisions) but also disagreed with one (or more decisions).

⁹ The original Charter Measurement Framework measure was 'X percentage of clients (who disagreed with a decision) said they felt able to challenge it'. The Client Survey previously asked if people 'felt they could' challenge a decision, and if they did. Since 2021-22 it just asks respondents if they did challenge the decision, not if they felt they could. So that is what has been reported against this framework measure since 2021-22.

¹⁰ Benefit data in Table 15 shows the proportion disagreeing with decisions on each benefit application separately. Table 16 shows the proportion who disagreed with a decision on each benefit individually who then asked Social Security Scotland to look at their application again for that benefit.

Table 14: Client Survey respondents' views on whether decisions were 'explained clearly', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of applying for each benefit, % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods and Scottish Child Payment	n/a	81%	79%
Best Start Grant / Foods	86%	71%	79%
Funeral Support Payment	86%	86%	91%
Young Carer Grant	91%	92%	91%
Job Start Payment*	85%	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	88%	92%	87%
Child Disability Payment	88%	89%	82%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	80%	70%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (88)

Table 15: Client Survey respondents who felt Social Security Scotland got the decision on their application wrong, by benefit experience¹¹

All respondents with experience of applying each benefit, % who said they disagreed with the decision received on each individual benefit, row percentages.

Benefit experience	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	12%	17%
Best Start Foods	16%	22%
Funeral Support Payment	15%	13%
Young Carer Grant	9%*	7%
Job Start Payment	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	5%	10%
Child Disability Payment	11%	16%
Adult Disability Payment	19%	32%

* Number of respondents for 2022-23 fewer than 100 (88)

¹¹ This data is not comparable with data collected in 2021-22 due to a change in the way the data was collected. In 2021-22 respondents were asked whether they disagreed with any decisions they received across all applications made, whilst in 2022-23 respondents were asked specifically and individually for each benefit they applied for. Data shown in Table 9 (agreement with decision by benefit) is the opposite of data shown in Table 15 (disagreement with decision by benefit).

Table 16: Client Survey respondents who asked Social Security Scotland to look at the decision they disagreed with again, by relevant benefit

All respondents who applied for each benefit and felt Social Security Scotland got the decision wrong, % who asked Social Security Scotland to look at the decision again, row percentages.

Asked Social Security Scotland to look at the decision again for:	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	28%	21%	20%
Best Start Foods	24%	19%	20%
Funeral Support Payment*	26%	18%	28%
Young Carer Grant	#	#	27%
Job Start Payment	#	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	27%	27%	23%
Child Disability Payment	47%	36%	46%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	39%	41%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 and 2022-23 fewer than 100 (58 and 51)

Measure 17: Examples of when staff were knowledgeable, of how they explained decisions well, of clients feeling able to challenge AND examples of not understanding decisions, examples of why clients felt unable to challenge AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Staff knowledge

Client Survey respondents gave positive feedback saying staff were able to answer their questions and give them the information they needed.

“I felt the staff were very knowledgeable and took time to source my enquiry. They explained all questions that I asked and I found on the two occasions I phoned the staff were very polite. I understand they are very busy but they showed patience and respect. They do a tremendous job in helping people.”
Client Survey Respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment

“The person I spoke to seemed to be very knowledgeable about the topic I was asking about. They were quick with responses and answers to my questions.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Carer’s Allowance Supplement**

“The operator on web chat was helpful and answered my questions within the scope of their job. They were pleasant and professional.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Similarly, respondents to the Annual Client Panel Survey 2023 described how staff informed them about the support available to them.

“I asked for help to apply for help as I am not working and unable to work due to health. The adviser took me through a lot of possibilities and suggested various ways to help. Found this information very useful although I could not get help, I still felt listened to.” **Annual Client Panel Survey Respondent**

However, some Client Survey 2023-24 respondents described instances where staff provided incorrect or inconsistent information. Others said they received limited information in response to their query.

Measure 17: Examples of when staff were knowledgeable, of how they explained decisions well, of clients feeling able to challenge AND examples of not understanding decisions, examples of why clients felt unable to challenge AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“Have phoned four times as vision poor at times and PC hurts head, two staff very helpful, last two have helped little and had given me information that was totally incorrect. I was promised call from manager of some sort (two days) still waiting” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“Only limited information could be provided by the representative. I would have liked a fuller update on the progress of my application.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Similarly, partner survey respondents in the Charter Research said that staff were pleasant but didn't always have the right level of knowledge to help. Some partner respondents received conflicting information and experienced inconsistencies in helpfulness and knowledge depending on which staff member they spoke to. Some partner respondents said they had to wait while client advisers went to find the answer to a query. Some didn't mind this in principle but others felt that staff needed better training.

“Staff are polite and helpful but their knowledge is poor and a lot of time spent on hold when advisers are speaking with their colleagues for help and support.” **Partner respondent**

“Speaking with Social Security Scotland regarding the transfer of Personal Independence Payment to Adult Disability Payment when special rules became appropriate for my client when it was not being processed with appropriate timescales. Advisers I spoke with (not in the Special Rules for Terminal Illness team) didn't seem to understand the nature of my call and I was often promised call backs which I did not receive. When eventually I [got] to speak with Special Rules for Terminal Illness team they were more than helpful.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 17: Examples of when staff were knowledgeable, of how they explained decisions well, of clients feeling able to challenge AND examples of not understanding decisions, examples of why clients felt unable to challenge AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Understanding decisions

Client Survey 2023-24 respondents gave positive feedback about decision letters. Many said the letter was clear, detailed and helpful for understanding the decision.

“I felt that the outcome of my application and report sent to me was excellent in explaining each part of my application and resulting outcome. This being the first time I had applied for Adult Disability Payment or its predecessor, to be given the information at conclusion, in the detail provided and why I was awarded the points at each step was very clear and greatly appreciated. I was pleasantly surprised by the level of detail in reply and also pleased at the outcome given in my own circumstances.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“The decision was explained very clearly and thoroughly. It was a very respectful communication.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“The clear information provided against criteria for making the decision was very helpful in helping me understand the reasoning behind the decision.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Fewer respondents provided negative feedback about decision letters. For those that did, they described inaccuracies or a lack of clarity.

“I did not understand why I did not qualify for Best Start Foods and it was not explained at all in the letter I received.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of a joint application for Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods and Scottish Child Payment**

“Determination notice was long and confusing.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Child Disability Payment**

Measure 17: Examples of when staff were knowledgeable, of how they explained decisions well, of clients feeling able to challenge AND examples of not understanding decisions, examples of why clients felt unable to challenge AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Some responses described receiving payments before receiving any correspondence about a decision. These respondents described being grateful for the payments. However, the lack of communication caused confusion about what payments were for, and where they came from.

“I got an award because i started getting money (thank you) but if i am honest I do not know what I got, whether it is mobility or something else, how long it's for, whether it's for everything or for my aspergers or my arthritis, I never got a letter or anything I just got money. So I am happy to get the money but I totally don't understand the breakdown of it.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I never received any updates on my application. It was only when the funds appeared in my account I called to find out what [award I got].” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Challenging decisions

The Client Survey 2023-24 invited respondents to comment on their experience of receiving a decision. Among the responses, some mention the prospect of appealing a decision they disagreed with. One described being in poor health and lacking the motivation or strength to dispute a decision which they felt was incorrect. Another decided not to appeal for the higher rate they felt they needed, due to not wanting to be “greedy”.

“Its a depressing process to have to get involved in when you are not well. When i received the rejection letter I just felt fairly helpless to be honest. I am struggling enough with health things without having to fight over getting some assistance. I don't have the motivation or strength at this time to fight. I am fighting enough for my health. After paying taxes and NI for the last 40 years and contributing fully to the UK economy it is incredibly demoralising. I never imagined it would be like this.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Measure 17: Examples of when staff were knowledgeable, of how they explained decisions well, of clients feeling able to challenge AND examples of not understanding decisions, examples of why clients felt unable to challenge AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“I was extremely happy to have an award at all after failing with Personal Independence Payment twice. This also effected my decision not to appeal for a higher rate I didn’t want to be greedy if this makes sense. But I did think there was certain places in the points break down where I should have had a few points instead of zero and as I said before I was 2 point short in each part for the higher rate which would have changed my award total” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“My first application I was declined. I then sent in the re-determination with help from the advice shop, and that was successful, although I was awarded the standard rate I believe I should have been awarded more but I was just grateful to have been awarded as it is recognised that I do have a disability.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Client Experience staff were asked about common reasons for re-determinations and for examples of the re-determination process in an online focus group. Findings are covered in Measure 35.

Staff are well trained

Measures 18 to 29 are about whether Social Security Scotland staff are well trained and supported. Data for these measures is taken from the People Survey and the Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 18a: 78% of staff respondents who interact with clients (or will in the future) said their knowledge of social security in Scotland was ‘good’ or ‘very good’. This compares to 73% in 2022-23 and 71% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 18b: 59% of 2023 People Survey respondents said they get the information they need to do their job well. This compares to 73% in the 2022 People Survey, 76% in the 2021 People Survey, and 75% in the 2020 People Survey.

Measure 19: 70% of staff respondents who interact with clients (or will in the future) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that ‘I know about a range of advice and advocacy

services that are convenient for clients'. This compares to 69% in 2022-23 and 71% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 20: 60% of staff respondents who interact with clients (or will in the future) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'I know how to refer people to advice and advocacy services'. This compares to 60% in 2022-23 and 62% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 21: 70% of staff respondents who interact with clients (or will in the future) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'I know enough about the re-determinations process to explain it clearly to clients'. This compares to 53% in 2022-23 and 55% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

51% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'I know enough about the appeals process to explain it clearly to clients'. This compares to 40% in 2022-23 and 48% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 22: 89% of staff respondents said they were 'confident' or 'very confident' that they could deliver a service without discriminating against others. This compares to 93% in 2022-23 and 96% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 23: 97% of 2023 People Survey respondents said they understand their customers' or service users' needs. This compares to 97% in the 2022 People Survey, 95% in the 2021 People Survey, and 98% in the 2020 People Survey.

Measure 24: Examples of knowledge (including knowledge of how not to discriminate) and training AND examples of more support needed by staff AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Knowledge and training

In written comments, staff survey respondents said support from colleagues, practical experience, and training and guidance had helped them to feel knowledgeable, skilled and well-equipped to do their job. Training covered topics like: safeguarding and risk of harm, call handling and telephony, internal processes, and equality, human rights and discrimination. Learning had taken a range of formats including internal and external training courses, online learning, on-the-job training, self-led learning, and knowledge sharing with peers. Positive comments said formal training contained useful content and was widely available. Some said internal guidance was easy to find and helpful for their needs. Some respondents noted that guidance had improved over time.

“I have completed a number of training courses, including external modules, so do feel very confident in making decisions based on knowledge/skills I have, coupled with advice from [my] line manager and feedback from colleagues.”

Staff respondent

“The training has been top notch. There has always been encouragement to undertake upskilling, shadowing and anything else I need.”

Staff respondent

“I feel the guidance has been updated to help us deliver a better service.”

Staff respondent

Knowledge of how not to discriminate

Staff respondents said what had helped them to feel confident to not discriminate against others. Examples included:

- holding personal values that focused on fair treatment,
- previous personal and professional experience,
- and guidance and training received as part of their role.

Measure 24: Examples of knowledge (including knowledge of how not to discriminate) and training AND examples of more support needed by staff AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Many described a personal commitment to treating others with dignity, fairness and respect. Respondents commonly described an understanding of bias and a commitment to challenging this within themselves or asking colleagues for help in recognising this.

“In my area, we are always striving to ensure that no-one would feel left out or discriminated against, both internally and externally. We take treating people with dignity, fairness and respect very seriously. Support for this comes from all levels, from administrative colleagues up to senior managers.”

Staff respondent

“I am always very aware of bias and always assess my work from an unbiased perspective. I often will outsource practitioner or peer support if I feel like I am not entirely certain of my Decision, to ensure that I am always treating the client fairly, and that Decisions are made considering the client and their needs at all times in a respectful and inclusive manner.”

Staff respondent

More support needed

Where staff respondents didn't feel confident, examples were about a lack of peer or manager support, problems with training and guidance, and unclear responsibilities within their role. Some respondents said frequently changing priorities, processes and policies made it difficult to keep their knowledge up to date and undertake their role with confidence.

“Too much change in teams and unsure of where responsibilities lie / what is in your job remit [...]”

Staff respondent

“Constant changes and pressures mean we do not have the time to keep up to date with guidance updates, process changes and more importantly our clients' needs [...]”

Staff respondent

Measure 24: Examples of knowledge (including knowledge of how not to discriminate) and training AND examples of more support needed by staff AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Some staff respondents described problems with training and guidance. Common issues with training included: a lack of training for core aspects of their role, training formats that didn't accommodate staff needs or learning styles, and good initial training but insufficient follow-up support for consolidation. There were calls for more training on internal processes, mental health awareness, and interacting with vulnerable clients. Some wanted more opportunities for one-to-one learning like coaching or job shadowing, and called for a wider range of learning formats to accommodate all staff.

“I have undergone induction training and then ‘on the job’ training. The initial training was excellent but I am not convinced by how well it prepared me for my role. The on the job training was poor and I did not feel well supported at all. I felt that we were all left to just get on with things and ask what we needed. However, when you are at the stage of not knowing what you don't know, that is very tricky [...]” **Staff respondent**

Some respondents said guidance was difficult to navigate, gave unclear or conflicting information, and didn't always meet their needs. Respondents commonly said it was difficult to keep up with frequent changes to guidance. Some were concerned that this had led to guidance not being followed consistently across the organisation. They felt changes should be communicated in a more clear and efficient way to give staff the most up to date information to do their jobs.

“Sometimes the guidance is not clear or is missing or incomplete regarding certain tasks. I always understand what we are trying to achieve but we do not always have the correct tools for the job.” **Staff respondent**

“Regular changes to guidance without communication can be difficult. If we are not informed of changes how can we apply them?” **Staff respondent**

Measure 24: Examples of knowledge (including knowledge of how not to discriminate) and training AND examples of more support needed by staff AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

In written comments, staff respondents who interact with clients as part of their job (or will do so in future) said what helped them to feel knowledgeable about the social security system including:

- peer support,
- training and guidance,
- experience gained in current and previous roles,
- and personal lived experience of social security.

Some felt knowledgeable about their area of work but knew less about other Social Security Scotland benefits or parts of the service. Some said refresher training or fact sheets would be helpful, and called for more training on benefits delivered by other bodies such as the Department for Work and Pensions. Many felt knowledgeable about support services and re-determinations and appeals processes, but others wanted more training and practical experience on this.

Some said high workloads made it challenging to develop their knowledge and wanted more time for learning.

“I feel very confident about my own benefit, Adult Disability Payment, but it would be helpful to refresh myself on the other benefits and support out there for our clients.” **Staff respondent**

“Anytime I am asked a question by a client I have to spend some time trying to find the answer. Training on this or at least a fact sheet would be helpful.”

Staff respondent

Staff are well supported

Measure 25: 64% of 2023 People Survey respondents said they had the tools they needed to do their job effectively. This compares with 75% in the 2022 People Survey, 81% in the 2021 People Survey, and 82% in the 2020 People Survey.

Measure 26: 79% of staff respondents said they had ‘good’ or ‘very good’ support from their line manager.¹² This compares to 82% in the 2022-23 Charter Research staff survey.

Measure 27: 80% of staff respondents said that they ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement ‘I would speak up if I saw something that wasn’t working, or something I thought was wrong, in Social Security Scotland’. This compares to 86% in 2022-23 and 94% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

Measure 28: 85% of staff respondents said they felt ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ to deliver a service that reflects the values of a human rights-based system as set out in Our Charter. This compares to 89% in 2022-23 and 93% in the 2021-22 Charter Research survey of staff.

¹² The answer options for this question were changed between 2021-22 and 2022-23, based on feedback from colleagues. The middle category in the options was changed from ‘neither good nor poor’ to ‘sometimes good, sometimes poor’. This means the results are not comparable between the two years (92% said they had ‘good’ or ‘very good’ support from their line manager in the 2021-22 survey of staff when the options were different).

Measure 29: Examples of good support for staff and staff confidence AND examples of any additional staff needs, and why, those who do, lack confidence AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Good support for staff

Staff respondents were asked about how supported they felt at work. Respondents commonly described line managers as approachable, dependable, knowledgeable and engaged. They said what had helped them to feel supported by line managers including:

- clear communication and regular one-to-ones,
- receiving useful advice and constructive feedback,
- being trusted to do their job with autonomy,
- and encouragement towards professional development.

Respondents felt listened to and supported with both work matters and personal circumstances. Some said line managers had welcomed input into team decision making which made respondents feel valued, enabled and empowered within their role.

“I receive great support from my line manager, making sure I have the right workload, am working on things that I enjoy, while at the same time being challenged and given the right development opportunities.” **Staff respondent**

“My line manager always ensures that I am included in any decisions which will impact me. They also are always there to discuss any issues and support me in any difficult conversations or meetings.” **Staff respondent**

Staff confidence

Staff respondents were asked about their confidence to deliver a service in line with the values set out in Our Charter. In written comments, staff respondents often talked positively about the Charter and Social Security Scotland’s values and ethos. Many were familiar with the Charter and felt their personal values were reflected in the commitments. Some talked specifically about using and referring to the Charter in their daily work or within their teams, and said the commitments were fundamental to shaping how they behaved and carried out their role. Respondents said support from colleagues and an internal culture of equality and fairness had helped them to feel confident to deliver the Charter values.

Measure 29: Examples of good support for staff and staff confidence AND examples of any additional staff needs, and why, those who do, lack confidence AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“The Charter and my personal values shape my work practice.” **Staff respondent**

“I am passionately supportive of these values and it is my priority focus to mindfully work in this way with all people.” **Staff respondent**

Additional staff needs

In their comments, staff respondents commonly mentioned positive experiences where their needs and requirements were met. Respondents had received support from line managers and health and safety colleagues to get what they needed. Examples of support included: changes to work roles and tasks, provision of required equipment, and flexibility around working location and pattern including phased returns after time off or special leave. Some respondents had received the support they needed to work in office locations. Some received support promptly and efficiently and appreciated the flexibility to try different adjustments until they found what suited them.

“I needed a standing desk and my line manager was very supportive and the Health and Wellbeing Team very responsive. I am getting the standing desk [to work from home] and my manager always checks to see if I have booked a standing desk at the office.” **Staff respondent**

“I required a reasonable adjustment for fixed days in office [...] and agreed this [with] no issues with my line manager.” **Staff respondent**

There were some examples where respondents’ needs weren’t met or where they experienced delays and long waits. Examples included: needs not being listened to or understood, ongoing needs being met only on a temporary basis, not being consulted on decisions about their adjustments, and withdrawal of support or adjustments without notice. Some said hybrid working was challenging and experienced problems having their needs in an office location. A few respondents mentioned examples of discrimination, unfair treatment and inconsistent decision making when asking to have their needs or requirements met.

Measure 29: Examples of good support for staff and staff confidence AND examples of any additional staff needs, and why, those who do, lack confidence AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“I got what I needed for a period of time, but this then ended without discussion. I was advised that it was never a permanent solution and I still have not been able to discuss extending this.” **Staff respondent**

“Require specialised chair, which is set just for me, however is frequently used as a pool chair including used by health and safety to see if it is a good fit. Chair is adjusted despite notice not to. Very frustrating and can and has caused a painful shift in office on more than one occasion.” **Staff respondent**

Lacking confidence and support

Staff respondents who lacked confidence described the challenges and barriers to delivering a service in line with the Charter. Examples included: high workloads and staff pressure, problems with internal tools and systems, and the service not being fully inclusive or accessible for all clients and staff. Some said internal processes and policies had made it difficult to uphold the organisation’s core values, including long application processing times. Respondents felt that some clients and staff were experiencing unfair treatment or discrimination as a result of these challenges. As in previous years, there was frustration that the Charter values were not always reflected in the treatment of staff. There were calls for the Charter to be better embedded within internal culture and for more training on equalities, human rights and internal systems.

“Mostly because of aspirations, time constraints, staffing issues and waiting times I don’t feel we are delivering the service we should to our clients.”
Staff respondent

“I endeavour to treat the clients that I support through the application process with dignity, fairness and respect. However, I feel that as an organisation we are not fully aware of the difficulties that some of our more vulnerable clients have in trying to fulfil the requirements of completing our application process. This is in particular around verifying identity.” **Staff respondent**

Measure 29: Examples of good support for staff and staff confidence AND examples of any additional staff needs, and why, those who do, lack confidence AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Some staff respondents felt less supported by line managers. Comments mentioned a lack of communication, infrequent one-to-ones, poor leadership, and unclear or unrealistic work expectations. Some said line managers wanted to help but were often unavailable due to high workloads. Some felt that line managers did not have the knowledge, training or experience to help with specific work-related queries. A few had instead gone to peers for guidance, support and information. Some reported varying levels of support from different line managers, saying their experience was markedly less positive with some compared to others. Some comments described experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination from line managers.

“My line manager doesn't support me or my team as a whole. She is in constant meetings and not available to ask for support most of the time. I and my team support each [other] when we can or approach other team managers a lot.”

Staff respondent

“My line manager is not very understanding of my disability and the challenges I face.” Staff respondent

Processes that Work

Do processes work?

Processes work well

Measure 30a: percentage of decisions deemed accurate from the first time.

When a client disagrees with a decision made by Social Security Scotland, they can request a re-determination or internal review. This includes if they have been denied a benefit and they feel they should have received it, or if they feel they are entitled to a higher level of award for Adult Disability Payment or Child Disability Payment. Job Start Payment and Best Start Foods have internal reviews, other benefits have a re-determination process. In the re-determination process, the application is assessed again by a separate team.

Table 17 below shows the percentage of applications where clients requested a re-determination or internal review. This is shown as a proxy for Measure 30a: percentage of decisions deemed accurate from the first time. For wider context about views on decisions, measures 11 and 16 provide data on the percentage of Client Survey respondents who agreed and disagreed with their decision, respectively. Measure 16 also shows what proportion of Client Survey respondents who disagreed asked Social Security Scotland to look at their application again.

Table 17: Percentage of cases where re-determinations/internal reviews were requested by clients, by benefit¹³

Benefit	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	0.9%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	1.3%
Best Start Foods	*0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Funeral Support Payment	*4.1%	2.7%	2.3%	2.6%	3.0%
Young Carer Grant	*0.9%	2.1%	2.0%	2.2%	3.4%
Job Start Payment	n/a	*3.1%	2.4%	2.5%	1.3%
Scottish Child Payment	n/a	*0.1%	0.7%	0.8%	3.2%
Child Disability Payment**	n/a	n/a	*4.0%	4.8%	7.4%
Adult Disability Payment**	n/a	n/a	n/a	***5%	12%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

* Part year figures because the benefits went live during the financial year.

** Please note that these figures relate only to re-determination requests for new applications, and do not include re-determination requests where a client has transferred to the benefit.

*** Does not include decimal places in line with the relevant statistics publication.

Measure 30b: percentage of re-determinations allowed are outlined in the tables below. A disallowed re-determination request is one that is accepted as valid, but payment has been rejected as the criteria for a payment has not been met. Allowed means that the client has been awarded the payment as they requested. Partially allowed means that the client was awarded part of what was requested in the re-determination. Withdrawn means that the client withdrew the re-determination request and decided not to escalate further. From October 2021 onwards, Social Security Scotland were not able to withdraw re-determinations. All re-determinations or internal reviews require a determination unless invalid. Any requests judged to be invalid requests are not included in the statistics.

¹³ No data available for Carer Support Payment, which opened for new applications in the pilot areas of Dundee City, Na h-Eileanan Siar and Perth and Kinross from 20 November 2023, due to the small cohort size and limited time period. Carer Support Payment is being rolled out to other local authority areas in a phased approach during 2024.

Table 18: Outcomes of re-determinations: Best Start Grant

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2019-20	55%	26%	18%
2020-21	38%	18%	44%
2021-22	51%	22%	28%
2022-23	83%	17%	0%
2023-24	70%	30%	0%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 19: Outcomes of reviews: Best Start Foods

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2019-20	43%	50%	7%
2020-21	40%	38%	22%
2021-22	39%	44%	17%
2022-23	71%	29%	0%
2023-24	57%	43%	0%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 20: Outcomes of re-determinations: Funeral Support Payment

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2019-20	49%	46%	5%
2020-21	44%	43%	13%
2021-22	57%	35%	9%
2022-23	54%	46%	0%
2023-24	52%	48%	0%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 21: Outcomes of re-determinations: Young Carer Grant

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2019-20	36%	27%	36%
2020-21	32%	52%	15%
2021-22	32%	59%	9%
2022-23	37%	63%	0%
2023-24	28%	72%	0%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 22: Outcomes of reviews: Job Start Payment

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2020-21	67%	21%	12%
2021-22	63%	31%	6%
2022-23	61%	39%	0%
2023-24	57%	#	#

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control.

Table 23: Outcomes of re-determinations: Scottish Child Payment

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Withdrawn
2020-21	25%	25%	49%
2021-22	29%	49%	22%
2022-23	48%	52%	0%
2023-24	38%	62%	0%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 24: Outcomes of re-determinations: Child Disability Payment

Year	Disallowed	Allowed / Partially allowed	Invalid
2021-22	#	83%	#
2022-23	11%	84%	4%
2023-24	30%	65%	6%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control.

Table 25: Outcomes of re-determinations: Adult Disability Payment

Year	Disallowed	Allowed/ Partially allowed	Invalid	Exceeded deadline – appeal lodged
2022-23	32%	61%	7%	0%
2023-24	41%	52%	4%	2%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Measure 31a: percentage of applications processed within x working days are outlined in the tables below¹⁴. Processing time data is presented by the year of decision, rather than the month the application was received. Processing time is calculated in working days, and public holidays are excluded, even if applications were processed by staff working overtime on these days. Applications that have a re-determination request have been excluded. Please note that these processing times include time spent waiting to receive evidence requested from clients, but do not include additional time to make payments.

Table 26: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods

Applications processed in:	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-10 days	55%	56%	23%	28%	6%	45%
11-20 days	31%	28%	33%	21%	7%	22%
21-30 days	8%	10%	20%	21%	13%	12%
31-40 days	4%	3%	9%	11%	29%	5%
41 days +	2%	3%	15%	19%	44%	16%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 27: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Funeral Support Payment

Applications processed in:	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-10 days	61%	52%	27%	6%	29%
11-20 days	27%	32%	48%	16%	23%
21-30 days	7%	9%	14%	38%	16%
31-40 days	3%	3%	6%	22%	11%
41 days +	2%	4%	5%	18%	21%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 28: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Young Carer Grant

Applications processed in:	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-10 days	30%	41%	20%	4%	22%
11-20 days	40%	27%	37%	26%	24%
21-30 days	15%	11%	22%	31%	18%
31-40 days	6%	6%	9%	17%	11%
41 days +	10%	15%	12%	21%	24%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

¹⁴ The way these figures are reported in the statistics publications changed in 2022-23, and these changes are reflected here.

Table 29: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Job Start Payment

Applications processed in:	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-10 days	74%	36%	30%	24%
11-20 days	11%	33%	30%	21%
21-30 days	4%	10%	14%	14%
31-40 days	2%	8%	7%	8%
41 days +	8%	13%	19%	34%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 30: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Scottish Child Payment¹⁵

Applications processed in:	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-10 days	6%	22%	17%	44%
11-20 days	19%	18%	26%	20%
21-30 days	15%	20%	9%	12%
31-40 days	18%	18%	17%	5%
41 days +	42%	21%	31%	19%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 31: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Carer Support Payment

Applications processed in:	2023-24
0-10 days	43%
11-20 days	20%
21-30 days	15%
31-40 days	10%
41 days +	13%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

¹⁵ In November 2022 'Straight-through Processing' was introduced. This allows certain applications which meet a specific set of criteria to be automatically passed to the payment approval stage. More information is available in the statistics publication. See Annex A for more details.

Table 32: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Child Disability Payment¹⁶

Applications processed in:	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
0-20 days	17%	1%	7%
21-40 days	52%	9%	7%
41-60 days	23%	19%	8%
61-80 days	6%	24%	12%
81-100 days	1%	20%	16%
101-120 days	0%	14%	18%
121-140 days	0%	6%	12%
141 days +	#	6%	20%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control.

Table 33: Percentage of applications processed within x working days: Adult Disability Payment¹⁷

Applications processed in:	2022-23	2023-24
0-20 days	2%	3%
21-40 days	9%	11%
41-60 days	21%	15%
61-80 days	26%	21%
81-100 days	23%	19%
101-120 days	12%	13%
121-140 days	5%	8%
141 days +	2%	9%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

¹⁶ Processing times for Child Disability Payment are counted from the date the part 2 form is received to decision date. Processing times for applicants applying under the special rules for terminal illness have not been included due to not having a part 2 date.

¹⁷ Processing times for Adult Disability Payment are counted from the date the part 2 form is received to decision date. Processing times for applicants applying under the special rules for terminal illness have not been included due to not having a part 2 date.

Measure 31b: percentage of clients paid on time from the first time. This measure is available as a percentage of payments rather than of clients. In 2023-24, 99.88% of payments were paid on time. Where they were not on time, this was either because of client error, operator error, system error or the death of a client or appointee.

Table 34: Percentage of payments paid on time¹⁸

Benefit	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	*	99.50%	99.87%
Funeral Support Payment	98.23%	97.35%	99.26%
Young Carer Grant	99.54%	97.55%	99.70%
Job Start Payment	99.77%	96.97%	99.48%
Child Winter Heating Payment	99.33%	99.89%	99.91%
Scottish Child Payment	99.99%	98.80%	99.95%
Child Disability Payment	*	99.76%	99.94%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	99.95%	99.84%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	99.97%	99.54%
Carer Support Payment	n/a	**	100.00%

Source: Social Security Scotland management information

* Figures not comparable for 2021-22 due to improvement in the method used to calculate payments paid on time for these benefits for 2022-23

** Carer Support Payment opened for new applications in the pilot areas of Dundee City, Na h-Eileanan Siar and Perth and Kinross from 20 November 2023. Carer Support Payment is being rolled out to other local authority areas in a phased approach during 2024.

Measure 32: percentage of clients paid the correct amount from the first time is not currently centrally collated. Please see Measure 13 above which covers whether Client Survey respondents said they were paid the right amount.

Measure 33: percentage of re-determinations completed on time can be found in Tables 35 and 36.

¹⁸ This table does not include Best Start Foods because payments to Best Start Foods cards go through a different system.

Table 35: Percentages of low income benefit re-determinations/internal reviews processed within 16 working days¹⁹

Benefit	% of re-determinations/internal reviews processed within 16 working days				
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant	97%	93%	92%	96%	92%
Funeral Support Payment	95%	83%	93%	92%	87%
Young Carer Grant	100%	90%	89%	95%	90%
Job Start Payment	n/a	92%	88%	81%	80%
Scottish Child Payment	n/a	97%	85%	96%	90%
Best Start Foods	87%	84%	88%	93%	83%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

Table 36: Percentages of Child Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment re-determinations processed within 56²⁰ working days

Benefit	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Child Disability Payment	99%	98%	86%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	99%	69%

Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.

¹⁹ Where a re-determination was not closed within 16 working days, a further 5 day extension was agreed with the client or it was subject to a Coronavirus related extension permitted under the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 legislation that came into force on 7 April 2020.

²⁰ A request for a re-determination should be made within 42 calendar days of being notified of the determination. Social Security Scotland then has 56 calendar days to make a re-determination.

Measure 34: call waiting times. From 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, Social Security Scotland handled 684,570 calls. In 2023-24, the average time a caller waited before a call was answered was 17 minutes and 54 seconds across all phone lines. This was down from 22 minutes and 17 seconds in 2022-23. Waiting times ranged from under two minutes for each of the Disability Payment case transfer lines and General Enquiries to an average of 28 minutes and 48 seconds for the Accessible Vehicles and Equipment (Adult Disability Payment) line.

The average waiting time for each phone line is shown in Table 37. More detailed breakdowns, including the distribution of waiting times for each phone line, are provided in the Telephony and Webchat Management Information release (See Annex A for more information).

Table 37: Average call wait time by phone line (minutes:seconds)²¹

Phone line	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods	07:11	29:39	09:47
Carer's Allowance Supplement	08:55	23:20	08:33
Child Winter Heating Payment	03:53	06:29	07:42
Funeral Support Payment	01:46	04:11	04:49
General Enquiries	07:09	07:07	01:34
Job Start Payment	02:18	03:30	03:31
Scottish Child Payment	07:05	30:50	09:53
Young Carer Grant	02:56	03:47	04:22
Child Disability Payment general	00:46	33:07	22:31
Child Disability Payment case transfer	00:30	01:51	02:10
Adult Disability Payment general	*00:55	17:29	21:20
**Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (Personal Independence Payment)	n/a	01:42	01:13
**Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (Working Age Disability Living Allowance)	n/a	01:35	01:12
***Accessible Vehicles and Equipment (Adult Disability Payment)	n/a	46:40	28:48
***Accessible Vehicles and Equipment (Child Disability Payment)	n/a	30:27	26:42
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	05:01	11:22
****Carer Support Payment	n/a	n/a	07:42
****Carer Support Payment Case Transfer	n/a	n/a	01:10
All phone line	00:05:51	00:22:17	17:54

Source - Social Security Scotland – Insights Research Findings/ Telephony and Webchat Management Information release

* This phone line launched on 21 March 2022, so this figure is for only 12 days of calls.

** These phone lines launched during 2022-23: Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (Personal Independence Payment) – May 2022; Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (Working Age Disability Living Allowance) – August 2022; Winter Heating Payment – January 2023.

*** In August 2022 the Accessible Vehicles and Equipment phone line was updated so callers could select either Adult Disability Payment or Child Disability Payment. Wait times are shown for these two lines individually and the previous single Accessible Vehicles and Equipment phone line is no longer shown in the table.

**** Carer Support Payment had calls from October 2023 and Carer Support Payment case transfer had calls from January 2024.

²¹ Please note that Social Security Scotland moved to a new telephony system on 30 March 2021.

Measure 35: Examples of reasons for re-determination and why or why not decision was changed, examples of re-determination process from client and staff points of view

Reasons for re-determinations and why decisions were changed

Client Experience staff who participated in focus groups were asked to share some of the common reasons why clients had challenged a decision.

For Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment, re-determinations were commonly requested where clients felt they should have been awarded a higher rate of benefit. Other reasons included: clients being denied the benefit but feeling they met the eligibility criteria, and a lack of clarity in the decision letter on why the client was denied or awarded a lower rate than expected. Re-determinations were requested in some cases where the original application or supporting information had not been considered in detail. Participants said decisions were changed in cases where further supporting information was supplied or where existing information was reviewed in more detail.

“With Child Disability Payment, it’s to do with clients feeling the award should be higher. When we find a lot coming through for mobility, it’s because they are unaware of how the high rate and the low rate works and that it’s dependent on the age and stage of development of the child. A lot of clients are unaware that they can’t get low rate mobility when the child is under 5. Sometimes it’s maybe how the decision letter has been worded to them on their original decision. They then ask for a re-determination on the mobility side because they’ve been told they’re not eligible based on the criteria.”

Client Experience staff participant

“Occasionally it could be that the supporting information hasn’t been fully looked at by the original decision maker. It could be a unique situation or condition. It’s possibly not been understood correctly or looked at completely. With those, I’ll do a case discussion where I’m unsure because of a unique condition.”

Client Experience staff participant

“It could be that they’ve now sent us additional supporting information that we never had with the original application. Or where a client’s situation and condition becomes clearer after a case discussion.”

Client Experience staff participant

Measure 35: Examples of reasons for re-determination and why or why not decision was changed, examples of re-determination process from client and staff points of view (continued)

For other benefits like Scottish Child Payment and Funeral Support Payment, re-determinations were commonly requested where clients had their application denied because they exceeded the income threshold or it wasn't clear whether they were in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Decisions were changed where there was evidence to show receipt of a qualifying benefit or that a client's income did not exceed the threshold.

“With Low Income Benefits, it's quite straightforward. A lot of the time it's to do with qualifying benefits. For example, if a client's qualifying benefit has been stopped or reduced. If the award has been denied, it could be because it's not picked up the client's qualifying benefits, or they don't have a qualifying benefit, or they're over the threshold. Or they might be on a qualifying benefit but our system has done an automatic decision and then we've had to go in to manually check and ask for supporting information.”

Client Experience staff participant

For benefits involving children and families²², clients had challenged decisions where it was unclear who had main caring responsibility for the child. Decisions were changed in cases where supporting information became available to prove that the client had responsibility.

“Another one would be if the system didn't pick up their responsibility benefit for the child or we haven't got sufficient information. We've not got the information we need.”

Client Experience staff participant

“If a decision has been changed, it's where we've been given additional information.”

Client Experience staff participant

²² Social Security Scotland delivers five family payments: Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment, Best Start Grant School Age Payment, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment.

Measure 35: Examples of reasons for re-determination and why or why not decision was changed, examples of re-determination process from client and staff points of view (continued)

Why decisions were not changed

Client Experience staff participants were asked to share some of the common reasons why decisions had been upheld following re-determinations. Across all benefits, this was common where a client did not meet the eligibility criteria for the benefit or where supporting information was not received at the re-determination stage. Benefit rates remained the same, or were reduced, where there was a lack of supporting information. Decisions were also upheld where clients weren't in receipt of a qualifying benefit, or didn't have clear responsibility for a child when applying for benefits involving children.

“With re-determinations it could be that the decision has been made correctly and the client is not providing any other supporting information. We're only able to base it on the information we already have. From that information, and possibly a case discussion [for disability benefits], it's clear that the decision can't be changed.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Examples of the re-determination process

Client Experience staff participants were asked how the re-determination process was working for clients and staff. They felt the process was working well overall and described recent improvements such as clearer letters to explain the reasons for re-determination decisions. Participants thought it would be helpful if original decision letters also contained clear and detailed explanations about the first decision. They also felt the re-determination process could be better explained to clients before they enter into the process, especially when contacting Social Security Scotland over the phone to query or challenge a decision.

“We have now got a Quality Team in place to make sure re-determination outcome letters have clearer reasons for decisions. The letters are more structured with more detail about reasons why they didn't qualify for the benefit or certain rates. So the applicant knows the exact reasons for the outcome and it could possibly prevent appeals.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Measure 35: Examples of reasons for re-determination and why or why not decision was changed, examples of re-determination process from client and staff points of view (continued)

“Sometimes when clients call up, client advisers automatically do a re-determination without clarifying whether the client is debating a decision or just making a query. We then have to explain to the client that they are entering a full re-determination which could change the award, and once it’s started it can’t be stopped. These cases are few and far between, but I think if it was explained more at the time to the client when they first ring up they might not go ahead with it.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Client Experience staff participants felt confident working on re-determinations. They said case discussions²³ helped them to feel confident about making accurate decisions for disability benefits at the re-determination stage. Participants said there were mechanisms in place for staff to provide feedback about the re-determinations and appeals processes. They felt that whilst feedback often led to change, there were also times when suggestions weren’t listened to or actioned.

“If the original decision is a denial, that’s the kind of situation where a case discussion will be held. I always do that to make sure that the decision I’m making is the correct one [...] When the case discussion has been done, I’ll have a better understanding of the situation and the right decision.”

Client Experience staff participant

“I’ve fed back to senior team leaders in the past and things have been escalated and led to changes in policy so that was very positive. But in some other situations you feed things back, but I feel like it gets diluted and distilled once it goes through different people. It seems to get lost, even simple changes and small steps to improve.” **Client Experience staff participant**

²³ A case discussion is when the staff member carrying out the re-determination requests formal advice from a specialist adviser to help them make a decision. A specialist adviser could be a Social Security Scotland practitioner or someone from the Decision Support Team in Social Security Scotland.

Measure 36: Appeals upheld or rejected

(Source - Official Statistics, see Annex A for more details.)

Tables 38 to 42 show data on the number of appeals received for each benefit each financial year and their outcomes. Please note, data in the tables has been rounded to the nearest five for disclosure control.

Job Start Payment and Best Start Foods do not have a statutory right of appeal. This means that they do not have a re-determination or appeal process and only internal reviews are conducted. For Young Carer Grant, a very small number of appeals were received across each reporting year so the data has not been published to prevent the disclosure of small cohorts.

Table 38: Best Start Grant appeals (numbers)

Year	Number of appeals received	Appeals taking place	Appeals upheld	Appeals not upheld
2018-2019	5	0	0	0
2019-2020	60	60	0	60
2020-2021	35	20	#	15
2021-2022	15	15	#	10
2022-2023	10	10	0	10
2023-2024	30	10	#	10

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control.

Table 39: Funeral Support Payment appeals (numbers)

Year	Number of appeals received	Appeals taking place	Appeals upheld	Appeals not upheld
2019-2020	5	0	0	0
2020-2021	15	20	5	10
2021-2022	10	5	0	5
2022-2023	15	15	5	10
2023-2024	30	20	10	10

Table 40: Scottish Child Payment appeals (numbers)

Year	Number of appeals received	Appeals taking place	Appeals upheld	Appeals not upheld
2021-2022	15	15	10	5
2022-2023	10	5	#	5
2023-2024	105	40	10	30

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control.

Table 41: Child Disability Payment appeals (numbers)

Year	Number of appeals received	Appeals taking place	Appeals upheld	Appeals not upheld
2021-2022	#	0	0	0
2022-2023	40	15	10	5
2023-2024	200	55	35	20

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control. A small number of appeals were received and the number has not been published to prevent the disclosure of small cohorts.

Table 42: Adult Disability Payment appeals (numbers)

Year	Number of appeals received	Appeals taking place	Appeals upheld	Appeals not upheld
2022-2023	65	#	#	#
2023-2024	2,475	560	310	250

indicates that figures are suppressed for disclosure control. A small number of appeals were completed and the numbers has not been published to prevent the disclosure of small cohorts.

Measure 37: Examples of reasons for appeals and why or why not upheld, examples of appeals process for positive and negative (if any) outcomes AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Reasons for appeals and why decisions were changed

Client Experience staff who participated in focus groups said there were a range of reasons why clients had asked to appeal their decision following a re-determination. Common reasons included:

- clients feeling they weren't given an explanation for an unsuccessful application or re-determination,
- not receiving the benefit rate they expected,
- not being able to provide the necessary supporting information until the appeal stage.

Other clients had appealed in cases where they were awarded a lower rate of benefit following a re-determination compared with the original award. Some Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment cases had led to appeals where the client's condition wasn't fully considered at either the original application or re-determination stages, or where their condition had deteriorated since the original application.

“There are quite a lot of reasons but one example is clients not being given a full and thorough explanation for their original decision or re-determination. The re-determination might say they've not provided additional information and that's why they've not been awarded, but it doesn't add explanation as to why specifically they don't meet the criteria or qualify for an award. Sometimes that's not clearly explained.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“Another common reason [for appeal] is that there can be a discrepancy between the original decision and the re-determination. In some cases, someone will be given a certain rate at the original decision and then request a re-determination hoping to receive a higher rate. But a re-determination is a full re-assessment of everything. We've had cases where people have had a high award initially and then a case discussion brings up information that means they might get a nil award at the re-determination stage.”

Client Experience staff participant

Measure 37: Examples of reasons for appeals and why or why not upheld, examples of appeals process for positive and negative (if any) outcomes AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Participants said decisions had been changed at the appeals stage where supporting information became available or had been missed by Social Security Scotland with the original application or re-determination. For disability benefits, participants said that appeals hearings often allowed clients to describe their or their child's condition in more detail. Participants said decisions were changed where it became clear that clients were eligible for a disability benefit, or a higher rate of benefit, based on the information gained during a hearing.

“Hearings are an opportunity to ask a lot of questions that decision makers may not ask clients. To ask for a full picture of people's lives. The application form is designed to allow people to tell us certain things but sometimes people don't know what we mean by certain questions. Further discussions can lead to a change in decision. Clients being asked about their lives can bring out more information.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“It will often be the case that clients will come all they way through to appeal and then they'll finally present further supporting information that can be used. The Tribunal have the power to order people to get supporting information and a full GP summary. People think Social Security Scotland are able to access full medical records but we have quite a limited data sharing agreement.”
Client Experience staff participant

“A bit of supporting information might have been missed [when making a decision on the original application or re-determination] or the case discussion has been quite narrow. The decision maker has maybe missed something on the form or something on the decision-making guidance has been missed, it's human error.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Why decisions were not changed

Client Experience staff participants were asked to share some of the common reasons why decisions had been upheld following appeals. Participants said the reasons were the same as for re-determinations: that the client did not meet the eligibility criteria or there was a lack of supporting information at the appeals stage.

Measure 37: Examples of reasons for appeals and why or why not upheld, examples of appeals process for positive and negative (if any) outcomes AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“In appeals sometimes we just have it right the first time. All the information has been provided but they just didn’t fit the criteria. It must be frustrating for the client at the end of the process. But there are times when the original decision was right.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“For Scottish Child Payment, it’s often about who’s caring for the child and it’s sometimes quite a difficult thing for people to provide supporting information for. So that often leads to appeals hearings where it’s an open discussion about people’s circumstances. Which we wouldn’t do ourselves [in Social Security Scotland]. It needs to be done in a better managed space. That’s something that comes up in appeals. Decisions will be upheld or changed depending on that discussion.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Examples of the appeals process

Client Experience staff participants were asked how the appeals process was working for clients and staff. Participants had helped clients during the appeals process where possible and often received calls from clients to check on the progress of their appeal. Participants said clients often attended their appeal hearing, but there had been cases where clients had not attended due to stress and anxiety around the process or a lack of clarity over how to join the hearing over the phone.

“Sometimes appeals are complicated. The Scottish Courts Tribunal Service are completely separate to us, but we quite often get calls from clients to check on progress. We pass clients the contact details for the Scottish Courts Tribunal Service and say they need to go to them. We can still advocate and make sure clients get fair representation and that we do things correctly. I think clients’ experience has been positive on a whole because we try to help them through the appeals process and we offer advice on hearings and things where we can. [...] It can be a confusing process for clients but we do our best to help them through it.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Measure 37: Examples of reasons for appeals and why or why not upheld, examples of appeals process for positive and negative (if any) outcomes AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“Clients are sent a notification letter that says this is the phone number you need to call and this is the passcode you need to enter. A lot of them seem to think the Tribunal is going to call them. The Tribunal will sometimes call the client to remind them about the hearing, but sometimes the decision will just be made and the client might not join the hearing. A lot of people are just really anxious and they don’t want to turn up. It’s a very stressful thing. Sometimes it’s been 18 months since they applied and they are exhausted by that stage. Some have representatives that attend in their stead. Most do turn up.”

Client Experience staff participant

Participants said the marked increase in appeals in 2023-24 had been challenging to deal with at times and had led to constantly changing processes. Similarly to the re-determinations process covered in Measure 35, participants had provided internal feedback about the appeals process but felt that it didn’t always lead to change.

“In appeals, the process has massively changed over the last year. There weren’t many appeals before and it used to be a slow pace. Now there’s an influx of many more appeals. Sometimes people in the appeals team can feel like they’re standing on constantly moving ground. The process is changing and constantly being refined because we need to catch up and find the best ways of working.”

Client Experience staff participant

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken

The survey of partners asked those who worked with Social Security Scotland or directly with clients to rate the service.

Table 43: How would you rate the overall service delivered by Social Security Scotland?

Number of respondents: 2021-22 = 74, 2022-23 = 98, 2023-24 = 228; column percentages.

Response options	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Very good	16%	9%	12%
Good	41%	46%	45%
Neither good nor poor	19%	19%	22%
Poor	14%	17%	13%
Very poor	4%	4%	5%
Don't know/not applicable	7%	4%	2%

Over half (57%) of partner respondents rated the overall service as good or very good. Less than a fifth (18%) rated it as poor or very poor. A slightly higher proportion (22%) said it was neither good nor poor. This compares to 55% saying they rated the overall service as good or very good in 2022-23, with 21% saying it was poor or very poor.

Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland

In written comments, some partner respondents described positive experiences of contacting Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients. A few said they'd had no issues getting through on the phone and webchat. Some said phone and webchat waiting times had recently improved. Others spoke of long waits and were dissatisfied with this aspect of the service, describing it as frustrating and stressful. Respondents suggested a dedicated phone line or email service for partners who support clients and dedicated phone lines for specific benefits.

“Always had a positive response when phoning [Social Security Scotland] with very helpful staff. I have had some clients complain about wait times but haven't found this with my own experience.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“The time it takes to get through to a member of staff is very stressful for both client and [third-party] staff member. There should be a separate number for [third-party] staff to contact as it takes hours of time to get through.”

Partner respondent

As in previous years, partner respondents described challenges around acting on behalf of clients when contacting Social Security Scotland. This was particularly to do with problems around third party consent. There were calls for online ways to submit third party consent forms and for consent forms to remain valid for a longer period of time. Some wanted Social Security Scotland to adopt a list of pre-approved third party representatives similar to the Apollo List used by the Department for Work and Pensions.

“Even with a mandate in place, there are a significant amount of security questions, some of which I do not know (e.g. client's bank details). This is very frustrating for me and my clients, particularly after a lengthy wait. My clients are very ill and depend on us to make the process easy and quick but it can be very challenging dealing with Social Security Scotland regarding their claims.”

Partner respondent

“[...] There are often issues with Social Security Scotland accepting that I am calling on my client's behalf and with them accepting my mandate to do so as well.” Partner respondent

Experiences with staff

Partner respondents described staff as helpful, patient and knowledgeable. Many said client advisers had dealt with their queries promptly. Respondents commonly noted that whilst it sometimes took a long time to get through on the phone, their experience with client advisers was often very positive when calls were answered. However, a few comments mentioned poor staff manner and feeling that staff weren't friendly or helpful.

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“Staff are friendly and knowledgeable. They make a big effort to be as helpful as possible and you feel as if they are listening to you and actually answering your question/s and not just sticking to a script which is the opposite what happens when speaking to the majority of Department for Work and Pensions staff. Social Security Scotland staff are a pleasure to deal with.”

Partner respondent

“It depends who you get on the phone whether the experience is good or bad. I have had absolute incompetent conversations with staff who are untrained, unhelpful and unknowledgeable, to staff who are very effective and go out of their way to be helpful.”

Partner respondent

Partner respondents praised Local Delivery staff saying they were friendly, approachable, and wanted to help clients and the partners who support them. However, a few respondents found that Local Delivery staff gave limited or conflicting information, or weren't always available to assist with queries.

“My experience of dealing with our Local Delivery team has been very positive as they have been very understanding of and responsive to client needs.”

Partner respondent

“Initially the local managers would contact [our] service letting me know who they were and if we had any queries to contact them for support. Currently don't know where the Local Delivery service are based.”

Partner respondent

Applications

The vast majority of written comments related to applications for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment. Where respondents mentioned other benefits, such as Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment, comments tended to be positive and described applications as easy to access and simple to complete.

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications are very easy [...]” **Partner respondent**

On Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment, positive comments said application forms were laid out clearly, straightforward to complete, and that questions were easy to understand. Many partner respondents felt the online application was quicker and easier to complete than the paper form. A couple preferred the paper form as they could skim through it with clients to see which questions were coming next but said perforated edges would be helpful for scanning. Some respondents praised the fact that additional information and images were embedded within the form itself.

“Completing applications is easy as the forms are clearly set out - whether that's online or paper.” **Partner respondent**

“Online forms themselves are straightforward and the extra steps taken to explain questions and how to answer is helpful for explaining to clients what is being asked of them. Inclusions of pictures in the Adult Disability Payment form, for example, is helpful for clients who struggle to read or to take in information.” **Partner respondent**

Other partner respondents said application forms for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment were complex and took a long time to complete. Some said the questions were repetitive and didn't allow clients to accurately explain their or their child's condition. Some felt the embedded guidance made the application seem large and overwhelming for clients. Others felt the guidance could be clearer about what to include and how to answer questions. There were mixed experiences of using mygov.scot accounts with clients and submitting supporting information online, with some having no issues but others reporting technical problems.

“Adult Disability Payment form is just too long, especially for clients with complex disabilities, mental disabilities or learning difficulties. Clients are distressed and anxious at the prospect of going through it [...]”

Partner respondent

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“I have had many issues with creating accounts where a client has a mygov.scot account or their address or email has been previously used for mygov.scot. This prevents an account being made and being unable to apply online. The issue can sometimes be resolved by IT if a form is submitted however this takes time [...]” **Partner respondent**

Partner respondents left positive comments about clients receiving Local Delivery support to complete applications for disability payments. However, some mentioned difficulties making Local Delivery appointments on behalf of clients. Respondents wanted the ability to refer clients directly to Local Delivery and an online option for requesting appointments. Other suggestions included: a way for partners to contact Local Delivery directly, to waive the need for a third party consent form when arranging appointments on clients’ behalf, and better promotion of the service to clients.

“The Local Delivery officer is excellent. It might be worth allowing claimants to request this online as well as over the phone.” **Partner respondent**

“We have a Local Delivery team who sits a few feet away but we cannot refer directly to them and have to go through [the] phone system. This is a waste of time and resource when they could easily speak directly with us and make their own appointments.” **Partner respondent**

Decisions

Some partner respondents left comments about the decisions clients had received. Comments said decision letters were straightforward, easy for clients to understand, and clearly explained the reasons for decisions.

“I think the decision letters are always very thorough in openly communicating the reasoning for your decisions, to help clients understand.”

Partner respondent

Measure 38: Positive AND negative (if any) feedback from organisations who work with client groups on how they think the service is working AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Partner respondents expressed dissatisfaction with application processing times for disability benefits. Many comments highlighted the negative impact of long waits on client wellbeing and expressed a desire for shorter processing times overall. Some said a long wait for decisions was one of the only negative aspects in an otherwise positive experience of the service. A couple felt that delays were to be expected with the launch of new benefits.

“[...] I am desperate to get an award for my client who has been waiting for his claim to be approved [for eight months]. [...] I feel that he has been denied his dignity.” **Partner respondent**

“The only drawback is the lengthy waiting times for decisions to [be] made and [re-determinations] not being looked at within the required timescales. However, it is appreciated that there has been a large volume of applications as would be the case with the roll out of any new benefits.” **Partner respondent**

Similarly to previous years, partner respondents were frustrated by the lack of a third-party escalation route for applications that have encountered problems or need to be processed quickly, such as for vulnerable clients. Some felt an escalation route, coupled with more systematic and joined-up communication with partners, could help to solve cases where issues had arisen or where an urgent decision was needed.

“You need an escalation route for advisers so problems are resolved in days, not weeks or months.” **Partner respondent**

“[...] failure to introduce an escalation route for third-party representatives for very vulnerable clients often resulting in catastrophic consequences for customers e.g. disability benefit being stopped and this having a knock-on effect of reducing other benefits they have and this resulting in distress/stress to the customer and leading to mental and physical harm.” **Partner respondent**

“I think if workers have more scope to contact that would be helpful. A lot of the time we have useful info to support with applications.” **Partner respondent**

How accessible are services and places?

Services are accessible

52% of Client Survey respondents said they had experience of applying for a Social Security Scotland benefit. Of those:

Measure 39: 69% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the application process was clear. Some groups were less likely to agree or strongly agree, these were:

- respondents aged 55 or over (65% compared to 73% of respondents aged 16-54)
- respondents with a disability or long-term health condition (66% compared to 82% of those without a disability or long-term health condition)

Measure 40: 65% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the application form asked only relevant questions. Some groups were less likely to agree or strongly agree, these were:

- respondents aged 55 or over (61% compared to 69% of respondents aged 16-54)
- respondents with a disability or long-term health condition (60% compared to 81% of those without a disability or long-term health condition)

Tables 44 and 45 show Measures 39 and 40 for each benefit, including previous years' findings where possible.

Table 44: Client Survey respondents' views on whether the 'application process was clear', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of applying for each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods and Scottish Child Payment	n/a	88%	86%
Best Start Grant / Foods	91%	83%	87%
Funeral Support Payment	91%	87%	84%
Young Carer Grant	91%	88%	87%
Job Start Payment*	90%	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	84%	94%	88%
Child Disability Payment	87%	79%	76%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	77%	62%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (93)

Table 45: Client Survey respondents' views on whether the 'application asked only relevant questions', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of applying for each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods and Scottish Child Payment	n/a	90%	85%
Best Start Grant / Foods	90%	84%	86%
Funeral Support Payment	87%	90%	84%
Young Carer Grant	93%	91%	89%
Job Start Payment*	86%	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	91%	94%	88%
Child Disability Payment	83%	76%	71%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	70%	56%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (88)

Measure 41: 100% of Social Security Scotland documents are available on request in accessible formats (braille, Easy Read, large print, non-English languages including British Sign Language and audio recordings) and marketing and communication materials are produced in twelve community languages, British Sign Language and Easy Read formats (Source: Social Security Scotland communications team).

Measure 42: this measure is worded in the original Charter Measurement Framework as 'X percentage of clients say staff adapted to enable them where they faced barriers to accessing services'. 24% of Client Survey respondents said they had experienced some sort of barrier when getting help from Social Security Scotland. Some groups were more likely to experience barriers, these were:

- respondents with a disability or long-term health condition (26% compared to 16% of those without a disability or long-term health condition)
- men (26% compared to 22% of women)
- ethnic minority respondents (27% compared to 23% of white respondents)

Table 46: Whether Client Survey respondents faced any barriers getting help from Social Security Scotland, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; % who said 'yes', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	13%	14%	11%
Best Start Grant	19%	23%	17%
Best Start Foods	19%	24%	18%
Funeral Support Payment	18%	17%	21%
Young Carer Grant	22%	18%	18%
Job Start Payment	20%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	15%	14%	14%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	22%
Scottish Child Payment	16%	15%	16%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	21%	23%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	11%	22%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	20%	29%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	22%	20%

Just under a third of those who experienced barriers said they told Social Security Scotland about them (30%).

Table 47: Whether Client Survey respondents who experienced barriers told Social Security Scotland about them, by benefit experience²⁴

All respondents with experience of each benefit who experienced barriers; % who said 'yes', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	27%	38%
Best Start Grant	28%	27%
Best Start Foods	29%	27%
Funeral Support Payment	36%*	31%
Young Carer Grant	#	#
Job Start Payment	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	45%*	52%*
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	37%
Scottish Child Payment	27%	28%
Child Disability Payment applicant	40%	44%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	37%	53%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	34%	32%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	31%	30%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (2022-23 - Funeral Support Payment: 74; Child Winter Heating Payment: 42) (2023-24 – Child Winter Heating Payment: 44)

Where respondents had told Social Security Scotland about the barriers they experienced, 36% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland 'understood them'. A quarter (21%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland 'supported [them] in overcoming them'.

Table 48 shows the proportion of respondents with experience of each benefit who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland understood the barriers they faced and supported them to overcome them.

²⁴ The number of respondents for these questions were too small to allow benefit breakdowns to be provided in previous years prior to 2022-23.

Table 48: Client Survey respondents who said Social Security Scotland understood the barriers they experienced and supported them to overcome them, by benefit experience, 2023-24

All respondents with experience of each benefit who experienced barriers and reported them to Social Security Scotland; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	Social Security Scotland understood [the barrier(s)]	Social Security Scotland supported client to overcome [the barrier(s)]
Carer's Allowance Supplement	41%*	5%**
Best Start Grant	48%	37%
Best Start Foods	48%	39%
Funeral Support Payment	30%*	20%**
Young Carer Grant	#	#
Job Start Payment	#	
Child Winter Heating Payment	#	#
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	#
Scottish Child Payment	47%	37%
Child Disability Payment applicant	43%	23%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	45%*	29%**
Adult Disability Payment applicant	31%	17%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	44%	23%

*Number of respondents fewer than 100 (Funeral Support Payment: 33, Carer's Allowance Supplement: 39, Child Disability Payment case transfer: 33)

**Number of respondents fewer than 100 (Funeral Support Payment: 30, Carer's Allowance Supplement: 37, Child Disability Payment case transfer: 31)

Measure 43: This measure is worded in the original Charter Measurement Framework as ‘X percentage of clients said that staff addressed the communication barriers they faced’. 6% of Client Survey respondents said they could not communicate with Social Security Scotland when they wanted to, whilst 7% could not communicate how they wanted to. 35% of respondents who faced at least one of these communication barriers told Social Security Scotland about the barriers they experienced.²⁵ 15% of this group who told Social Security Scotland about the barriers they faced ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that Social Security Scotland supported them to overcome them.

Measure 44: 51% of Client Survey respondents who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that their application was handled within a reasonable time frame.

Table 49: Client Survey respondents’ views on whether their ‘application was handled within a reasonable time frame’, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of applying for each benefit; % who ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’, row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Best Start Grant / Foods and Scottish Child Payment	n/a	65%	76%
Best Start Grant / Foods	72%	55%	76%
Funeral Support Payment	81%	71%	76%
Young Carer Grant	81%	61%	72%
Job Start Payment*	67%	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	75%	77%	80%
Child Disability Payment	73%	50%	40%
Adult Disability Payment	n/a	45%	42%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (90)

²⁵ These respondents could have also experienced other barriers, so they may not have only been referring to communication barriers in the next two responses.

Measure 45: 73% of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their time was not wasted.

Table 50: Client Survey respondents who said 'Social Security Scotland did not waste my time', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	84%	84%	84%
Best Start Grant	87%	83%	86%
Best Start Foods	87%	82%	85%
Funeral Support Payment	86%	86%	83%
Young Carer Grant	88%	83%	89%
Job Start Payment*	77%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	87%	86%	86%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	80%
Scottish Child Payment	89%	88%	92%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	81%	87%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	84%	88%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	78%	77%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	76%	83%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (97)

Measure 46: This measure is worded in the original Charter Measurement Framework as ‘X percentage of clients that required extra support said they were referred to relevant support’. Client Survey respondents who had been in contact with a member of staff were asked whether they were told about other benefits they might have been entitled to or other sources of additional help. Of these:

- 19% said staff had told them about other benefits they might have been entitled to. 38% said that they would have liked to have been told about other benefits by staff but were not. A further 32% said this question was not applicable or relevant to them, whilst 11% said they could not remember or did not know.²⁶
- 34% said staff had told them about other sources of additional help (for example Citizens Advice Scotland, etc.). 42% said that they would have liked to have been told about other sources of help by staff but were not. A further 8% said this question was not applicable or relevant to them, whilst 16% said they could not remember or did not know.

Tables 51 and 52 show data on the proportion of clients who were told about other benefits and additional sources of support for each benefit.

²⁶ The “Can’t remember / don’t know” option was accidentally omitted for Carers Support Allowance, Child Winter Heating Payment and Winter Heating Payment for this question and the next one. This is indicated by ‘-’ in tables 51 and 52. These omissions skew the findings for these benefits. This could also be impacting the overall results on whether clients were told about other sources of additional help so findings should be interpreted with caution. Due to the relationship between benefit experience and demographic groups, results across different groups of respondents may also be impacted. As such, no demographic breakdowns are provided for this measure for 2023-24.

Table 51: Whether Client Survey respondents were told about other benefits they might have been entitled to by staff, by benefit experience, 2023-24

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff, % selecting each response option; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	Yes	No, but I would have liked them to	No, not applicable / relevant	Don't know / can't remember
Carer's Allowance Supplement	29%	30%	41%	-
Best Start Grant	31%	34%	22%	12%
Best Start Foods	39%	32%	18%	11%
Funeral Support Payment	27%	26%	30%	17%
Young Carer Grant*	17%	35%	40%	8%
Job Start Payment	#	#	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment*	27%	38%	36%	-
Winter Heating Payment	24%	42%	34%	-
Scottish Child Payment	33%	33%	22%	12%
Child Disability Payment applicant	16%	37%	35%	12%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	21%	32%	35%	12%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	17%	42%	29%	12%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	16%	33%	42%	9%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (Young Carer's Grant: 60, Child Winter Heating Payment: 98)

Table 52: Whether Client Survey respondents were told about other sources of additional help by staff, by benefit experience, 2023-24

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had been in contact with staff, % selecting each response option; row percentages.

Benefit Experience	Yes	No, but I would have liked them to	No, not applicable / relevant ²⁷	Don't know / can't remember ²⁸
Carer's Allowance Supplement	34%	24%	42%	-
Best Start Grant	27%	30%	29%	14%
Best Start Foods	30%	29%	27%	14%
Funeral Support Payment	33%	23%	29%	15%
Young Carer Grant*	15%	32%	37%	17%
Job Start Payment	#	#	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment*	27%	26%	46%	-
Winter Heating Payment	33%	32%	35%	-
Scottish Child Payment	28%	29%	29%	14%
Child Disability Payment applicant	30%	52%	-	19%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	38%	46%	-	16%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	35%	47%	-	18%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	42%	43%	-	15%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (Young Carer's Grant: 60, Child Winter Heating Payment: 99)

²⁷ This option was accidentally omitted for Child and Adult Disability Payment applicants and case transfer clients, which is skewing the findings for these benefits.

²⁸ This option was accidentally omitted for Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Carer's Allowance Supplement, Winter Heating Payment and Child Winter Heating Payment, which is skewing the findings for these benefits.

Measure 47: 75% of Client Survey respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that they had enough choice in how they communicated with Social Security Scotland.

Table 53: Client Survey respondents’ views on whether they had ‘enough choice about how they communicated with Social Security Scotland’, by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland; % who ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’, row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	82%	79%	81%
Best Start Grant	86%	80%	82%
Best Start Foods	87%	79%	84%
Funeral Support Payment	82%	82%	83%
Young Carer Grant	90%	82%	82%
Job Start Payment*	79%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	88%	79%	90%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	77%
Scottish Child Payment	89%	80%	83%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	79%	80%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	84%	81%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	81%	72%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	79%	79%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (72)

Measure 48: 72% of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had enough choice of how Social Security Scotland communicated with them.

Table 54: Client Survey respondents' views on whether they had 'enough choice about how Social Security Scotland communicated with [them]', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	74%	72%	75%
Best Start Grant	84%	82%	80%
Best Start Foods	84%	81%	83%
Funeral Support Payment	83%	83%	80%
Young Carer Grant	87%	82%	85%
Job Start Payment*	76%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	72%	80%	83%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	76%
Scottish Child Payment	85%	83%	81%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	81%	77%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	76%	83%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	79%	68%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	73%	74%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (72)

Measure 49: Percentage of clients that challenge a decision who already have payments continue to receive their payments. This measure refers to Short-term Assistance, which clients can apply for whilst challenging a determination which reduced or stopped their ongoing payments. The value payable of Short-term Assistance is the difference between the level of assistance paid under an earlier determination and the level of assistance paid after review. There were 200 cases for Adult Disability Payment and 25 cases for Child Disability Payment that received Short Term Assistance by 31 March 2024.²⁹

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken

Positive experiences of accessibility and how clients were enabled

Around one-in-ten Client Survey respondents reported needing or receiving help to complete the application process. Respondents described needing help due to a range of physical (e.g. arthritis, hearing impairment) and mental health (e.g. anxiety) conditions. Several respondents gave positive feedback about receiving help from Social Security Scotland, describing staff as helpful, kind and patient. A few also mentioned being told about additional support services by helpline staff (such as the availability of Local Delivery), as well as/or being advised of other benefits they may be eligible for.

“It was very comforting having the help to fill in the application. The lady was very professional and didn't make me feel uncomfortable when talking about my embarrassing and private medical conditions.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“[...] When I first contacted Social Security Scotland it was only to find out how the process works and I was unsure on what to put in the application. The lady I spoke with was very helpful and filled out the first part over the phone for me and then booked me in with the local delivery service which I was unaware was even an option for me [...]” **Client Survey respondent with experience of a Disability Payment**

²⁹ Data is not available as a percentage.

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Both the Client Survey 2023-24 and the Annual Client Panel Survey 2023 asked respondents about their experience of using webchat. Feedback was mostly positive, describing webchat as easy to use. Respondents said webchat was convenient because it allowed them to multitask, for example doing housework or childcare whilst contacting Social Security Scotland. Similarly, some respondents commented that the webchat was more suited to their environment, for example if they were in a public place and did not want their conversation with Social Security Scotland to be overheard. Some respondents explained that they disliked speaking on the phone as it provoked anxiety or was incompatible with their health condition/disability (e.g. hearing loss, stutter), so webchat was an appropriate alternative.

“I feel I have more time to use the webchat while doing other things. My son who has autism is very loud when I’m trying to make a phone call so I find the webchat a lot easier to communicate without disruption.” **Annual Client Panel Survey Respondent**

“I get stressed talking on the phone so webchat eases my anxiety.” **Annual Client Panel Survey Respondent**

In the Charter Research survey of partners, positive comments described the service as user friendly and accessible for clients. Positive examples included: clients having multiple ways to apply; a choice of ways to contact Social Security Scotland; simple processes for uploading supporting information; and the availability of interpretation and information in languages other than English. Some respondents felt application forms were accessible and that this had been prioritised in their design.

“You have paper claims and online - very accessible.” **Partner respondent**

“There has clearly been thought put into the accessibility of the forms and the various options made available for applicants. I’m sure there will be ways it can be improved but from my observations it seems clear that this topic was thought about during the creation of the various forms.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Some partner respondents felt that Local Delivery home visits and face-to-face appointments in local venues were accessible ways for clients to get support to apply. A few respondents mentioned the Independent Advocacy Service delivered by VoiceAbility³⁰ and Social Security Scotland's ability to directly refer clients to this service. They said the service was a positive way for clients with a disability or health condition who need support to communicate to access Social Security Scotland's benefits. Some felt the advocacy service should be promoted more to clients.

"People can request for [the] Local Delivery Team to help them in a community venue, or at their home. I do appreciate VoiceAbility being given as an option for help with application for Adult Disability Payment so that clients have choice." **Partner respondent**

"The various options (paper application, phone, online, Local Delivery) make it very accessible I believe. However, I believe greater exposure to the clients of the available Advocacy support (VoiceAbility) would improve accessibility even more." **Partner respondent**

A few respondents said that whilst the service wasn't fully accessible, they felt the organisation was committed in its approach to prioritising and improving accessibility.

"People can apply for benefits from their phones while at home. Most people have access to a smartphone, or a friend or family member does. For the rest, they can use Citizens Advice Bureau or another service to link them in. Social Security Scotland has done a lot to inform the public about benefits they might be entitled to and how they can go about applying. Unfortunately there will always be some folk that slip through the net but you are tackling it proactively." **Partner respondent**

³⁰ VoiceAbility is a charity with experience in delivering independent advocacy services. It is separate to Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government. The Independent Advocacy Service provides free and independent advocacy to anyone who identifies as disabled and requires support to communicate. Clients can access this support by contacting VoiceAbility directly or by calling Social Security Scotland and asking to be referred to the Independent Advocacy Service.

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Negative experiences of accessibility

Some Client Survey respondents left negative comments about needing help from Social Security Scotland to complete the application. Some mentioned a generalised lack of guidance as how to access support. This included a lack of guidance within the application form.

“There was no point on the form that I could find to get extra support.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I would like a clearer picture on who to talk to regarding getting support to fill in the application and how to get in touch with them.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

For some Client Survey respondents, long wait times to connect to helpline or webchat services were identified as a barrier to communicating with Social Security Scotland. Those with physical disabilities and/or caring responsibilities notably felt this posed a barrier to communicating with Social Security Scotland.

“...you are left holding on so long that you have to hang up, maybe because you are too ill or need of the bathroom, which means you have to start all over again...there has got to be a better way of doing things that does not cause strass or anxiety which does not help the people need help in the first place.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Disability Payment**

“Over an hour wait on the phone and the phone lines close at 6pm. I don’t get home from work until 5pm.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“I could never get through by phone or web chat without waiting a life time and when have disabled children staying on hold for an hour really isn’t an option.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of representing a client case transferred to Child Disability Payment**

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

Translation was mentioned as a barrier by a few Client Survey respondents, with one relating how long helpline wait times (over an hour) meant that their interpreter had to leave the call as they had 'other people to help'.

“Contact Scotland interpreter had to end call to Social Security Scotland after over an hour of waiting because interpreter had other people to help.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I don't speak English, which makes it very difficult for me to receive information in English.” **Client Survey Respondent with experience of Disability Payment**

Partner survey respondents commonly noted that Social Security Scotland's service was accessible for most clients but not all. Many said the clients they support had relied on help from third parties in order to access the service. Negatives examples of accessibility included:

- problems with interpretation,
- issues with three-way calls,
- difficulties going through the security process at the start of calls,
- and staff guiding clients to apply online instead of using their preferred method.

Many partner respondents mentioned examples of digital exclusion. They said the service was easily accessed by clients who were able to use online methods, but less accessible for those who didn't have digital skills or couldn't access online information and applications.

“Most of our clients are not capable to fill [out the] application form on [their] own.” **Partner respondent**

“Clients [are] often advised to go online to apply when this is not accessible to them. One call handler notified a client that paper forms weren't being sent out anymore which is untrue.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 50: Examples of positive AND negative (if any) experiences of accessibility (how clients were enabled) AND Social Security Scotland action taken (continued)

“Unfortunately so many clients don’t have access to internet facilities and are unable to travel to local libraries.” **Partner respondent**

Some partner respondents felt the delay getting through to an adviser was a barrier to accessing information and applying by phone. They said this had led some clients to use an alternative application route they weren’t comfortable with. Others said the length and complexity of application forms for disability benefits had deterred some clients from applying in the first place.

“It is fine if the customer has digital skills and access to allow them to make a claim online. But the length of time taken to get an answer on the phone to make an initial claim, or to ask for local Client Advisor assistance to make a claim, is a barrier to claiming for the customer group I deal with [...]”

Partner respondent

“All information is straightforward, but this can mean that the forms are very lengthy and I am aware that this has put some people off from claiming [...]”

Partner respondent

Places are accessible and convenient

Measure 51: X percentage of social security offices pass the accessibility checklist (Checklist to be agreed by disabled people with lived experience).

Social Security Scotland has two types of offices – base locations and outreach locations. Usually, base locations are office spaces for staff and are not used to meet with clients. However, there are now 20 base locations which also operate as outreach locations. While accessibility is assessed for all base locations, we only include these 20 base locations, alongside all outreach locations, in this measure. Clients can also have appointments with staff over the phone, by video call or at their homes, according to their preference and accessibility needs.

Social Security Scotland's policy for outreach venues is co-locating with other organisations which clients may know or visit. This limits the buildings we have available. This should be considered when reviewing the information below.

Across the 32 local authorities, as of March 2024 (the end of the financial year) there were **183 locations** completely signed off as outreach locations (including the 20 base locations which are client facing, as noted above). Some of these venues were active for only a portion of this period but are still included in this analysis. Accessibility consideration for **183 (100%)** of these locations was available for analysis for this measure.

Accessibility information was analysed to determine the most frequently mentioned accessibility features. How accessibility was described varied across locations, which means that where a feature was not mentioned, it does not mean it was not present in the building. The accessibility consideration formed part of reports used to formally sign off locations for use. The top 5 most common accessibility features are listed below along with the frequency and percentage (respectively) of how often they were mentioned across all outreach locations.³¹

- Accessible toilet/s (**112, 61%**)
- Disabled parking (**96, 52%**)
- No steps/services are on ground floor/lift/s (**89, 49%**)
- Automatic door/s (**83, 45%**)
- Ramp/s (**79, 43%**)

³¹ Please note that these percentages may seem to be lower compared to the previous year. This is due to slight over-reporting across these accessibility features in the 2022-23 Charter Measurement Framework and does not represent a meaningful change in accessibility features.

Measure 52: X percentage of clients said it was convenient to get access to social security places and services. Two Social Security Scotland services can be delivered using appointments. Local Delivery staff can take proof of identity, support applicants to fill out Social Security Scotland forms, and assess people who want to become appointees. Health and social care staff conduct consultations with Adult Disability Payment applicants where more information is needed to make a decision on their application. Both Local Delivery and consultation appointments can happen in a client's home, at a Social Security Scotland location, over the phone, or by video call. The Client Survey asked about the convenience of both of these services.

Of the 6% of Client Survey respondents who said they had contact with Local Delivery staff, 89% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that it was easy to book an appointment at a time and place that suited them.

Table 55: Client Survey respondents' views on whether 'it was easy to book an appointment with Local Delivery staff at a time and place that suited them', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit who had contact with Local Delivery staff; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	#	#
Best Start Grant	87%	96%
Best Start Foods	88%	95%
Funeral Support Payment	#	#
Young Carer Grant	#	#
Job Start Payment	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	#	#
Scottish Child Payment	92%	91%
Child Disability Payment applicant*	94%	92%
Child Disability Payment case transfer*	#	97%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	94%	90%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	88%	87%

* Number of respondents fewer than 100 (58)

Over one-in-five (23%) of Client Survey respondents with experience of Adult Disability Payment said they'd had a consultation.³² Of those who said they had a consultation:

- 87% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the appointment was at a convenient time
- 87% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the type of appointment (e.g. phone call, virtual face to face, in person face to face) was convenient.

How is the consultation process for benefits for disabled people (and people with health conditions) working for clients?

The consultation process for benefits for disabled people (and people with health conditions) minimises stress for clients

This section in the original Charter Measurement Framework referred to 'face to face assessments'. This is the language used by the Department for Work and Pensions for Personal Independence Payment. Adult Disability Payment in Scotland does not require face to face assessments, but some applicants will be asked to have a consultation with a health and social care practitioner.

Over one-in-five (23%) of Client Survey respondents who had experience of Adult Disability Payment said they had a consultation.³³ Of those who said they had a consultation:

Measure 53: 86% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they understood why the consultation was needed.³⁴

Measure 54: 78% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'my practitioner understood my disability or health condition(s) and how it affects me'.³⁵

³² Many of these respondents may have had a phone call with a case manager to gather more information about their case, rather than a consultation with a health and social care practitioner. This means client views on consultation experiences should be treated with caution.

³³ Many of these respondents may have had a phone call with a case manager to gather more information about their case, rather than a consultation with a health and social care practitioner. This means client views on consultation experiences should be treated with caution.

³⁴ The original measure was "X percentage of people who needed a consultation for benefits for disabled people (and people with long-term health conditions) said they felt the assessment was necessary because the information needed to find out if they were eligible was not otherwise accessible to Social Security Scotland." This was shortened to 'I understood why the consultation was needed' in the Client Survey to make sure the question was easy to understand.

³⁵ The original measure was "X percentage of people who had a consultation for disabled people's benefits said the assessment was carried out by appropriately qualified staff." The Client Survey instead asks about whether the client felt they and their health condition were understood, as clients will likely not know about the qualifications of the person who conducted their consultation.

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised

Client Survey respondents who reported having a consultation were invited to comment on their experiences, including suggestions for improvement.

When respondents commented on their experience of having a consultation, four recurrent themes stood out. These themes are reported on in detail below, including verbatim comments made anonymously by respondents. Suggestions for improvements are also discussed where relevant.

Overall experience

When respondents reflected on their overall experience of the consultation process, many were positive. Some described the overall process as straightforward. Others said that they were overall satisfied with their experience, in part because the consultation was carried out in a way, and at a time, that suited them.

Comments highlighted that for many respondents, the consultation process was overall an emotive experience. Respondents reported a range of feelings including stress and anxiety before or during the appointment, feeling respected and put at ease by staff, finding it difficult or overwhelming to discuss health and other personal issues, and relief that the process went well.

“Pleasant experience, nice to have someone who actually listened.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“The whole process ran smoothly and I never felt under-pressure, I never felt bullied and, most important of all, I felt believed.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I thought I'd be put through the wringer, but it was much quicker and less stressful process.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Respondents who had a negative experience variously mentioned feeling stressed, frustrated and disbelieved.

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

“I felt disbelieved, rushed, felt very stressed and frustrated during and after the process.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“There was nothing good about the consultation. When they arrived it was clear the issues I was having, I also explained them. They had to sit in my bedroom with me in bed while conducting the consultation. They did not seem to listen or observe the situation or problems I was having. Terrible experience.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I was asked a lot of questions that had to be repeated. Took longer than letter stated. I was asked questions about work which didn't feel were relevant. It was very exhausting and stressful.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Feedback about practitioners

Overall, feedback was positive about staff. Respondents variously said they felt listened to, that staff were kind, and staff made them feel trusted. Negative comments highlighted issues with practitioners' knowledge of individual health conditions and some issues with the format of consultation questions.

“Overall the consultation interviewer was kind and compassionate and I felt at ease opening up to her about personal medical problems she is a credit to Social Security Scotland.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“I thought that the gentleman who visited my home was very professional and patient and polite as I was not very well and took he took the time and understood what I was communicating with him and I was impressed with his manners.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

“My memory and ability to maintain focus are not great due to extreme exhaustion, so I often start explaining something then forget details and become frustrated and upset, but the practitioner conducting the appointment was very understanding, didn't rush me, and seemed to realise that I wasn't trying to avoid answering any questions but just needed more time to form my thoughts correctly before answering.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“It was like speaking to a robot. Felt rushed and questions fired at me without time to think.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Arranging an appointment

As a consultation can take place over the phone, via video call, or in person at a local venue or in a client's home, respondents gave feedback about these arrangements. Some said that the type of appointment suited them; whereas others noted deficits in appointment arrangements, such as venues that lacked privacy, or a lack of clarity regarding accessing additional help for those who have a hearing impairment.

“I was very relieved the consultation was over the phone, it took huge stress out of the situation, I think I would have struggled with a face to face consultation.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“The face to face consultation is very important as my initial application was lost. getting a 1-2-1 with someone who was able to understand the complexity of describing my ailments and feeling comfortable enough to talk to a stranger about it.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“No privacy on face to face appointments.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

“The consultation was very good it was easier speaking to someone rather than trying to write it down on a form.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Consultation questions

There were a range of comments about the format of the questions asked by practitioners during a consultation discussion. Some respondents were positive about being able to explain their condition and the impact on their life. Others were less positive. Comments particularly highlighted that questions didn't allow them to fully explain their condition or needs. Some said the consultation felt rushed or that practitioners covered a lot of questions but didn't fully listen to what respondents said or give them enough time to answer.

“Treated with respect and felt understood. Questions were sensitive to my condition and was allowed help to explain my medical condition.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“It was straightforward and she asked loads of questions which made it easier to answer and explain my condition.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“As mentioned, they were polite enough but the questions were a weird and unhelpful way of ascertaining my struggles, how many days/metres on average etc.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

“I had to stop during the consultation as it was quick fire questioning and I wasn't getting time to answer I felt she wasn't interested in my needs.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

Suggestions for improvement

When suggestions for improvement were made, these included the need for practitioners to have a good understanding of the individual health condition/s that impact a client so to better understand a client's lived experiences. It was also suggested that Social Security Scotland should take into account the emotional and physical toll a consultation may have on a client, for whom the consultation may include the disclosure of upsetting and/ or traumatic life experiences.

“An hour and a half on the phone, being forced to go through every question again, in excruciating detail - including those where I disclosed some pretty horrific stuff. I spent the next two days off sick from work.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Partner experiences

Partner respondents who said they'd supported clients with an Adult Disability Payment consultation were asked whether client wellbeing had been protected and prioritised during the process.

Table 56: How much do you agree or disagree with the following: Social Security Scotland protected and prioritised client wellbeing during the Adult Disability Payment consultation process

Number of respondents = 80; Column percentages

Response options	
Strongly agree	13%
Agree	26%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	8%
Don't know / Not applicable	9%

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

Almost two in five (39%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that client wellbeing was protected and prioritised during the consultation process. Around a quarter (24%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a similar proportion said 'neither' (29%). Year-on-year trend analysis is not available for these findings due to the low number of respondents (n=22) who answered this question in 2022-23. Year-on-year trend analysis will be included in future reports where possible.

Written comments about consultations were largely positive. Partner respondents saw consultations as an opportunity for clients to express themselves and to fully explain how their condition affects their life. Consultations were described as being short, client-centred, and only asking relevant questions. Respondents said staff working on consultations were compassionate, empathetic, professional and genuine. They said clients had felt heard and understood during the consultation. In one example, a respondent said their client was reassured and offered breaks during the consultation and received a call beforehand to explain what to expect.

“Client was offered opportunity to take a break and was constantly reassured. Tone was non-threatening and informal. Client got call before the assessment to make sure all was okay and to explain what would happen.”

Partner respondent

“I have only supported one customer with a consultation and this took place over the phone. They were asked relevant questions to the application, it did not cause them any distress, and it gave them an opportunity to clarify what the impact of their conditions were on their life.” **Partner respondent**

Negative and mixed experiences included an instance where a client received a call unexpectedly from Social Security Scotland about a consultation. Some respondents highlighted long waits for clients between submitting an application and being invited to a consultation and thought the overall process could be shorter. In some cases, respondents said clients' needs weren't fully understood or accommodated during the consultation process.

“The person I was supporting got a surprise phone call stating that they were calling her for her assessment.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 55: Case studies on all aspects of the consultation process and results of the process; including in-depth assessment of how client wellbeing was protected and prioritised (continued)

“They [protected and prioritised client wellbeing] while I was there to assist my clients and could explain their communication and understanding abilities. However, when consultations were carried out without [my] support, assumptions were made and information from the client was misunderstood as the Social Security Scotland worker had no understanding of the client’s limitations. Anyone who identifies as having a learning disability or autism should be asked if they want to have someone they know and trust to assist them.” **Partner respondent**

Some respondents were unsure of the distinction between consultations and other forms of contact made by Social Security Scotland during the application process for Adult Disability Payment. Respondents said the consultation process could be better explained and publicised to clients and partner organisations. There were also suggestions for clients to be able to request a consultation if they felt it would help with explaining their condition, especially for clients with multiple conditions.

“This process needs to be explained to both clients and organisations that support clients.” **Partner respondent**

“Sometimes a consultation would be more appropriate than a case manager calling [...] if there was an option on the form for a client to state this is something they feel they would like to have, I believe I have had clients who would have stated this. Clients with multiple medical complaints should be considered for this [...]” **Partner respondent**

A Learning System

To what extent is Social Security Scotland a learning organisation?

Social Security Scotland uses feedback to improve performance

Measure 56: Qualitative evidence on any additional support Social Security Scotland can put in place for clients

Staff and partner survey respondents, Client Experience staff participants, and Client Survey respondents made suggestions to improve Social Security Scotland's service. Suggested improvements to communication included: extended helpline and webchat opening hours; to download a copy of webchat conversations; for staff to be able to leave voicemails with clients' permission; and for clients to receive text updates about the progress of their application or be able to check their claim's progress online. Some staff and partners thought a call back service would be useful for clients when phone lines were busy.

"The webchat is a most useful way to assist as it offers the option instead of waiting on a phone line. It would be great if the hours of this could be extended to take into account individual's working hours." **Partner respondent**

"Would suggest sending a text message acknowledging receipt of application, where you are in the process and notification of decision on the way. Think this would reduce applicants anxiety levels." **Client Survey respondent with experience Adult Disability Payment**

"One suggestion was to ask clients for their permission to leave voicemails. This would enable detailed messages to be left and, therefore, reduce the amount of incoming calls from clients to ask why they were called [...]." **Staff respondent**

"Perhaps a way to track your application online? Though I appreciate the complexities of introducing such a system." **Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment**

Client Experience staff participants felt it would be helpful for clients to know their queue position on a call.

Measure 56: Qualitative evidence on any additional support Social Security Scotland can put in place for clients (continued)

“I spoke to a client where their anxiety was so severe that they tried calling but they didn’t know how long they were going to be on the call for. So they just had to hang up. I think you should be able to see where you are in the queue [...] especially for those with anxieties because you don’t know how long you’re going to be on the phone for.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Some clients wanted to communicate with a single point of contact, such as a named client advisor. For some respondents, this consistency was expressed as a means of having more personalised and efficient communication.

“One person deals with you, therefore knows all your information and therefore more likely to get your claim correct and you don’t have to keep repeating your information time and time again to several different people.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

As in previous years, there were suggestions to provide a secure email service as a communication option for clients. A few staff respondents said outgoing calls to Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment clients could be carried out by Social Security Scotland practitioners. They felt these colleagues had the clinical training and experience to deliver a more informed service to this client group.

“I would suggest to send emails rather than texts and to communicate more regularly.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“Be good if you could have an email contact as the phone lines are busy constantly.” **Client Survey respondent with experience of being case transferred to Adult Disability Payment**

“We get a large amount of requests to communicate by email which would help clients who struggle with phone calls.” **Staff respondent**

Measure 56: Qualitative evidence on any additional support Social Security Scotland can put in place for clients (continued)

“Not medically trained. Feel [it] should be practitioners who call [clients] as they are medically trained to handle these calls with [the] professionalism and sensitivity that is required.” **Staff respondent**

Suggestions to improve the application process for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment included: the ability to access forms without first registering online or by phone, having a named case worker, and the option to complete the two parts of the application in different formats (for example the first part by phone and the second part online). There were calls for an online option for submitting re-determinations and for information and application guidance to be available in a wider variety of formats including video and animation.

“By allowing access to claim forms without the need to register a claim either online or by phone.” **Partner respondent**

“For the most part access is good. There can be issues when customers start a process online but then wish to abandon this channel and complete applications on paper, or vice versa. More could be done to make the application process flexible to suit the needs of customers.”
Partner respondent

“Most information [and] resources are clear and accessible and available in multiple community languages. I would like to see more videos and animations with the key information for clients to raise further awareness of processes in a more accessible way than predominantly print.” **Partner respondent**

Partner respondents suggested that clients should be able to contact Local Delivery directly to ask for support with applications rather than going through Social Security Scotland’s main helpline. Other suggestions about Local Delivery included: a tick-box on the first part of an application to ask for support with part two, in-person appointments to be offered more widely, the provision of more drop-in sessions for clients, and better promotion of the service when clients contact Social Security Scotland.

Measure 56: Qualitative evidence on any additional support Social Security Scotland can put in place for clients (continued)

“Older people have great difficulty hearing on the phone and going online. Face-to-face would be best for this client group.” **Partner respondent**

“[...] At the very least ensure that your website offers the option to request a call from the Local Delivery team and ensure every call to your national number is offered help from the Local Delivery team. That does not happen at present - a client must know in advance about the local team and request it themselves as they are not told about it or offered the support.” **Partner respondent**

Suggestions to improve the application forms for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment included: more use of simplified language and plain English, multiple choice questions, and larger spaces to write in answers on paper forms. There were many calls for online forms to allow clients to better explain their condition in detail, particularly for those with unseen, variable, or multiple conditions. Similarly, there were suggestions to increase the character limit within online review forms so that clients could provide more detail during this process. Other suggestions were: the ability to save a copy of the completed application on mygov.scot accounts, and shorter versions of the forms for third party or Local Delivery use.

“I wonder if some more multiple choice questions could be included to help people who struggle to write, and if language could be simplified further.” **Partner respondent**

“Most of the applications are simple and straightforward, but the Adult Disability Payment claim is very longwinded and lacks the option/section to add 'any more information'. This would be useful to allow further explanation, especially in unusual cases.” **Partner respondent**

“[...] I think introducing a short form without the same prompts should be an option for people who are getting help to complete the form either by Social Security Scotland or a welfare rights team.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 56: Qualitative evidence on any additional support Social Security Scotland can put in place for clients (continued)

“It would be great if a copy of applications could be retained in the person's mygov.scot account for future reference.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 57: Examples of You said: We did

In the survey of partners, a couple of respondents noted that Social Security Scotland had made changes based on feedback, such as measures to address delays in processing applications and to reduce call waiting times.

“[...] Social Security Scotland have been open about difficulties they have faced in processing claims to [Adult Disability Payment] and other benefits within target times and [have] taken measures to address delays.”

Partner respondent

“There are things that are good – e.g. where there have been changes as the result of feedback, where the phone line waiting times have come down [...]”

Partner respondent

In the survey of staff, some respondents described examples of when their feedback had been taken on board and led to improvements. A few also described examples where they had passed on feedback from partners which was listened to and led to changes. Examples were commonly about improvements made to Social Security Scotland's service, such as better processes for communicating with clients and guidance for supporting vulnerable clients. There were also improvements to how applications are managed and processed, and changes to policies on identification.

“To accept an adoption certificate as identification in a similar manner to a birth certificate. I raised this issue and some months later it was introduced.”

Staff respondent

Measure 57: Examples of You said: We did (continued)

“I’m aware of a senior practitioner who suggested a different way for the adult health practitioners to manage cases. This led to a trial of a different way of working. The trial was so successful, that this new way of working will be rolled out to the entire Adult Disability Payment health practitioner staff in mid-April.”

Staff respondent

Staff respondents said feedback had also led to improvements to internal policies and processes for staff. This included improvements or changes to things like:

- internal guidance,
- staffing and resource,
- communication and collaboration across different teams,
- and internal systems and how these are used.

There were also improvements to the way management information is collected, ways of working in specific teams, and staff processes for Local Delivery appointments.

“Case Transfer is an ever changing department that encounters new issues very regularly so we require more streamlined and efficient communication for us to continue working cases correctly - this has started to get worked on [...] and we had a big email about the communication overhaul [...].”

Staff respondent

“We have made multiple changes to our processes and ways of working as a team based on good ideas from colleagues.” Staff respondent

“New ways of recording information on [internal system] for involvement of practitioners. This was suggested and was taken forward.” Staff respondent

“Ability to track the number of automatic applications being processed - this has now been implemented.” Staff respondent

Measure 58: Staff diversity statistics

The diversity characteristics of the Social Security Scotland workforce (directly employed only, source: Social Security Scotland quarterly workforce publications) are outlined in the following tables. Figures relate to the position at the end of March each year to represent the financial year.

Some protected characteristics reported in the Official Statistics are voluntarily provided by staff. If staff have not yet updated this information on the HR system, where the Official Statistics are drawn from, it has resulted with staff being reported in the 'unknown' category within the statistics.

Table 57: Sex of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Female	60.7%	57.7%	59.8%	61.4%	61.1%
Male	39.3%	42.3%	40.2%	38.6%	38.9%

Table 58: Age of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
16-19	2.7%	0.9%	0.7%	0.4%	0.2%
20-29	20.0%	21.5%	22.6%	20.6%	16.0%
30-39	29.0%	27.5%	29.6%	30.7%	31.6%
40-49	25.5%	26.3%	24.9%	24.4%	26.0%
50-59	20.7%	21.0%	18.9%	19.9%	21.3%
60-64	#	2.2%	2.8%	3.3%	4.0%
65 and over	#	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%

indicates that figures are suppressed due to low numbers.

Table 59: Disability status of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Disabled	10.8%	10.7%	10.4%	9.8%	10.3%
Not disabled	59.3%	58.5%	51.3%	40.1%	39.1%
Prefer not to say	1.5%	2.1%	1.8%	1.6%	1.6%
Unknown	28.4%	28.7%	36.5%	48.5%	49.0%

Table 60: Ethnicity of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Ethnic minority	2.7%	3.3%	4.1%	3.7%	3.6%
White	82.9%	77.2%	66.1%	53.7%	53.0%
Prefer not to say	0.0%	0.7%	1.1%	0.6%	0.7%
Unknown	14.4%	18.8%	28.7%	41.9%	42.8%

Table 61: Religion or belief of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
None	51.8%	46.9%	41.0%	33.3%	32.6%
Church of Scotland	9.9%	10.0%	7.7%	6.3%	6.4%
Roman Catholic	14.9%	14.2%	12.5%	9.4%	9.4%
Other Christian	4.2%	4.1%	3.6%	3.2%	3.1%
Other religion or belief	2.9%	2.9%	3.1%	3.3%	3.1%
Prefer not to say	1.7%	2.9%	3.4%	2.7%	2.7%
Unknown	14.7%	18.9%	28.7%	41.9%	42.8%

Table 62: Sexual orientation of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other	6.2%	6.5%	7.3%	6.3%	6.2%
Heterosexual/straight	76.9%	71.5%	61.3%	49.7%	49.0%
Prefer not to say	2.1%	2.9%	2.8%	2.2%	2.1%
Unknown	14.9%	19.1%	28.6%	41.9%	42.7%

Table 63: Marital/civil partnership status of people directly employed by Social Security Scotland

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Married/civil partnership	19.5%	20.7%	16.8%	16.0%	19.2%
Single	5.4%	7.0%	4.7%	3.7%	4.0%
Other	5.3%	5.3%	5.0%	5.0%	5.4%
Prefer not to say	0.2%	0.7%	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%
Unknown	69.7%	66.4%	73.1%	75.0%	70.9%

Measure 59: Examples of acknowledgment of mistakes

A Client Survey 2023-24 respondent described how, when they had received incorrect information, they appreciated that staff then apologised for the error.

“Staff were friendly and always tried to assist. I was given wrong advice at one point but when I raised that it didn't sound right, I really appreciated that the adviser checked her information and later provided me the correct advice and assistance admitting to the error. It is a prompt and easy way to communicate particularly for me being nervous about communicating on the phone.”

Client Survey respondent with experience of Adult Disability Payment

Some partner survey respondents described examples of mistakes including: clients receiving incorrect documents from Social Security Scotland, and paper applications being lost or online applications not being received. Some respondents said clients had incorrectly received letters to say their application had been lost or not returned when this wasn't the case. One respondent experienced initial difficulty reporting a mistake to staff about an incorrect form, but the issue was eventually resolved.

“[...] Automatic letters being sent out regularly advising people their applications have been lost, or not returned, when they are indeed with Social Security Scotland. Causes a lot of anxiety and panic for our clients and is not uncommon unfortunately.” Partner respondent

“[...] your webchat adviser would not believe me when I told him you had sent a client another re-determination form rather than an appeal form. All I wanted him to do was send an appeal self addressed envelope. He refused to do so but did eventually send an appeal form and envelope to the client directly.”

Partner respondent

Other mistakes included: staff giving incorrect information, clients and partners not receiving call backs when promised, and problems with interpretation. One partner respondent mentioned a miscommunication over whether their client was due to receive Local Delivery support with their application. Some respondents said staff were apologetic when things went wrong but one described a poor experience with staff during an in-person appointment.

Measure 59: Examples of acknowledgment of mistakes (continued)

“[...] frontline staff have always been very helpful and open and apologetic when things have gone wrong [...].” **Partner respondent**

“I’ve had two instances where translators have incorrectly translated on behalf of my client at security questions. On both occasions we noted this but the adviser stated they had to take the translator’s answer. We had our own translator in the room who verified the correct info was given [by the client] it was just relayed incorrectly each time.” **Partner respondent**

“[...] Person was not on time and client has autism, time keeping is a huge trigger. Meeting in a room with very bright florescent lighting and where there was a noise of an underlying hum, again client has huge sensory issues. When they mentioned the lighting the person stated ‘I know it’s not good’. Why would they allow this environment for clients? [...]” **Partner respondent**

Some respondents mentioned mistakes to do with Social Security Scotland’s policies, processes and systems. Examples were: requests for help with the mygov.scot portal not being followed up, and problems completing a review for disability benefits or reporting a change of circumstances.

“[...] I have a review form that I completed online for a client which disappeared when I pressed the submit button. It took four phone calls [and] three webchats, all with about an hour each to get through to someone, to find out it had not been received. So now I have to put the client through the trauma of a third form. It has taken two days’ work to lodge a form that should take an hour [...].” **Partner respondent**

Client Experience staff participants described examples of mistakes that led to complaints from clients. They said mistakes were commonly to do with missing letters or errors in communication. In one example, some clients didn’t receive a letter with key information about moving from Child Disability Payment to Adult Disability Payment and began to submit complaints when their payments stopped. Participants said Social Security Scotland contacted clients to inform them of the communication error and the requirement to submit an application for Adult Disability Payment.

Measure 59: Examples of acknowledgment of mistakes (continued)

Other examples were to do with errors in clients' details on Social Security Scotland's system, often resulting from the transfer of information from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland.

"I had a case where we'd actually done a change of circumstances in a reasonable timeframe and we spent the next four months telling the person we hadn't done it and we hadn't sent them a letter. So there were multiple people that gave that information, not just one person that got it wrong. It was four, five, six calls the client had. That comes back to training because staff genuinely don't know what they're looking at on their case so can't give an update." **Client Experience staff participant**

"Clients who were reaching the age of 18 and moving from Child Disability Payment to Adult Disability Payment got a letter saying they were a transfer case and they would get paid Child Disability Payment until they were 19. Then they got a letter saying they had to apply for Adult Disability Payment before their 18th birthday or their payments would stop. Some of those clients didn't get that second letter so they thought they would get paid until they were 19. The first they knew was when they got a letter saying their Child Disability Payment had stopped and they would no longer get payments unless they applied again. There were a lot of complaints about that. We now have a [working group] to agree a way forward when there's a big ticket issue like this. [Social Security Scotland] made calls to those clients to tell them they had to apply and if they didn't manage to submit the application before their 18th birthday then we would treat those applications as a priority because it was our fault." **Client Experience staff participant**

"Bank details and addresses have changed because the transfer of information from the Department for Work and Pensions has overwritten what's on our system with out of date information. It's a known issue but advisers aren't checking details before payments are issued [...]."

Client Experience staff participant

Measure 60: Qualitative evidence on client experience of the complaints and feedback process³⁶

Partner experiences of complaints

Some partner respondents had complained to Social Security Scotland about the mistakes and problems they experienced. Some complained in cases where applications had encountered problems or needed to be processed urgently. Comments said this was due to the lack of other ways to escalate issues. A few respondents had helped clients to raise complaints.

Some respondents said Social Security Scotland got back to them and acknowledged or resolved the issue. Others said Social Security Scotland had been inconsistent at responding to complaints and described instances where they received a response to some complaints but not others, or no response at all. A few comments described poor experiences with staff when trying to submit a complaint or dissatisfaction with the final outcome.

“I had complained regarding an issue with a client on my caseload. I received a call with an explanation and the issue was resolved.” **Partner respondent**

“I helped a client raise a complaint about the time delays in processing an Adult Disability Payment application and they contacted the client directly.” **Partner respondent**

“I raised a number of complaints for clients. Some I have had feedback, some not, it’s inconsistent.” **Partner respondent**

“Complaint submitted following failure to follow proper procedure regarding refusal decisions based on failed ID checks, failure to contact rep etc. No compensation offered and only a meagre apology. Social Security Scotland did say they would update their systems.” **Partner respondent**

³⁶ The original Framework had this listed as separate measures for feedback and complaints. These have been brought together into one box as research participants used both words to describe similar experiences.

Measure 60: Qualitative evidence on client experience of the complaints and feedback process (continued)

Partner experiences of feedback

Partner respondents had provided feedback online or directly to Social Security Scotland staff. Respondents said staff welcomed feedback and were engaged and responsive when given suggestions. Respondents felt that staff listened and took feedback on board. Stakeholder engagement activities - like Social Security Scotland-run meetings and events - made some respondents feel that the organisation was open to feedback.

“It was reassuring that I was listened to and responded to in a thoughtful and positive way.” **Partner respondent**

“I have found Social Security Scotland's engagement events informative and the staff presenting them helpful and open to suggestions for possible improvements in service delivery.” **Partner respondent**

Some partner respondents said staff hadn't acknowledged or welcomed feedback and it wasn't clear whether their feedback would be actioned. Other issues included: delays hearing back, not hearing back at all, or wanting to give feedback but not knowing how to do so. A few had received a response to their feedback in some instances but not others and felt this could be more consistent. Some said their feedback was taken on board but slow to be dealt with. There were calls for Social Security Scotland to work more closely and consistently with partners to gather unique client-focused insight to improve the service.

“I have fed back and received contact but would have liked a response to know if my feedback would be actioned.” **Partner respondent**

“Detailed queries about very pragmatic, operational matters regarding benefit administration do not feel welcomed and the responses from Social Security Scotland officers seem intended to close down enquiries rather than offer an open dialogue. This is quite a disappointing aspect of development as customer representatives have much to offer in terms of how improvements could be made to processes.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 60: Qualitative evidence on client experience of the complaints and feedback process (continued)

Staff perspectives on complaints

Client Experience staff participants said complaints were commonly about the time taken to process applications and receive a decision. Other common complaints were about:

- a lack of updates during the application process;
- receiving conflicting information or no information about the status of an application or change of circumstances when contacting via phone or webchat,
- not receiving promised call backs,
- and errors in communication as described in Measure 59.

Participants said some clients had complained where they disagreed with a decision rather than requesting a re-determination.

“Not being kept up to date with change of circumstances or applications. Clients are phoning to chase what’s happening [...]. Conflicting information that’s given. Clients are told one thing on one call and told something different two weeks later. And not receiving call backs [...]. Clients are promised several call backs but they’ve not got them so then they complain.”

Client Experience staff participant

“Clients want an update on calls or webchat and are being told we can’t give an update [...] staff are saying no we’re not checking your case, we’re not giving updates and that’s what the complaints are about. There’s just no communication.” **Client Experience staff participant**

Client Experience staff participants described how the complaints process had been working for clients in 2023-24. They said clients sometimes tried to complain over the phone or webchat but that their initial complaint wasn’t dealt with or logged by the client adviser they spoke to. This led clients to submit a further complaint in writing, usually via Social Security Scotland’s website. Participants felt this was a poor aspect of the service and said clients were often frustrated about having to submit more than one complaint.

Measure 60: Qualitative evidence on client experience of the complaints and feedback process (continued)

Participants felt the service could be improved if client advisers had more training and practical experience to confidently handle client queries and complaints. They also thought internal systems could be improved to make it easier for client advisers to find existing complaints records whilst talking to a client.

“Clients are saying this is the fourth or fifth time they’ve complained. They’ve maybe complained to an adviser on the phone but the adviser hasn’t realised it was a complaint and hasn’t logged it, or just hasn’t done anything about it. It’s quite common where an adviser doesn’t know what to do and it’s easier for them to tell them to email with the complaint so they’re being directed to our team.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“On webchat a client said they’d like to make a complaint about the application timescales but the adviser didn’t offer to take the complaint or give any advice, they just put the website straight in instead.” **Client Experience staff participant**

“It’s about not getting proper training to call handle. Client advisers are trained on a benefit but have no call handling experience. They’re telling the client to email the complaint to us because they don’t know what to do on the call. And someone else is hassling them to get back on the phone. Ideally you’d want the client adviser to say ‘give me all your details, I will go and have a look at it and get back to you’ [...]. Managers should be able to say ‘that person can’t be on inbound calls because they need to deal with this issue’ [...]. We are not investing the training in advisers for them to handle all that work. They’re the most important people in our business, those frontline people, they’re the face of our business and they leave the impression of our business with clients. We need to invest in training for those frontline advisers.”

Client Experience staff participant

Clients and organisations that work with them see Social Security Scotland as a trustworthy organisation

Measure 61: 61% of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland was an open organisation.

Table 64: Client Survey respondents' views on whether 'Social Security Scotland is an open organisation', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	71%	71%	70%
Best Start Grant	87%	85%	84%
Best Start Foods	87%	85%	86%
Funeral Support Payment	78%	78%	77%
Young Carer Grant	88%	86%	80%
Job Start Payment*	78%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	80%	79%	83%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	77%
Scottish Child Payment	87%	84%	85%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	77%	78%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	75%	85%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	72%	66%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	67%	71%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (87)

Measure 62: 68% of Client Survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Social Security Scotland was an honest organisation.

Table 65: Client Survey respondents' views on whether 'Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation', by benefit experience

All respondents with experience of each benefit; % who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', row percentages.

Benefit Experience	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Carer's Allowance Supplement	79%	75%	75%
Best Start Grant	89%	86%	84%
Best Start Foods	89%	85%	86%
Funeral Support Payment	83%	83%	81%
Young Carer Grant	88%	83%	84%
Job Start Payment*	76%	#	#
Child Winter Heating Payment	84%	83%	87%
Winter Heating Payment	n/a	n/a	78%
Scottish Child Payment	90%	86%	85%
Child Disability Payment applicant	n/a	82%	76%
Child Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	80%	85%
Adult Disability Payment applicant	n/a	76%	67%
Adult Disability Payment case transfer	n/a	71%	78%

* Number of respondents for 2021-22 fewer than 100 (95)

Measure 63: Organisations that support clients evidence on openness and honesty of Social Security Scotland

Partner respondents were asked if they thought Social Security Scotland was an open and honest organisation.

Table 66: Partner respondents' views on whether Social Security Scotland is an open organisation

Number of respondents: 2021-22 = 72; 2022-23 = 97; 2023-24 = 226; column percentages

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Strongly agree or agree	65%	51%	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	37%	31%
Disagree or strongly disagree	13%	4%	9%
Don't know	10%	8%	12%

Around half (48%) of partner respondents in 2022-23 said they agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is an open organisation, similar to last year. The proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed increased from 4% to 9%.

Table 67: Partner respondents' views on whether Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation

Number of respondents: 2021-22 = 72; 2022-23 = 97; 2023-24 = 226; column percentages

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Strongly agree or agree	60%	53%	49%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	33%	31%
Disagree or strongly disagree	7%	3%	6%
Don't know	11%	11%	14%

Similarly, around half (49%) partner respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland was an honest organisation. The proportion disagreeing increased from 3% to 6%.

Partners talked positively about Social Security Scotland's culture and client-focused approach to the delivery of the service. Some respondents felt that the organisation had tried to stick to its core values and to do the right thing for clients in spite of issues and challenges. Some felt that Social Security Scotland had been open and honest about the challenges faced.

Measure 63: Organisations that support clients evidence on openness and honesty of Social Security Scotland (continued)

Other positive comments described open and honest interactions with staff, including client advisers and staff at stakeholder events. Some respondents said Social Security Scotland talked about their communications with clients and the general public.

“As far as I know Social Security Scotland is doing a great job and attempting to be open and accessible.” **Partner respondent**

“It feels open and honest when you call.” **Partner respondent**

“They have been open and honest in all their dealings that I know of and are respected in our community.” **Partner respondent**

Some respondents felt Social Security Scotland had not delivered what was promised and hadn't been forthcoming or honest enough about problems, challenges or mistakes. Some felt the organisation tended to focus on what had gone well with less attention paid to acknowledging issues. In particular, comments said the organisation had not been clear, transparent or honest about the length of time needed to process applications for Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment. Some respondents were satisfied that Social Security Scotland had removed inaccurate information on processing times from the mygov.scot website, but were unhappy that there was no new indication of how long decisions could take.

“I wouldn't say dishonest but they don't mention any of the hiccups and again focus on what they think they have done well and try to brush away concerns without dealing with them.” **Partner respondent**

“Give people a clear indication of how long it will take for an [Adult Disability Payment] decision. They would rather have the truth than an underestimate no matter how bad it looks for [Social Security Scotland].” **Partner respondent**

Measure 63: Organisations that support clients evidence on openness and honesty of Social Security Scotland (continued)

“On mygov.scot there was, frankly, misleading information about the waiting times. There now appears to be no information at all on the website about how long the decisions take.” **Partner respondent**

Other respondents said internal processes and policies made them feel that Social Security Scotland wasn't an open organisation. Examples included: difficulties sharing or receiving information on a client's behalf due to issues with third party consent, and being unable to escalate individual cases involving vulnerable clients. These issues are covered in more detail in other relevant sections of the report.

“[Social Security Scotland] is not "open" in any shape or form, it is very much closed. Cannot access appropriate complaint process, cannot escalate individual cases [...].” **Partner respondent**

“I feel that the aim and ethos is to be open and honest with people, but this isn't always possible (operational restrictions etc) and so they can't be as open as they want to be.” **Partner respondent**

Measure 64: Examples of openness and honesty or otherwise (if applicable)³⁷

A few Client Survey respondents said that, when given incorrect information by Social Security Scotland staff, they felt this was not due to staff being dishonest and that errors were made “in good faith”.

“Staff were very helpful and took time however unable to help and I was given incorrect information, but this was not down to the advisors.” **Client Respondent**

“Very helpful staff. Advice given although flawed was given in good faith...”
Client Respondent

³⁷ Research with clients each year for the Charter Measurement Framework has found that the concepts of openness and honesty do not resonate with client participants. In 2022-23, interviews with clients found people had little to say when asked directly about it. This year, it was raised very seldomly in the written comments in the Client Survey. This measure does not appear in the new Charter Measurement Framework that will begin next year.

Social Security Scotland works well with other organisations

Measure 65: 39 service level agreements are in place with external partners.

There are 13 formal service level agreements in place with external partners. There are also 26 local delivery agreements in place with external partners for the use of spaces in local buildings as base locations by Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery staff.

Measure 66: Qualitative evidence from organisations that work with clients on partnership working

Partner respondents were asked about their experience of working with Social Security Scotland (Table 68).

Table 68: How much do you agree or disagree with the following: Social Security Scotland has worked well with me and my organisation
Number of respondents: 2021-22 = 72; 2022-23 = 63; 2023-24 = 109; column percentages

Response options	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Strongly agree	19%	19%	22%
Agree	45%	48%	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	24%	20%
Disagree	11%	5%	6%
Strongly disagree	8%	2%	8%
Don't know/not applicable	4%	3%	1%

Around two-thirds (64%) of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland had worked well with them and their organisation. A fifth (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and slightly fewer (15%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. This compares to a similar proportion of respondents in 2022-23 who agreed or strongly agreed (67%) or said 'neither' (24%). The proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed increased from 7% in 2022-23 to 14% in 2023-24.

Respondents were asked further questions about how well Social Security Scotland has worked at answering their queries and sharing information with them (Table 69).

Measure 66: Qualitative evidence from organisations that work with clients on partnership working (continued)

Table 69: Partner respondent views on how well Social Security Scotland has worked at sharing information and answering queries

Number of respondents = 109; Respondents who have worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland, Row percentages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know / Not applicable
Social Security Scotland has worked well at sharing information with me and my organisation	64%	16%	19%	1%
Social Security Scotland has worked well at answering queries from me and my organisation	50%	17%	30%	4%

This was the first year that the survey asked partner respondents about how Social Security Scotland had shared information and answered queries. Year-on-year trend analysis is therefore not available for these findings.

There were positive written comments about respondents' experiences of working in partnership with Social Security Scotland. In particular, they praised staff in the National Engagement and Local Delivery teams, saying they were 'proactive' when working with stakeholders and describing relationships as 'constructive'.

"There has been a shared experience of learning and openness to improving the experience of those using the service." **Partner respondent**

"Very responsive and proactive e.g. we organised a drop-in session on the day the Child Payment went live and were able to sign up dozens of our clients that day - this was done at the suggestion of our Social Security Scotland [Local Delivery] worker and was a very positive experience for all involved."

Partner respondent

Measure 66: Qualitative evidence from organisations that work with clients on partnership working (continued)

Although comments praised Social Security Scotland's overall approach to partnership working, there were calls for closer collaboration with partners who support clients. For example, there was frustration in comments at being unable to engage with Local Delivery staff on specific cases when supporting clients.

"[...] There should be better understanding of what third partner agencies do for clients and how Social Security Scotland can work together for the better of the client." **Partner respondent**

"Partnership newsletters/emails are good and hope they continue. I have attended several events with the National Engagement Team and at each event although it is specific to a certain topic there is a lot of time dedicated at the event to tell us the current state of play and progress of what Social Security Scotland have done to date. This is very time consuming and sometimes not relevant given that we have already taken time out of our diary to attend the sessions [...]." **Partner respondent**

"Would like more links with the regional face to face team. Love the engagement online training. Plenty of them [and] they are free - great for charities who support clients - and [they] take enough time to go over our queries."
Partner respondent

There were mixed comments about how Social Security Scotland had handled queries from partners.

"For the most part, easy to contact, engage with and explanations or answers are provided." **Partner respondent**

"Stakeholder events are filled with questions, and often left unanswered."
Partner respondent

Measure 66: Qualitative evidence from organisations that work with clients on partnership working (continued)

“Whilst I find Social Security Scotland generally helpful, unfortunately they haven't always been good at getting back to me with answers when they say they will.” **Partner respondent**

How is Social Security Scotland involving clients?

Clients are involved in all areas of Social Security Scotland

Measure 67: The original Charter Measurement Framework contained the following measure – “X percentage of learning packages delivered to staff are informed by clients.” This proved difficult to define and measure in a meaningful way.³⁸ Instead, the data below outlines the main training courses which are informed by clients and how many times they have been undertaken in the last two financial years

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide figures on the percentage of staff who have undertaken each training course. This is because the learning system does not track overall staff numbers.

For context, in March 2021, Social Security Scotland had 1,136 directly employed staff. By March 2022, there were 2,445, in March 2023 there were 4,027, and in March 2024 there were 3,955 (source: Social Security Scotland quarterly workforce publications).

Table 70 shows how many staff have undertaken each course in each year, and which staff it is relevant to. It only includes training linked to the central learning platform. Any courses undertaken separate from that are not counted centrally.

³⁸ The main reason for this was that client experiences are not relevant to a large proportion of training packages. For example, training on how to use systems, technical learning, or fire safety.

Table 70: Training informed by clients

Training Title	Available to	Number of staff completed, 2021-22 ³⁹	Number of staff completed, 2022-23	Number of staff completed, 2023-24	Details
Inclusive Communications	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff.	724	1280	223	Includes testimonies of people with lived experience using accessible communication tools and methods
Corporate Parenting	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff.	657	1531	1802	Includes quotes from people with lived experience
Social Model of Disability	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff working on disability benefits.	884	1507	91	Shaped by input and quality assurance from Glasgow Disability Alliance and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland.

³⁹ Please note, the table in the 2021-22 Charter Measurement Framework provided data on the number of times each course had been completed. This meant some duplicates were present in the data. This year, and in 2022-23, the figures are based on the number of staff completing each course, excluding duplicates. The figures for 2021-22 have also been updated in the table in line with this approach.

Scottish Child Payment Meeting our clients	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff delivering relevant benefits.	n/a - launched in July 2022	468	83	Designed with input from Child Poverty Action Group. Informed by a survey the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland shared with their users.
Meet the Client Adult Disability Payment	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff delivering relevant benefits.	425	42	271	Informed by a survey the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland shared with their users.
Meet the Families Child Disability Payment	All staff, and part of induction training for client facing staff delivering relevant benefits.	300	1076	29	Informed by a survey the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland shared with their users.

Measure 68: Qualitative evidence on client involvement in testing processes

The list below outlines testing undertaken with clients by user researchers in Social Security Scotland in 2023-24 for continuous improvement. It does not include testing undertaken by user researchers in the Scottish Government working on the design of benefits and parts of the service that have not yet been passed over to Social Security Scotland.

New letter design testing

Researchers tested a new letter format with clients. The changes included reducing the amount of information that appears in all letters and changes to the signatures. Researchers held interviews with Client Panel members to gather their feedback about the new format before the changes were finalised.

Text Message and email testing

We spoke with disability clients to test messages that would keep them up to date with the progress of their application. The research allowed Social Security Scotland to build in two stages where clients would be kept up to date. When first checks were done, and when a case manager was reviewing their application.

Icons testing

Researchers tested a range of icons with Client Panel members. Based on their feedback changes were made to some of the icons. The final icons can now be found on communication materials and are part of an icon library that is used across Social Security Scotland.

16–24-year-olds research

This research explored barriers and problems for Job Start Payment, Young Carer Grant and for young parents. It looked at awareness amongst the age group about benefits generally, and looked at how these clients want to be communicated with.

Easy Read Survey

Researchers conducted a survey with Client Panel members about their understanding of what Easy Read is. The results indicated that people are unclear what easy read involves. Including a description could clarify what Easy Read is for clients.

Funeral Support Payment testing

New questions were added to a test version of the Funeral Support Payment application, with some changes to help speed up the time taken to process applications. Following the testing, the changes were adopted.

Measure 69: Qualitative evidence on client involvement in measuring effectiveness

Clients are involved in measuring effectiveness in several ways. The main ones are the Client Survey and Client Panels research programme. In 2023-24, there were 394,337 invitations to the Client Survey across all benefits, and 36,914 clients took part. During the survey, clients are invited to join the Client Panels and take part in further research. By the end of 2023-24 we had over 11,800 Client Panel members. Social research conducted for Social Security Scotland is reported on the [Social Research section of our website](#).

The first Annual Client Panel Survey was sent to Client Panel members in November 2023 and we received 1,182 responses. The survey gathered insights from Client Panel members about their experience over the last 12 months. It focuses on aspects of client experience which typically happen after receiving a decision on an application or a payment. This included the experience of receiving recurring payments and communicating with Social Security Scotland about a change of circumstances. The aim of this research is to identify aspects of the client experience where things are working well, or could be improved. The survey will be repeated on an annual basis to feed into continuous improvement in Social Security Scotland.

The research team offers feedback surveys to all Client Panels participants after they take part in surveys and interviews. By the end of March 2024, there had been 171 responses to survey feedback surveys (no research interviews took place in this period so there were no interview feedback survey responses). Around half of these responses were from respondents who participated in Charter Review research and the other half did not identify which survey they were referring to in their feedback.

When asked what was good about the survey they completed, feedback included comments about the research being easy to take part in. Comments described the survey as easy to understand and complete, and not too long.

“It was easy to use and questions were straightforward enough and easy to understand.” **Client Panels participant**

“The questions & possible answers were easy to understand which allowed me to be able answer the questions truthfully & quickly even though there was no time limit.” **Client Panels participant**

Measure 69: Qualitative evidence on client involvement in measuring effectiveness (continued)

“Easy to complete (clear, simple to understand even for people who's English is a second language).” **Client Panels participant**

Survey feedback respondents also commented that they appreciated the opportunity to give feedback.

“Being able to give feedback and maybe make the process easier for people like myself” **Client Panels participant**

“I like to help with the surveys as it makes me feel I'm doing my bit to make sure we get this right (fair, with dignity, easy to manage, sensitive etc).”
Client Panels participant

“A great feeling of being included in the process and views being recorded to help improve the service.” **Client Panels participant**

Some comments included suggestions for improving surveys. Some respondents highlighted a functional issue with a ranking question where they could not select the number they wanted, while others found ranking questions difficult or susceptible to misinterpretation. Others suggested that more open text question should be included to capture additional insights not covered by the closed survey questions. Some made suggestions on the accessibility of the survey, such as including illustrations or audio options formats for written questions.

“Sometimes illustrations can be added to aid with the questions as not everyone can read and understand a specific question.” **Client Panels participant**

“Additional text boxes may be useful to give additional comments. For example, on the rate 1 to 7 questions I rated staff knowledge low because I felt this would be an ongoing training issue and not that staff interaction with clients wasn't important.” **Client Panels participant**

Measure 69: Qualitative evidence on client involvement in measuring effectiveness (continued)

“Ranking is difficult.” **Client Panels participant**

The research team will continue to survey participants directly after every survey and interview. There will also be a regular survey of all panel members on their overall experience.

A Better Future

Did we have effective processes of policy making?

Policy making shows the Social Security principles at work

All aspects of the design, development and delivery of the Scottish social security system adhere to Social Security Scotland's principles of dignity, fairness and respect. The information and examples within this report demonstrate our commitment to these principles.

Some key highlights from this reporting year include:

- The launch of Carer Support Payment in November 2023 with a phased rollout to local authorities and national availability from later this month. Carer Support Payment replaces the Department for Work and Pensions' Carer's Allowance. Carer Support Payment, unlike Carer's Allowance, is also available to carers aged 16-19 in full-time advanced education and carers aged over 20 in full-time education at any level.
- We introduced the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on 31 October 2023, which provides for a range of improvements to various devolved social security processes and policies based on the Social Security Principles enshrined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, focusing on delivering value for money and improving client experience.
- The Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 came into force in January 2024, to provide Social Security Scotland with a bespoke legal gateway to make referrals of concerns of risk of harm to relevant authorities, strengthening our commitment to the wellbeing and care of the people we work with. This provision included allowing concerns of financial or property abuse to be referred where a person has a Power of Attorney, Legal Guardian or appropriate order to the Office of the Public Guardian.
- We widened eligibility for Best Start Foods in February 2024 by removing the income thresholds for all qualifying benefits, so that thousands more families could access support.
- Social Security Scotland now delivers 14 devolved benefits, seven of which are new benefits not delivered elsewhere in the UK. Uprating for the upcoming reporting year took effect from April 2024 and was at least 6.7% for all Scottish benefits, which is in line with the increase made to comparable UK benefits.
- In line with the requirements of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 to review the Social Security Charter every five years, the revised Charter was approved by Parliament in June 2024. This has ensured the Charter is aligned with the views of stakeholders and keeps pace with the maturing social security system in Scotland.

- Client engagement has continued through our Client Panels. This gives people engaging with the Scottish social security system the opportunity to have a significant impact on how we shape and continue to deliver our benefits.

The following sections show how the Social Security Principles are delivered through policy work. The Scottish Government engages with stakeholders regularly and seeks feedback to help shape social security policy, legislation and systems. We share these annual reports with stakeholders and comments are used to inform the development of the Social Security system as well as the content of future reports.

Social Security fits well with other policies

Social Security is designed to support and progress the [Scottish National Outcomes](#) with particular focus on the outcome: “We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.” We have designed social security policies that address the greatest need, whether this is for disabled people, carers, families or households facing unexpected costs.

The [2023 – 2024 Programme for Government \(PfG\)](#) had a focus on equality, opportunity and community, and what steps to take to support a higher standard of living across the country. In particular, it laid out plans to invest £5.3 billion in Scottish Government benefits in 2023/24 to support over 1.2 million people, including an increase to the Scottish Child Payment from £25 to £26.70 per week, in line with inflation. This was rolled out in April 2024 and brought the total value of our Five Family Payments, which include the Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Foods, to over £10,000 by the time a family’s first child turns 6 and around £25,000 by the time an eligible child turns 16. This supports the wider Scottish Government commitment to tackling child poverty as laid out in the [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022 – 26](#).

The 14th benefit, Carer Support Payment, has been developed with carers and support organisations to work for the people that will use it. The benefit is available to many full-time students who are currently unable to get Carer’s Allowance, removing barriers to education and widening access to 1,500 more carers once the benefit is available nationally. Carer Support Payment has also been designed to signpost carers to wider services to help them to access all of the support they are entitled to in social security and beyond.

Policy making takes user experience into account

The Social Security Experience Panels were established in 2017 by the Scottish Government. Over the six years that the panels ran, more than 2,400 people with lived experience of the UK benefits system joined. Their participation in research ensured that lived experience was at the heart of designing the new Scottish social security system.

The Experience Panels formally closed at the end of March 2024 as the original purpose of the panels, to help design the devolved benefits, has been achieved.

During the final year of the Experience Panels, we have published reports on:

- Adult Disability Payment mobility component
- Pension Age Winter Heating Payment
- Employment Injury Assistance
- Carers with English as a second language

To mark the end of the Experience Panels we have conducted a review of their research impact, documenting how lived experience has contributed to decision making and other processes across areas of research, policy, and Social Security Scotland. We also conducted a feedback survey with panel members to understand their experiences and opinions of taking part in the panels. In addition, the review will present and reflect on learnings gained throughout the lifetime of the Experience Panels. The findings will be published in the Experience Panels legacy report in summer 2024.

All of our reports are available on the [Experience Panels publication page](#).

The Experience Panels were also part of the first review of the Social Security Scotland Charter. The review took place during 2023 and was facilitated by researchers and officials from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland, including the Experience Panels team. The review consisted of a series of five workshops with Social Security Scotland clients to identify any changes to the Charter that would be beneficial, as well as speaking with seldom heard groups, organisations representing those in receipt of benefits, and Social Security Scotland staff. The review resulted in an updated form of the Charter, and considered how the changes should be reflected in the Charter Measurement Framework. The findings can be found in the [Social Security Charter Review report](#).

While the Experience Panels have come to an end, engagement with people with lived experience will continue to be integral to the development of benefits and how they are delivered in Scotland. The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland will continue to listen to, and work with, thousands of people who have experience of the social security system through the Social Security Scotland Client Survey, Client Panels and User Research programme.

Policy making promotes all groups in society

Equality legislation covers the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. Accordingly, the Scottish Government conducts Equality Impact Assessments on all new benefit proposals and major policy and legislative changes.

In 2023-24, Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken to consider the potential effects of Best Start Foods, Carer Support Payment, Disability Assistance for Older People, and Information-sharing regulations, as well as the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

The evidence and data gathered from the Best Start Foods Equality Impact Assessment indicated that it should have a positive impact and allow more low-income families to benefit from this support, especially families with parents aged 19 and under due to widened eligibility criteria. No potentially negative impacts on any protected groups were found.

The Carer Support Payment Equality Impact Assessment identified an expected disproportionately positive impact on women and disabled people and did not identify any aspects of the final Carer Support Payment which would negatively impact on carers from protected groups, or to people in these groups who are cared for.

The Draft Disability Assistance for Older People Equality Impact Assessment found that the policy has a number of improvements on the existing process which could have a positive impact on people in Scotland with protected characteristics.

The Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 Equality Impact Assessment indicated these regulations may have a direct cross-cutting positive impact on all people regardless of their protected characteristics. Social Security Scotland supports some of the most vulnerable people in society and these regulations created structure to better safeguard people who interact with Social Security Scotland when a risk of harm is identified.

The Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill Equality Impact Assessment found that the Bill will have a positive impact on people who use the services provided by Social Security Scotland, irrespective of protected characteristics.

Public money is spent fairly

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring public money is spent fairly and goes directly to the people of Scotland who need it the most. The Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2023-24, which includes a social security [case study](#), highlights the consistent commitment of the Scottish Government to examine the

impact of the Scottish Budget on the diversity of Scotland's population. This approach supports our ambition for a fairer Scotland.

The statement provides an overview of the Equality and Fairer Scotland assessment of the budget and an overview of the impact of the budget on child poverty targets. It provides a clearer focus on the main cross-Portfolio challenges that are faced in relation to socio-economic equality, on the basis of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, and on the realisation of human rights and how these challenges are being addressed through our budget decisions.

The investment in social security is focused on the overarching aim of creating a fairer Scotland. We have continued to prioritise funding to support the development, design and implementation of our social security powers and delivery of benefits through Social Security Scotland. We are establishing a social security system that meets the needs of the people of Scotland and delivers a service that treats people with dignity, fairness and respect. Our investment in social security benefits expenditure for 2023-2024 was £5.2 billion; this investment is crucial in meeting our National Performance Framework outcomes such as tackling poverty.

These choices show social security is a priority for this government and we are proud of the increases in benefits expenditure. The investment being made by the Scottish Government to deliver Social Security benefits is an investment in the people of Scotland, demonstrating our national mission to eradicate child poverty, helping low-income families with their living costs and supporting disabled people to live full and independent lives. This includes new payments only available in Scotland such as our game-changing Scottish Child Payment, which has reached around 329,000 children; as well as Winter Heating Payment which was paid out to nearly 418,000 people in Winter 2023-24. We aim to create a fairer Scotland in a way that delivers value for money, which is enshrined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act and further underlined in Our Charter.

Did the Government promote social security positively?

Social Security is promoted as a human right

Scotland's devolved social security system is founded on the principle that social security is a human right and the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 established the first social security system in the UK which reflects the [United Nations](#) principle that social security systems should be established 'under domestic law to ensure that benefits are effectively administered and supervised'.

The right to social security dates back to the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights where Article 25 describes the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living and is

enshrined in a range of international treaties and domestic law. It is also closely linked with the right to an adequate standard of living as described under Article 11 of the International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights and other rights described by that treaty.

As set out by the UN, the right to social security encompasses the right to access and maintain benefits without discrimination in order to secure protection from:

1. a lack of work-related income caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member
2. unaffordable health care
3. insufficient family support, particularly for children and adult dependents

Social security plays an essential role in reducing and alleviating poverty, preventing social exclusion and promoting social inclusion.

Under the Social Security (Scotland) Act, the ability to access the support and assistance provided by an effective and efficient social security system is also recognised to be essential in ensuring that other human rights are properly respected, protected and fulfilled for every member of Scottish society.

The Scottish Government remains committed to implementing the Social Security principles in full. At Social Security Scotland people are welcomed and treated equally in a way that ensures their rights are upheld. Our new system is as accessible as possible by removing barriers for people, not putting them in their way. The system exists to fulfil human rights, not obstruct them.

An important feature of our new system is that it reduces the stigma traditionally associated with accessing assistance. We therefore support and encourage people to exercise their rights to the fullest possible extent. In fact, our approach recognises that, far from being ‘a burden’ on society, social security provision is an investment in the people of Scotland.

Specific benefits have been developed in ways that give direct effect to human rights and equality principles. The Scottish Child Payment directly addresses child poverty and is expected to have a positive impact on children’s rights as set out in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), including the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27) and to benefit from social security (Article 26). Scottish Government modelling estimates that the Scottish Child Payment will keep 60,000 children out of relative poverty this year.

A rights-based approach continues to inform activity across the Scottish Government and in Social Security Scotland, from policy development and service design to the day-to-day delivery of benefits and advice. The way Social Security Scotland staff

are recruited and trained, and the interaction between staff and the people who use the new service reflect that same ethos.

The Scottish Government has consistently called for key measures introduced in the Welfare Reform Acts (2012 and 2016) such as the two child limit and benefit cap to be repealed and continues to invest significantly in mitigating the impact of these measures. In the 2023-24 period, local authorities spent £84.9 million on Discretionary Housing Payments to Scottish households as part of the Scottish Government commitment to fully mitigate the Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap. In 2024-25, a further £90.5 million will be made available to local authorities.

Myth and stigma about social security is challenged

We recognise that stigma is a key barrier for many families and individuals accessing the support they are entitled to. A review of evidence from seldom heard groups at particular risk of being marginalised from the Scottish social security system found robust evidence that psychological barriers, including stigma and prejudice, are a barrier to people taking up their entitlement. A report from the Poverty Alliance in May 2024 on the delivery of a Citizen's Panel on the impacts of poverty related stigma on benefit take-up similarly evidenced that stigma around social security continues to create barriers to people accessing their entitlements. This evidence will help to inform future policy development to support the groups identified to take-up their social security entitlements.

There is evidence from across Scottish Government evaluation activity this year of a positive experience around the process of applying for benefits. For example, the Supporting Information evaluation found that clients felt the process of supplying supporting information was simple and straightforward, successful applicants felt that they were trusted by Social Security Scotland, and that the application process was less difficult and stressful than they had anticipated.

Scottish Government talks positively about social security and those who use it

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling poverty and inequality. A robust and accessible system of social security is a key component of managing this goal.

The Scottish Government encourages and supports those who are eligible for social security benefits to access them by actively marketing and advertising what benefits are available. Wider awareness and advertising of what benefits are available also challenges stigma around claiming benefits and reinforces the Scottish Government commitment to promote benefit uptake. This approach reinforces that the Scottish Government views social security and its clients positively.

Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service helps people access the benefits to which they are entitled by providing advice and support on benefit applications and eligibility. Local Delivery colleagues can visit people in their homes or in local outreach venues which, alongside online, telephone and paper options, ensures that the service is as accessible as possible and meets the needs of clients that want to use it. Giving people a range of options for accessing support reinforces the Scottish Government's positive and proactive approach to social security and those who use it.

The [Cost of Living Support Scotland](#) website signposts to both Scottish and UK benefits and includes a benefits calculator to aid people who may be unsure of what benefits, if any, they are eligible.

Did benefits make a difference?

Our benefits counteract poverty and improve participation in society

Income from social security is described as one of the three drivers of poverty reduction and this year's Tackling Child Poverty progress report summarises key statistics relating to the delivery of social security in 2023-24. This includes:

- As of 31 March 2024, around 329,000 children were in receipt of Scottish Child Payment, with £429 million issued to clients between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.
- Between April 2023 and March 2024, £35.1 million was paid to clients for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.
- As of 31 March 2024, it is estimated that 80,915 children and young people were in receipt of Child Disability Payment and £416 million in payments had been issued in 2023-24.
- As of 31 March 2024, 233,755 people were in receipt of Adult Disability Payment and £879 million in payments had been issued in 2023-24.
- As of 31 March 2024, a total of 30,400 Child Winter Heating Payments had been issued for Winter 2023-24 with a total value of £7.2 million.
- As of 31 March 2024, a total of 417,885 Winter Heating Payments had been issued in Winter 2023-24, with a total value of £23 million.
- In 2023-24, over 175,000 Carer's Allowance Supplement payments were made, an investment of over £47.8 million supporting over 96,000 carers.

Take-up and access to social security is critical in our efforts to tackle poverty. Evidence across our evaluations helps us to understand how households are being supported to access the benefits they are entitled to.

The Scottish Child Payment has had a number of positive impacts for children and families. It has led to more money being spent on children and was found to enable them to participate in social and educational opportunities. Clients also indicated that Scottish Child Payment has helped to reduce financial pressure on households. People who use payments for essential household items such as food or bills feel its impact keenly, and say they depend on the money to avoid getting into debt.

Benefit levels reviewed and updated in line with inflation

The Scottish Government reviews benefit levels and the impact of inflation in each financial year. A [report](#) was published in January 2024 in fulfilment of the duties under section 86A of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.

Scottish Ministers agreed to uprate all forms of carer's assistance, disability assistance, employment injury assistance, funeral expense assistance and Scottish Child Payment by 6.7%, using the annual rate of Consumer Prices Index (CPI) in September 2023. All other devolved benefits, where up-rating is at the discretion of Ministers, were also up-rated by 6.7%.

Industrial Death Benefit, which is delivered by the DWP on behalf of Scottish Ministers, was increased by 8.5% in line with the growth in Average Weekly Earnings in the year from May-July 2023. The earnings limit for Carer Support Payment was also increased by 8.5% in line with the growth in Average Weekly Earnings in the year to May-July 2023, aligning with the increase of the earnings limit for Carer's Allowance.

Fairer rules are designed and new benefits created

The Scottish Government is making social security fairer where we can. For example, our 14th benefit, the Carer Support Payment, was launched in November 2023 and will gradually replace Carer's Allowance in Scotland through a case transfer process, with national availability from November 2024. It has been designed to deliver a service that works for carers and a number of improvements have been made from launch, including:

- extending entitlement to many carers studying full-time, helping remove barriers to education
- improving join up with wider support and services, initially using signposting information in Carer Support Payment to help carers find out about wider benefits they may be entitled to, as well as the incredibly valuable support provided by carers centres across the country
- reducing the 'past presence test' in line with other devolved benefits so some carers can receive support more quickly after moving to Scotland, and reducing

the education restriction by extending eligibility to 16- to 19-year-olds in full-time non-advanced education with exceptional circumstances

We introduced the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on 31 October 2023. It will improve the experience of people using Scotland's social security system and ensure that it continues to deliver value for money. In particular, it will introduce new rights for people, save money by increasing efficiency, improve the scrutiny of social security, and take powers to improve existing benefits. The Bill includes a number of different provisions, including the ability to create regulations for childhood assistance.

In February 2024 we widened eligibility for Best Start Foods by removing the income thresholds for all qualifying benefits, so that thousands more pregnant people and children can access support to buy milk and healthy food. This aligns eligibility more closely with Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment. Between launching on 12 August 2019 and the end of this reporting year on 31 March 2024, more than 174,000 applications had been authorised for Best Start Foods. In total, over £53 million has been provided to eligible families.

In April 2024, the Scottish Child Payment, which is unique to Scotland, was increased to £26.70 per week. We are prioritising lifting children out of poverty and payments are calculated from the day someone applies if they are eligible for the benefit.

Looking forward, we will continue to devolve social security and introduce more benefits to provide crucial support to people in Scotland. Pension Age Disability Payment replaces Attendance Allowance for people over the State Pension age. This payment provides assistance to help mitigate additional care costs incurred by being disabled or having a long term health condition. Pension Age Winter Heating Payment, our replacement for Winter Fuel Payment, will be delivered in Scotland this Winter by the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of the Scottish Government. The UK Government's decision to restrict entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment to those in receipt of relevant benefits, which was taken without due consultation or discussion with the Scottish Government, has resulted in a significant reduction in the funding we expected to receive to deliver a universal Pension Age Winter Heating Payment this winter. Following careful consideration, Scottish Ministers have had to make the difficult decision to mirror the UK Government's approach. The timing of the UK Government announcement has meant it is not practicable for the Scottish Government to deliver Pension Age Winter Heating Payment in winter 2024/25 through Social Security Scotland. It will be delivered through Social Security Scotland from Winter 2025. In March 2024 we announced Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance (Scottish Adult DLA), this will replace Disability Living Allowance for adults in Scotland. We expect to introduce Scottish Adult DLA and begin case transfer in Spring 2025.

Take-up improved

Ensuring that people can access all of the social security benefits to which they are entitled is a moral imperative, legal duty, and fundamental priority of the Scottish Government.

Under the provisions of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, Scottish Ministers are required to prepare a Benefit Take-up Strategy to promote the take-up of Scottish benefits and have so far published two such strategies – [the first](#) in October 2019, and [the second](#) in October 2021.

The next Benefit Take-up Strategy is due to be published by October 2026. In the meantime, Scottish Ministers have committed to publishing an action-plan setting out our approach to supporting seldom-heard groups to access their entitlements and will continue to publish the annual update on take-up rates for Scottish benefits.

The [most recent estimates](#) of Scottish benefit take-up rates, published in November 2023, estimate that overall take-up rates are high and relatively stable across the Five Family Payments, including Scottish Child Payment. These rates suggest the vast majority of eligible low-income families in, or at risk of poverty, are taking-up these entitlements. However, we know more work is required to ensure this is replicated across all devolved payments, and we continue to work with the Scottish Government, wider stakeholders, and people with lived experience to identify, develop, and implement improvements.

Our current Benefit Take-up Strategy sets out five guiding principles for making social security in Scotland accessible:

1. Prioritise Person-Centred Approaches
2. Communicate and Engage Effectively
3. Bring Services to People
4. Encourage Cross-System Collaboration
5. Continuously Learn and Improve

These principles are applied through a number of take-up initiatives, including access to independent advocacy support, continued investment in accessible advice via Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships, and targeted marketing of devolved payments. Perhaps most importantly, the principles form the basis for social security policy development and delivery, ensuring we prioritise person-centred approaches.

The Scottish Government has committed to investing over £4.6 million to support the delivery of welfare advice and income maximisation services in 2024-25. This includes more than £645,000 to continue to support the local delivery of Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships, which see Welfare Rights Advisors placed into over

160 GP practices across Scotland. Partnerships are targeted in the most deprived communities, as well as remote, rural and island settings, and this embedded model continues to highlight the value in bringing advice to people in non-stigmatising settings where they already go, with 89% of all users accessing welfare rights advice for the first time.

Furthermore, the Independent Social Security Advocacy Service – delivered by VoiceAbility on behalf of Scottish Ministers since its launch in January 2022 – has so far supported more than 5,000 disabled people to engage with the Scottish social security system. This free and independent service means that more disabled people in Scotland can access and meaningfully engage in the processes and decisions which affect them.

Annex A: Data Sources

Data Source	Description	Links	Frequency
Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on applications and payments for Best Start Grant from 10 December 2018 and on applications and payments for Best Start Foods from 12 August 2019.	Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods Statistics	Quarterly
Funeral Support Payment Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Funeral Support Payments, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed and authorised, as well as the value of payments made from 16 September 2019.	Funeral Support Payment statistics	Quarterly
Young Carer Grant Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Young Carer Grant, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed, and authorised, as well as the value of payments made.	Young Carer Grant statistics	Quarterly
Job Start Payment Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Job Start Payments, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed and authorised, as well as the value of payments made from 17 August 2020.	Job Start Payment statistics	Quarterly
Scottish Child Payment Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Scottish Child Payment, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed, and authorised, as well as the value of payments made from 9 November 2020.	Scottish Child Payment statistics	Quarterly

Data Source	Description	Links	Frequency
Child Disability Payment Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Child Disability Payment, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed, and authorised, as well as the value of payments made from 26 July 2021.	Child Disability Payment Official Statistics	Quarterly
Adult Disability Payment Official Statistics	This publication series provides information on Adult Disability Payment, including statistics on the number of applications received, processed, and authorised, as well as the value of payments made from 21 March 2022.	Adult Disability Payment Official Statistics	Quarterly
Social Security Scotland Workforce Information Official Statistics	This publication series provides a quarterly snapshot of the workforce, taken at the end of each of quarter, based on information recorded in the HR system. The statistics show: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of directly employed staff by category • numbers of non-directly employed workers by category • staff sickness absence • staff diversity information location information	Social Security Scotland – Workforce Information: June 2024	Quarterly
Social Security Scotland Client Survey	This is a survey of everyone who has applied for (and reached decision stage) or received a Social Security Scotland benefit. It asks about overall experiences with Social Security Scotland and specifically addresses many of the measures in this framework.	Social Security Scotland - Client Survey 2023-2024 Earlier publications at: Social Security Scotland - Social Research	Annual

Data Source	Description	Links	Frequency
Telephony and Webchat management information	This management information release reports on telephony and webchat contacts across the reporting year, including information on the number of telephony or webchat contacts, wait times and handling times	<p>Statistics to March 2024: Telephony and Webchat management information - Statistics to March 2024</p> <p>Please note that an amended version of the pdf document was uploaded on the 27th August 2024 to correct minor errors in some benefit names referenced and the total number of webchats handled. The figures contained in the Excel tables were not affected and remain correct.</p>	Annual
People Survey	Social Security Scotland take part in the Civil Service People Survey which is a standardised annual survey of all staff members across Civil Service departments in the UK, which takes place in the Autumn.	<p>More information on the People Survey can be found at: Scottish Government People Survey</p> <p>Data for 2023 is at: Civil Service People Survey 2023 - Results Highlights</p> <p>Data for 2022 is at: Civil Service People Survey: 2022 results</p> <p>Data for 2021 is at: Civil Service People Survey: 2021 results.</p> <p>Data for 2020 is at: Civil Service People Survey: 2020 results</p>	Annual
Charter Research	Research with clients, staff and partner organisations, to inform the 'examples of' measures in the framework.	<p>Most Recent Publication 2023-2024: Social Security Scotland - Charter Research 2023-2024</p> <p>Earlier publications at:</p>	Annual

Data Source	Description	Links	Frequency
		Social Security Scotland - Social Research	
Annual Client Panel Survey 2023	Annual survey of Social Security Scotland Client Panel members. Gathers insights on client experiences which (usually) happen after receiving a decision, e.g. experiences of receiving recurring payments, reporting a change of circumstances.	Social Security Scotland - Annual Client Panel Survey 2023	Annual



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