



Social Security
Scotland

Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2024-2025



Exploring this research

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1. Findings at a glance

Social Security Scotland staff and partners were surveyed on their experiences in 2024-25. Experiences were similar to previous years on the whole. Staff findings showed some positive annual trends, although some aspects of partner experiences showed decline over time, particularly on working in partnership with Social Security Scotland.

Almost half (46%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good. Some said clients continued to be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. Others thought the organisation's values didn't match up to its performance in practice. Around two-fifths said Social Security Scotland had been open (40%) and honest (42%) about its policies and processes, but others wanted more transparency about how decisions are made.

Around a fifth (19%) of partner respondents who support clients said it was easy or very easy to contact Social Security Scotland for clients. Some had no issues and a couple felt call waiting times had recently improved. Others experienced long waits, technical problems, and difficulty communicating as a third party. Around two-fifths (43%) rated their experience with staff as good or very good. Some said staff were helpful and well-informed. Others said staff knowledge, manner, and helpfulness varied. They suggested better training on third party consent, benefit entitlement, and client needs.

Three in ten (30%) client-facing partner respondents said the application process was easy or very easy. Some said applications for disability benefits were straightforward, but others said they were long and noted the emotional toll for clients. Some had supported clients with an Adult Disability Payment consultation and were positive about this process but wanted more guidance for clients about what to expect.

Most staff respondents (80%) had good or very good support from their line manager. Most (85%) felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job. Training, guidance, and support from managers had helped them feel confident. Those who weren't confident mentioned issues with guidance and limited development time.

Over half (58%) of staff respondents found it easy to deliver a service with inclusive communication. Whilst respondents were committed to communicating inclusively, challenges included: problems with interpretation and translation; inadequate training and guidance; and gaps in processes for clients who communicate differently.

Less than a quarter (22%) of partner respondents had complained about issues or mistakes. Respondents said some complaints had been addressed smoothly and quickly but others had taken a long time, with some not hearing back at all.

Some staff and partner respondents said Social Security Scotland welcomed and acted on feedback. Others said feedback wasn't listened to or actioned, or that action was slow. Some partner respondents thought Social Security Scotland would benefit from more collaboration with partners who can share expertise and feedback on client needs.

2. Executive summary

This report presents the findings from annual research with Social Security Scotland staff and partners. The research asked respondents how Social Security Scotland performed in 2024-25. It was designed to provide data for the 2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework. The Charter Measurement Framework is a co-designed list of measures. It shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are getting on with delivering the commitments in Our Charter.

Both the Charter and Charter Measurement Framework were recently reviewed. This is the first year that this research has provided data for the revised Charter Measurement Framework.

The research was carried out between March and June 2025. It involved a survey completed by 999 staff (23% response rate) and a survey completed by 196 partners.

The sections below provide the headline findings from each theme of the research. Findings were similar to previous years on the whole for both staff and partners. Staff findings showed some positive annual trends, specifically around staff confidence in their knowledge and skills. Where there are notable changes in staff findings across reporting years, these are described in this summary.

Findings from the partner survey cannot be directly compared across reporting years as the survey likely reaches a different group of respondents each year due to the way it is distributed. It can, however, be noted that partner sentiment has been relatively similar across reporting years although some aspects of partner satisfaction have declined over time, particularly around working in partnership with Social Security Scotland.

Findings from this report appear in the relevant sections of the [2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

A People's Service: Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland as an organisation

Almost half (46%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good. Around two-fifths said that Social Security Scotland is open (40%) and honest (42%). Partner respondents were positive about Social Security Scotland's values and said clients continued to be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. Some felt Social Security Scotland had been transparent about policies and processes. Others thought the organisation's values didn't match up to its performance in practice and wanted more transparency about decision-making processes.

Around a quarter of partner respondents had worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland in 2024-25. Of those, around five in ten agreed that Social Security Scotland had worked well with them and their organisation, and had answered their queries effectively. Around six in ten said Social Security Scotland had shared relevant, timely information with them.

Partner respondents praised the staff they worked in partnership with, particularly Local Delivery colleagues, saying they were knowledgeable and reliable. Some felt the quality of partnership working had decreased over time and that Social Security Scotland's engagement with partners had become less frequent and in-depth. Suggestions to improve included more collaboration with partners who have expertise in supporting clients and named members of staff to contact for partnership matters.

Processes that Work: Partner experiences of using the service on behalf of clients

Most (93%) partner respondents said they work with clients or potential clients of Social Security Scotland. These respondents were asked about their experience of supporting clients to use the service, including getting in touch with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients and helping them to apply. Almost all (97%) had supported clients with Adult Disability Payment although many had helped clients with more than one benefit.

Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland

Around a fifth (19%) of partner respondents who support clients said it was easy or very easy to make contact with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients. Two-thirds (66%) found it difficult or very difficult. Some respondents had no issues contacting Social Security Scotland using either phone or webchat. Some praised the availability of webchat as an alternative to phone and a couple felt call waiting times had recently improved. Others experienced difficulty contacting Social Security Scotland. Common issues included: long call waiting times; being disconnected whilst in a queue or on a call; not receiving call backs where promised; and problems with language interpretation, third party consent, and security questions. Suggestions for improvement included: a dedicated partner phone line or email service; a specific team of named staff to help partners with client queries; and smoother processes for third party consent.

Experiences with staff

Around two-fifths (43%) of partner respondents who support clients rated their experience of speaking to staff on behalf of clients as good or very good. Some respondents praised staff saying they were helpful, supportive and well-informed. Some said their experience with staff was a positive aspect of contacting Social Security Scotland. Others said knowledge varied across staff, with some advisers providing incorrect or conflicting information, and were frustrated when staff didn't have the right knowledge to answer their query. Some said staff manner also varied depending on who they spoke to, with a few describing poor experiences where staff were unhelpful and unprofessional. Respondents felt staff would benefit from better training on topics like third party consent, benefit entitlement, and understanding client needs.

Applications

Three in ten (30%) partner respondents who support clients said it was easy or very easy to go through the application process with or for clients. Nearly four in ten (39%) said it was difficult or very difficult. Most comments were about applications for disability payments. Positive comments said disability payment applications were straightforward to complete and questions were clear. Some said online applications

were quicker, easier, and more user-friendly than paper forms on the whole. Other comments said applications were time-consuming to complete and highlighted the emotional toll for clients repeatedly going over their condition in detail. Suggestions included shorter versions of paper forms for partners to use with clients; larger text boxes on paper forms; and changes to routing in the online form to allow clients to better explain their disability or health condition in detail.

Consultations for Adult Disability Payment

Just under half of partner respondents who work with clients said they had supported clients with a consultation for Adult Disability Payment in 2024-25. Of those, around three in ten agreed that Social Security Scotland prioritised client wellbeing during the consultation process and a similar proportion disagreed. Positive comments said consultations were easy and straightforward and that Social Security Scotland's health and social care practitioners were polite, supportive, and focused on client wellbeing. Other comments mentioned not trusting practitioners or the consultation process, with a couple of examples of poor experiences. Some felt consultations had been stressful or inappropriate for the clients they support, whereas others felt they should be offered to clients more widely. There were calls for clients to receive more guidance about what to expect during the consultation.

Accessibility of Social Security Scotland's service

Partner respondents who support clients were asked to score the accessibility of Social Security Scotland's service from 0 (not at all accessible) to 10 (very accessible). Over half (55%) gave a medium score between 4 and 7. A fifth (20%) gave a high score between 8 and 10 and around a quarter (24%) gave a low score between 0 and 3. Some respondents described positive examples of accessibility including: a choice of ways for clients to contact Social Security Scotland and apply for benefits; the ability to save progress on online forms; the availability of the Local Delivery service; and the option to ask for communication in another language. Some said Social Security Scotland made information accessible for clients by offering letters in large print and easy read and providing clear, straightforward information online.

Other respondents said the service was accessible for most clients but not all. Many mentioned examples of digital exclusion for clients without access to online information or digital skills. A few described clients who didn't have access to either phone or internet and were excluded from communicating with Social Security Scotland altogether. Other negative examples included issues with security questions and identification and problems with interpretation processes. Many comments mentioned call and webchat waiting times as a barrier to clients accessing the service. Suggestions included better promotion of the support offered by Social Security Scotland to help clients access the service (such as help from Local Delivery) and more opportunities for clients to communicate by email, video call, or face to face.

Working for Social Security Scotland: Staff experiences

Delivering a service without discrimination

Most (92%) staff respondents felt confident or very confident to deliver a service without discriminating against others. Just under one in ten (8%) didn't feel confident. Many staff respondents said empathy and fairness were core aspects of their personal values and felt strongly about applying this in their role. Some said the organisation's principles of dignity, fairness and respect and a team culture of equality and inclusion had helped them to do their job without discriminating. Others felt confident thanks to: professional experience; guidance and training; and having person-centred internal policies, processes and tools to meet clients' needs. Those who lacked confidence said this was due to practical constraints, high workloads, and problems with internal processes, policies and systems in practice. There was concern that some clients and staff had been treated unfairly as a result, with a few noting discriminatory behaviour among colleagues. Suggestions included: improving processes for vulnerable client groups, better language translation, and for equality and diversity to be embedded more consistently across the organisation.

Knowledge and skills

Most (85%) staff respondents said they felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job.

Staff who interact with clients as part of their job, or will in future, were asked additional questions about their knowledge. Most (82%) knew about support services for clients and around six in ten (65%) knew how to refer clients to the independent advocacy service (delivered by VoiceAbility). Around three-quarters (76%) felt knowledgeable about re-determinations and over half were knowledgeable about appeals (56%). A higher proportion of respondents felt knowledgeable about re-determinations and appeals in 2024-25 compared to 2022-23 (70% and 51%) and 2023-24 (53% and 40%).

Staff respondents who felt confident said this was due to: learning and experience in their current role; professional and personal experience prior to joining the organisation; peer learning and self-directed development; and support from colleagues and managers. Some said internal guidance and training had enabled them to do their job with confidence. Those who didn't feel confident mentioned: being new to their role; a lack of support from managers or colleagues; unclear direction from senior managers; issues with training; limited time for development due to high workloads; and unreliable or frequently changing internal guidance, processes, and systems. Some felt there was always more to learn in order to keep up with the changing nature of the job and service. There were calls for more training on topics like: accessibility; how to support colleagues inclusively; internal systems and technology; and specific aspects of the service like re-determinations and appeals. Some wanted more training about Social Security Scotland's organisational structure and the roles of different departments.

Support for staff

Most (80%) staff respondents rated support from their line manager as good or very good. Positive comments said line managers were supportive, approachable, and understanding of both work and personal issues. Some respondents said line managers were always available to help and offered frequent, good quality communication. Having the right level of autonomy in their role had made respondents feel empowered at work and confident to provide feedback and ideas. There were positive examples where line managers had supported respondents with professional development and applying for promotions. Respondents who didn't feel supported mentioned: poor communication; feeling micromanaged; unreasonable workloads; additional needs not being met; a lack of feedback or support with development; and line managers not having sufficient training, knowledge or experience to help with project- or HR-related issues. Many felt line managers were trying their best but were let down by high workloads, poor communication from more senior colleagues, and problems with internal procedures. Some mentioned bullying, unfair treatment and exclusionary behaviours by managers.

Inclusive communication

Over half (58%) of staff respondents said it was easy or very easy to deliver a service based on inclusive communication. Some respondents said they were committed to communicating inclusively, either as part of their personal values or as an integral part of their job role. Challenges to delivering a service based on inclusive communication included: the absence of email communication for clients; inadequate training and guidance on accessibility; and gaps in internal processes for clients who communicate differently. Some said translation and interpretation processes were good, but others described problems with interpreters, long waits for translations, and limited training or knowledge of these processes.

Around three-quarters (73%) of staff respondents found it easy or very easy to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs. A lower proportion of respondents found this easy or very easy in 2024-25 and 2023-24 (74%) compared to 2022-23 (80%). Respondents were positive about support received from managers and colleagues to meet their individual needs, such as adjustments to the office environment. Where support was lacking, issues included specific needs not being met and problems with accessibility software. Email and Microsoft Teams were highlighted as effective channels for communicating with colleagues. However, some described difficulties communicating with colleagues including: the use of acronyms and jargon; being asked not to talk in the office; and challenges around hybrid working.

A Learning System

Partner experiences of giving feedback

Around a third (36%) of partner respondents thought Social Security Scotland is open to feedback. Around one in ten (14%) thought Social Security Scotland acts on feedback. Roughly a third (35%) of partner respondents had given feedback. About a fifth (21%) said they wanted to give feedback but didn't know how.

In written comments, some respondents felt Social Security Scotland had a genuine aim to improve the service. Some felt that improvement was embedded in Social Security Scotland's values and highlighted that the organisation was obliged to take feedback as an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Others were less satisfied with Social Security Scotland's approach to feedback, feeling that suggestions weren't welcomed, listened to, or actioned. There were calls for a greater focus on actively inviting partner feedback and insights, particularly at meetings and events.

Of the respondents who had provided feedback, some described positive experiences and said they felt listened to. A few said Social Security Scotland acted on their suggestions. Some of these respondents hadn't heard back from Social Security Scotland about their feedback but didn't mind this. Others were dissatisfied with their experience of providing feedback. Issues included: feeling that suggestions were dismissed, ignored or not acted on; long delays in hearing back about a suggestion; and not hearing back at all. There were calls for Social Security Scotland to communicate more clearly and publicly about whether feedback had been actioned and, if not, the reasons for delays or lack of change.

Staff experiences of giving feedback

Most (79%) staff respondents said they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong in Social Security Scotland. A lower proportion of respondents agreed with this in 2024-25 and 2023-24 (80%) compared to 2022-23 (86%). Many respondents felt a responsibility to raise issues and provide feedback to improve Social Security Scotland as a workplace and public service. Some said continuous improvement was part of their role and felt confident on this basis. Some felt strongly about challenging poor behaviours and attitudes, including bullying and discrimination. A number of respondents felt supported and safe to raise issues and felt that feedback was taken seriously and often led to change.

Other respondents described mixed or negative experiences of speaking up. Issues included: concerns not being welcomed, listened to, or actioned; not hearing back about feedback; suggestions being delayed in a backlog; and not feeling safe or supported to speak up. Some were worried about how feedback would be received. Several had experienced negative reactions after raising concerns. Some believed there was no point in speaking up as they felt staff feedback didn't lead to change.

Improvements based on feedback

In the staff survey, some respondents mentioned examples where feedback had led to improvements in Social Security Scotland. Examples were often about improvements to internal processes and guidance which made it easier for staff to do their jobs. There were also changes to ways of working in certain business areas such as restructuring teams, better communication, improved HR procedures, and different approaches to the way cases are handled and processed. Other examples were to do with improving Social Security Scotland's service for clients including clearer letters, more effective telephony, and improvements to application forms and payment processes.

Experiences of things going wrong

Some partner respondents described things that went wrong during their experience with Social Security Scotland. Examples were commonly about problems or mistakes with communication and information. This included not hearing back about queries; specific communication instructions for vulnerable clients not being followed; mistakes with translated letters; and receiving incorrect, conflicting or misleading information from staff.

Other problems were about policies, processes, and systems, most of which were to do with applications and decisions. There were problems with forms going missing as well as written errors in decision letters and inconsistent decisions where it was evident that supporting information had not been fully considered. There were also examples where processes for terminally ill clients had gone wrong, including insensitive staff interactions and delayed decisions.

A few respondents said Social Security Scotland had admitted when they made mistakes, although some felt this hadn't always led to direct changes or improvements. Some respondents reported problems to staff and said issues were resolved, but others felt staff hadn't understood the problem or situation. Many expressed frustration with the lack of escalation route. However, some were positive about Social Security Scotland's recent escalation pilot and hoped this would be implemented more widely.

Experiences of making complaints

Around a quarter (22%) of partner respondents complained to Social Security Scotland in 2024-25. Of those, around three in ten agreed they were satisfied with how Social Security Scotland resolved their complaint, whilst around five in ten disagreed with this.

In written comments, some respondents said Social Security Scotland had worked well at handling complaints. They said the complaints process was simple and that complaints were often resolved quickly. Some received a prompt response and said Social Security Scotland kept them updated on the progress of their complaint.

Others were dissatisfied with the complaints process. Issues were commonly to do with communication including: delays hearing back about the complaint; not hearing back at all; and not being included in communication to do with complaints from vulnerable clients. Respondents said some complaints had been addressed smoothly and quickly but others had taken a long time to resolve. Other problems were about: complaint forms being lost, feeling that Social Security Scotland did not welcome complaints, and dissatisfaction with the final outcome of a complaint.

Next steps

Findings appear in the relevant sections of the [2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework](#). They will be shared across Social Security Scotland to inform continuous improvement activities. Research will shortly begin for the 2025-26 Charter Measurement Framework.

3. Introduction

This report presents the findings from research with Social Security Scotland staff and partner organisations about how Social Security Scotland performed in 2024-25. The research was designed to provide data for a range of measures in the 2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework.

3.1 The Charter Measurement Framework

The Charter Measurement Framework is a co-designed list of measures relating to the commitments set out in [Our Charter](#). Our Charter was originally co-designed in 2018, and again when it was [reviewed in 2024](#). This means that the Scottish Government worked with Social Security Scotland and people with lived experience of the social security system to develop the Charter. The Scottish Commission on Social Security and groups who represent people with lived experience (partner organisations) were also involved. The original Charter Measurement Framework was similarly co-designed in 2019, as was the [revised Charter Measurement Framework](#) in 2024. This is the first year that this research has provided data for the revised Charter Measurement Framework.

The Charter Measurement Framework has two purposes. First, it publicly demonstrates how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are delivering the commitments in Our Charter. Second, it helps Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government to improve.

The framework contains a list of measures that focus on how Social Security Scotland's services are working. Measures that ask for 'examples' of staff and partner experiences were used to develop questions for this research.

The Charter Measurement Framework is published annually alongside Social Security Scotland's Annual Report and Accounts. Findings from this report appear in relevant sections of the [2024-25 Charter Measurement Framework](#).

3.2 Research methods

The research was carried out between March and June 2025.

All staff in Social Security Scotland were invited to complete a survey which ran in March and April 2025. The survey asked staff about their experience of working for Social Security Scotland during 2024-25. 999 staff took part, a response rate of approximately 23%. This was slightly lower than the Charter Research staff surveys carried out in 2022-23 and 2023-24, both of which had a 36% response rate. Respondents to the staff survey are called 'staff respondents' in this report.

A survey was also sent to a range of partner organisations. Partners (also known as 'stakeholders') are people who, as part of their job, support clients to use Social Security Scotland's services or collaborate with Social Security Scotland to inform how the service is delivered. The survey asked partners about their experiences with Social Security Scotland in 2024-25, including how they think the service is working and what could improve. The survey was sent directly to Social Security Scotland's stakeholder

mailing list. It was also promoted in Social Security Scotland's stakeholder newsletter and on the organisation's social media channels. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with other relevant partners in order to reach as many people as possible.

The partner survey ran in May and June 2025 and received 196 responses. For context, the partner surveys carried out in 2022-23 and 2023-24 received 101 and 229 responses respectively. Due to the way in which the survey is distributed each year, it is not possible to determine a response rate for current or previous reporting years. Respondents to the partner survey are called 'partner respondents' in this report.

3.3 About the participants

Most (81%) staff survey respondents worked full time. Around two in ten (22%) respondents were A-Band staff, roughly six in ten (63%) were B-band, and 8% were C-band or above.¹ Around four in ten (41%) said they interact with Social Security Scotland clients as part of their job, or would do so in future, whilst around six in ten (59%) said client interaction is not part of their role. Around six in ten (58%) respondents were women and around three in ten (31%) were men. Around four in ten (43%) were aged 45 or over. Most (89%) were white. Around three in ten (33%) said they had a long-term health problem or disability. Full tables of staff survey respondents' characteristics are at Annex C.

The partner survey asked respondents how they had engaged with Social Security Scotland. Three-quarters (75%) said they support clients or potential clients of Social Security Scotland (for example with applications and finding information). Around one in ten (7%) said they work in partnership with Social Security Scotland on behalf of their organisation (for example as part of Social Security Scotland's Operational Reference Group or attending online or in-person events). Around a fifth (18%) said they both support clients and work in partnership with Social Security Scotland. Full figures of partner respondents' engagement with Social Security Scotland are at Annex B (Table B1).

Partner respondents were asked further questions about the specific ways they had engaged with Social Security Scotland, either when supporting clients or working in partnership. Six in ten (60%) had interacted with Social Security Scotland staff. Around half had attended an event run by Social Security Scotland (51%), sent a query or requested information from Social Security Scotland (51%), or received resources from the organisation (46%). Fewer respondents had engaged with the organisation in other ways and a small proportion said they belonged to one of Social Security Scotland's stakeholder reference groups. These findings are presented in full at Annex B (Table B2).

¹ Scottish Government staff bands are part of a structured pay system that categorises employees based on their roles and responsibilities. The bands are used to determine salary range for each grade, reflecting on the level of expertise and responsibility associated with the position. C-Band positions are typically more senior with higher levels of responsibility than A- and B-Band positions.

Partner respondents represented a range of organisation types. Around two-thirds (64%) represented third sector or charitable organisations or advice providers. Just under a quarter (22%) worked on welfare rights within a local authority. Fewer respondents represented NHS or health professions (5%) or social landlords and housing associations (5%). A small proportion were from other local or national government departments or public sector organisations including schools and further education (Annex B, Table B3).

Around half (47%) were from relatively small organisations of around 2 to 49 people. A slightly smaller proportion (42%) were from larger organisations (Annex B, Table B5).

Partner respondents commonly belonged to organisations that offered advice, support or information to multiple client groups. Almost all respondents were part of organisations that offered services to disabled people (86%) or people with health conditions including mental health conditions (85%). Many engaged with carers (79%), people on low incomes (77%), or people of State Pension age (75%). Around six in ten offered services to people aged 16 to 24 (68%), minority ethnic groups (63%), homeless people (63%), care experienced people (60%), and LGBTI communities (59%) (Annex B, Table B4).

3.4 Reading this report

The findings in this report represent the views of staff and partner survey respondents only. We cannot assume that the results represent the views of all Social Security Scotland staff or partners. It should also be noted that the findings represent a point in time where respondents were asked to consider their experiences during 2024-25 and therefore doesn't reflect any development activity within the organisation since the surveys took place.

Whilst all research participants were asked to think about their experiences between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 when providing their responses, we cannot guarantee that all responses referred solely to 2024-25. Some participants may have talked about experiences slightly before or after this period.

Quotes are used to illustrate the findings presented in this report. In some cases, minor edits were made to quotes to make them easier to read. Quotes have been chosen to best reflect themes in the findings. The number of quotes used to illustrate each theme does not always match the total number of responses which spoke about that theme.

We have avoided acronyms throughout this report to make it easier to read. This includes replacing acronyms with the full words in quotations where possible.

Results presented in tables use percentages to show proportions of respondents choosing different answer options. Tables exclude any respondents who were either filtered out of the question or who left the response blank. Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results included in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes. Some percentages

quoted in the report relate to questions that allowed respondents to choose more than one response. Again, these percentages will not sum to 100%. Where a result was less than 0.5%, this is shown as <1% in tables. Where no respondents selected a particular answer, this is shown as '-' in tables.

Where fewer than 100 respondents answered a question, results are discussed in written text but results tables are not included.

Where results look at the experiences of specific groups of respondents (such as partner experiences of contacting Social Security Scotland in relation to their benefit experience), groups of fewer than 100 respondents are highlighted (*) in tables to caution the reader. Results for small groups of respondents are not published (shown as '#' in tables) to make sure respondents are not identifiable.

Comparable quantitative figures from the staff survey are included in tables where available for previous years (2022-23 and 2023-24). Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings. The way the partner survey is distributed means that we cannot know whether it is reaching the same group of respondents each year. We cannot, therefore, directly compare findings with previous years as the make-up of respondents might differ each time. The number of partner respondents has also been relatively low each year which prevents direct comparison of figures. We have included previous years' figures, where available, in the written analysis of partner findings. These are included for information only and are not directly comparable. This applies to all partner findings throughout the report.

4. A People's Service: Partner experiences of Social Security Scotland as an organisation

This chapter matches up with the first section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter called 'A people's service'. It looks at partner respondents' overall experiences of Social Security Scotland as an organisation and their views on its values and approach to delivering a service in 2024-25.

4.1 Partner views on Social Security Scotland's service and values

Partner respondents were asked to rate the overall service delivered by Social Security Scotland (Table 1).

Table 1: How would you rate the overall service delivered by Social Security Scotland?²

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 194)

Response options	
Very good	9%
Good	38%
Neither good nor poor	31%
Poor	14%
Very poor	5%
Don't know / Not applicable	3%

² Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

Almost half (46%) of partner respondents rated the overall service as good or very good with around a fifth (19%) rating it as poor or very poor. A lower proportion of respondents were satisfied with the overall service than in previous years (with 55% selecting good or very good in 2022-23 and 57% in 2023-24). Around a third (31%) said it was neither good nor poor (compared to 19% in 2022-23 and 22% in 2023-24).³

The survey asked partner respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with statements on whether Social Security Scotland was an open and honest organisation (Table 2) and whether they trust Social Security Scotland (Table 3).

Table 2: Partner respondent views on openness and honesty of Social Security Scotland

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 193-194)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know / Not applicable
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	40%	36%	15%	9%
Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation	42%	39%	9%	10%

³ Previous years' figures are not included in tables for partner findings. The way the survey is distributed means that we cannot know whether it is reaching the same group of respondents each year and therefore cannot directly compare findings with previous years as the make-up of respondents might differ each time. The number of respondents has also been relatively low each year which prevents direct comparison of figures. We have included previous years' figures, where available, in the written text. These are included for information only and are not directly comparable. This applies to all partner findings throughout the report.

Table 3: How much do you agree or disagree with the following... I trust Social Security Scotland⁴

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 193)

Response options	
Strongly agree	9%
Agree	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	40%
Disagree	11%
Strongly disagree	4%
Don't know / Not applicable	5%

Around two-fifths of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is an open (40%) and honest (42%) organisation. A relatively similar proportion said they neither agreed nor disagreed that Social Security Scotland is open (36%) and honest (39%). A lower proportion of respondents thought Social Security Scotland was open and honest than in previous years (51-53% in 2022-23 and 48-49% in 2023-24). Around a tenth (9-15%) said they disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements (compared to 3-4% in 2022-23 and 6-9% in 2023-24).⁵

Similarly, two-fifths (40%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they trust Social Security Scotland and the same proportion (40%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 15% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. This was the first year that the survey asked whether respondents trust Social Security Scotland. Figures for previous years are therefore not available for this survey question. They will be included in future reports where possible if this question is asked in future surveys.

In written comments, respondents commonly discussed Social Security Scotland's organisational values. Some said they trusted the organisation because of their client-centred aims and ethos as well as the fact that they are an executive agency of the Scottish Government and therefore publicly accountable. Some said they felt that trust and honesty seemed to be "lived values" at Social Security Scotland and that the

⁴ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

⁵ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3).

organisation had continued to treat clients with dignity, fairness and respect. Some said they had positive experiences with the organisation and no reason to mistrust them.

“I trust Social Security Scotland because they come from a rights-based perspective. I trust them to investigate claims thoroughly and make a fair determination on the supporting evidence regardless of how badly someone completes a form due to misunderstanding questions. I trust them to strive to make the correct decision first time.” [Partner respondent](#)

“My experience has largely been positive when supporting clients, and trust/honesty seem to be more lived values than seen at [the Department for Work and Pensions], for example.” [Partner respondent](#)

Others thought that the organisation’s values didn’t always match up to its performance in practice. Some felt that the organisation hadn’t delivered what it originally promised when it launched. Some respondents recognised that the aims of the organisation had been hindered by problems with the delivery of service.

“I have noticed a bit of a slip in performance as more and more benefits have been introduced - likely due to increased work volume but it is still better than [the Department for Work and Pensions] (just!)” [Partner respondent](#)

“I am sad to put these answers as at the beginning we had a lot of hope for the new system and the commitment to dignity and respect. However it is clear that the reality is falling far short of what was promised and actually many things are worse than they were under the previous system.” [Partner respondent](#)

In terms of openness and honesty, some respondents thought Social Security Scotland had been open and transparent about its policies and processes. For example, some said the information in decision letters had been clear and straightforward with transparent explanations about the decision-making process. There was also particular praise for stakeholder meetings and online events, saying that staff at these meetings had provided information and engaged with attendees in a transparent way.

“It seems that Social Security Scotland wants to provide updated information and clear, concise directions. I appreciate that every decision letter includes a full explanation of the decisions made and why; this is helpful for understanding the assessment process, points thresholds, eligibility, etc. and is also helpful as a basis for redeterminations and appeals. I think that Social Security Scotland wants to help people within the parameters of the budget laid out by the Scottish Government (and more indirectly by Westminster).” [Partner respondent](#)

“From the online events I have attended they seem to be transparent about their services, processes and taking questions.” [Partner respondent](#)

Other respondents shared mixed views on the openness, honesty and trustworthiness of Social Security Scotland. Some were frustrated that Social Security Scotland was unable to share data with partner organisations and felt the organisation wasn’t open in this respect. A few felt Social Security Scotland was open because it publishes performance data and statistics, however other respondents reported issues with this.

Some believed Social Security Scotland hadn’t always been honest or forthcoming when they made an error or mistake, such as application forms being lost (partner experiences of problems and mistakes are discussed in section 8.1). Some respondents had lost trust in Social Security Scotland over time due to issues like: inconsistent decisions, supporting information not being fully considered with applications, and re-determinations being handled in-house rather than by an independent body. There were calls for more transparency on processes like decision-making and re-determinations.

“Depends who you speak to in terms of being helpful and also losing forms and not notifying people they have lost a form and also taking too long to process claims.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I think Social Security Scotland aim to portray an image of being open, honest and trustworthy. I don't see evidence of this though. (Which is different to believing that they are not!) Social Security Scotland were very keen for co-location within our services but was less tangible what value they would or could add. They advised they would be able to share data with us regarding how they were helping our clients however this has not been the case. The impression given from the nationally available data is that too many clients are still having to make appeals to be awarded correct decisions from Social Security Scotland which is really disappointing. I can't see how Social Security Scotland can claim to be an open organisation at all when their information governance inhibits them even more than [the Department for Work and Pensions].” [Partner respondent](#)

4.2 Inclusive communication for partners

Partner respondents were asked about their experience of interacting with Social Security Scotland in the ways that they prefer (Table 4).

Table 4: How easy or difficult has it been to interact with Social Security Scotland in the ways you prefer?⁶

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 191)

Response options	
Very easy	6%
Easy	23%
Neither easy nor difficult	23%
Difficult	29%
Very difficult	17%
Don't know / Not applicable	4%

Over a quarter (28%) of respondents said it was easy or very easy to interact with Social Security Scotland in their preferred way. A similar proportion said it was easy in previous years (30% in 2022-23 and 31% in 2023-24). Around half (46%) said it was difficult or very difficult (compared to 53% in 2022-23 and 48% in 2023-24).⁷

Written comments showed a range of contact preferences among respondents including phone, webchat, letters, online meetings and in person contact. A few respondents experienced no issues when interacting with Social Security Scotland and were pleased to have a choice of ways to communicate. Some said staff were helpful and receptive to their needs, although a few mentioned poorer staff interactions.

“I prefer to use the online live chat in appointments, but if need be I can use the telephone and call. Not had any problems with this at all, and the waiting times are less than what I was used to with [the Department for Work and Pensions].”

Partner respondent

⁶ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

⁷ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3).

“Incredibly reliable staff who are a pleasure to work with.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I prefer to be able to call someone, explain my query and receive a response. webchat is fine too as long as long as the person on the understands the query (for both phone and webchat) however too often I have found call handlers/webchat advisers to be unwilling or unable to understand the issue at hand.”

[Partner respondent](#)

Most comments described mixed experiences, where contacting Social Security Scotland in respondents’ preferred ways was sometimes easy but sometimes difficult. This was mainly to do with long queues on Social Security Scotland’s phone helpline and webchat. Partner experiences of using these contact methods on behalf of clients are discussed in section 5.2. Suggestions to improve partners’ experiences of contacting in their preferred ways included the introduction of a partner-specific helpline or email address and more options to communicate by letter. A couple of respondents thought communication could be improved at meetings and events.

“They do not answer the phone and refuse to send responses to letters to us. We would prefer to be able to email or have a dedicated line to contact but these options are not available.” [Partner respondent](#)

“As indicated the waiting times to speak to an adviser via phone and more recently also your webchat are lengthy and time consuming. It makes our service delivery much more difficult due to the amount of clients requiring to contact. A specific helpline [for Citizens Advice Bureau advisers] would be helpful.” [Partner respondent](#)

“It has been easy to interact in terms of having meetings but these haven’t always been attended by Social Security Scotland (even when Social Security Scotland have been the party to schedule the meeting). It has been difficult to successfully use these meetings to make tangible progress in terms of a partnership service.” [Partner respondent](#)

4.3 Experiences of working in partnership with Social Security Scotland

Around a quarter of respondents said they had worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland in 2024-25, for example as part of Social Security Scotland's stakeholder groups, forums or engagement events. These respondents were asked about their experience of working in partnership with Social Security Scotland, including receiving information and making queries.

Of those who had worked in partnership, around five in ten agreed that Social Security Scotland had worked well with them and their organisation.⁸ Around two in ten disagreed with this. Similarly, around five in ten said Social Security Scotland had answered their queries effectively, with around two in ten disagreeing. Roughly six in ten agreed that Social Security Scotland had shared relevant and timely information with them whilst around one in ten disagreed.⁹

Written comments showed that some respondents had experienced a positive working relationship with Social Security Scotland, particularly in relation to the staff they had engaged with. For example, respondents commonly praised Local Delivery staff saying they were knowledgeable, friendly, supportive and reliable. Some respondents said that staff changes and new contact information could be better communicated to partners.

“Social Security Scotland officers have consistently delivered exceptional levels of partnership working [...].” [Partner respondent](#)

⁸ As fewer than 100 respondents answered questions about partnership working this year, results tables are not included in the report. It is not possible to pinpoint a specific reason for the lower volume of respondents who work in partnership compared to previous years. However, this may be due to several factors including: a reduction in the volume of partnership working happening in practice over time; changes to question routing the 2024-25 survey which meant these questions were targeted more specifically at respondents who had worked in partnership with Social Security Scotland compared to previous years; and random fluctuations in the type of respondents completing the survey each year. The changes to question routing means that comparable figures from previous years are not available for these findings. For context, it can be noted that around two-thirds (67%) of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland had worked well with them and their organisation in 2022-23 and a similar proportion (64%) in 2023-24. However, these figures are not comparable to this year's findings.

⁹ Figures from previous years are not included in the written text for questions about receiving information and making queries due to the low volume of responses and changes to the wording of these questions in 2024-25. The 2023-24 survey asked 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following... Social Security Scotland has worked well at sharing information with me and my organisation / Social Security Scotland has worked well at answering queries from me and my organisation'. This wording was updated to 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following... Social Security Scotland has shared relevant and timely information with me and my organisation / Social Security Scotland has answered queries from me and my organisation effectively' for the 2024-25 survey.

“We have such a good setup with the staff that come into our premises and have an office [...] that is allocated for them each week to use. All of the staff that we have met are lovely and friendly, and we look forward to continued working with Social Security Scotland.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Partnership working with the local delivery teams has been good but organisations need to have contact information updated when staff leave or contact numbers change [...].” [Partner respondent](#)

On the other hand, some respondents experienced issues with staff when working in partnership with Social Security Scotland. Issues included poor communication, lack of staff attendance at meetings and events, and staff not fulfilling commitments or engaging with partners in the way respondents expected. Similarly to previous years, some respondents who had worked with Social Security Scotland’s Local Delivery staff were frustrated that the organisation’s processes and policies prevented Local Delivery staff from answering queries or sharing information to do with specific client cases.

“We have had very little contact with the local delivery team who were 'meant' to be co-locating in our office space with us. They do not attend any events that we invite them to such as our 'welfare rights' forum that we facilitate. This communication and 'joined-up' working has been very disappointing. [...].” [Partner respondent](#)

“While the officers who have met with our organisation have always been very pleasant there is an ongoing problem with data sharing which has caused our team additional work.” [Partner respondent](#)

Some comments described a decrease in the quality of partnership working or relationships with Social Security Scotland over time. This was mainly to do with respondents feeling that communication from Social Security Scotland (including meetings and events) had become less frequent and in-depth over recent years compared to when the organisation was first established. A couple of respondents had also recently experienced difficulties when reaching out to arrange events, such as benefit information workshops, compared to previous years. Suggestions to improve partnership working included more open and flexible data sharing and having a named member of staff to contact about partnership matters.

“At [the] outset of Social Security Scotland we had regular meetings with our Local Liaison and everything was very positive about working together but no idea who this now is and haven't had any contact for a couple of years.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Used to do more and had more information and events. Not much lately.”
[Partner respondent](#)

“Previously we have had great workshops where benefits advisors will come along and answer any queries our service users have but recently I have tried to arrange another workshop but have been unable to get a reply by email. I plan to try again.”
[Partner respondent](#)

Written responses commonly mentioned the themes of feedback and collaboration in relation to partnership working. Whilst some respondents felt they had good engagement with the organisation, others were frustrated that their views and suggestions didn't always lead to change despite trying to work in partnership to improve the service.

There were calls for partnership working to involve more collaboration with partner organisations, particularly with partners who had extensive experience of supporting clients and key knowledge of their needs. A few respondents felt that Social Security Scotland had focused on highlighting the organisation's successes and improvements when communicating with partner organisations, but the impact of improvements had not yet been seen by partners in practice. Others felt that existing policies had prevented specific improvements from being implemented and were frustrated by this. Partner experiences of providing feedback are presented in more detail in section 7.1.

“Meetings and information-sharing are mainly about the plus points and how well Social Security Scotland are doing at reducing timescales for decisions and shortening waiting times on the telephone. We have seen absolutely no evidence of this. In our experience there is still on average a 40 minute wait for calls to be answered and around 3 to 5 months for Adult Disability Payment decisions.”
[Partner respondent](#)

"I fail to see that there is a two-way partnership in place. The entire process seems to be designed to exclude welfare rights advisers and representatives, putting the onus on vulnerable clients for contact etc. Although the provision of information events is helpful, especially regarding policy and procedures, any criticism, however constructive, appears to be ignored and suggestions for improvement not implemented. It's a sad day when welfare rights officers can say they had a better working relationship with [the Department for Work and Pensions]!"

Partner respondent

"I have given feedback at the end of each stakeholder event that I have attended. Suggestions on how future events could be delivered was given but no change to how they are being delivered i.e. each event is for a specific topic however events usually start with Social Security Scotland telling you what they have done to date as an agency. This is not useful or helpful given that as advisors we are looking for information about that specific topic and have tight resources and restricted time to attend. The stakeholder events have become very rigid and delivery very structured without enough opportunity to ask questions/have discussion or share good practices." Partner respondent

A few respondents described their experience of making queries to Social Security Scotland, most of which were made on behalf of clients and tended to be about benefit or case information. Experiences were generally positive with respondents saying queries were dealt with efficiently, although some faced initial delays getting through to Social Security Scotland on the phone. On the other hand, some felt benefit queries weren't dealt with efficiently or effectively due to problems with third party consent and acting on behalf of the client (see section 5.2). A couple of respondents described not hearing back in response to their queries.

"Once the lengthy time waiting for a call to be answered is over, most queries are answered quickly and effectively." Partner respondent

"Had to chase responses from Social Security Scotland." Partner respondent

"I never got a reply on live chat to a query on behalf of a client." Partner respondent

5. Processes that Work: Partner experiences of using the service on behalf of clients

This chapter matches up with the second section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter called 'Processes that work'. It looks at partner respondents' experiences of supporting clients to use Social Security Scotland's service in 2024-25. It discusses their experience of getting in touch with Social Security Scotland and speaking to staff on behalf of clients. It also covers their experience of helping clients to apply for benefits, including experiences of the consultation process for Adult Disability Payment.

5.1 Partner respondents' benefit experience

Three-quarters (75%) of partner respondents said they work with clients or potential clients of Social Security Scotland (see Annex B, Table B1). Around a fifth (18%) said they work both with clients or potential clients and in partnership with Social Security Scotland on behalf of their organisation. Therefore, in total, most (93%) respondents said they work with clients or potential clients as part of their role. The survey asked these respondents which Social Security Scotland benefits they had supported clients or potential clients within 2024-25 (Table 5).

Respondents had commonly supported clients or potential clients with more than one Social Security Scotland benefit. Almost all (97%) had supported clients with Adult Disability Payment. Two-thirds had supported clients with Child Disability Payment (66%) and a similar proportion had supported with Scottish Child Payment (67%). Fewer respondents had experience of Young Carer Grant (24%), Child Winter Heating Payment (16%) or Job Start Payment (9%).

Table 5: Since April 2024, which Social Security Scotland benefits have you supported clients or potential clients with?*

Partner respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 180)

Response options	
Adult Disability Payment	97%
Scottish Child Payment	67%
Child Disability Payment	66%
Carer Support Payment	62%
Best Start Grant	46%
Pension Age Disability Payment	43%
Funeral Support Payment	43%
Best Start Foods	42%
Carer's Allowance Supplement	34%
Winter Heating Payment	29%
Young Carer Grant	24%
Child Winter Heating Payment	16%
Job Start Payment	9%

* Respondents could select more than one option

5.2 Getting in touch with Social Security Scotland and experiences with staff

Partner respondents who support clients or potential clients were asked about their experience of making contact with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients (Table 6).

Table 6: How easy or difficult have you found making contact with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients?¹⁰

Partner respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 181)

Response options	
Very easy	4%
Easy	15%
Neither easy nor difficult	8%
Difficult	33%
Very difficult	34%
Don't know / Not applicable	6%

Around a fifth (19%) of partner respondents said it was easy or very easy to make contact with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients. A similar proportion (18%) said it was easy or very easy in 2023-24. Two-thirds (66%) found it difficult or very difficult (compared to 60% in 2023-24). Less than one in ten (8%) said it was neither easy nor difficult.¹¹

Respondents who support clients were then asked to rate their experience of speaking to Social Security Scotland staff on behalf of clients (Table 7).

¹⁰ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

¹¹ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3). For context, the 2022-23 partner survey asked 'How easy or difficult have you found looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland with or for clients?'. After consulting with Social Security Scotland's National Engagement and Corporate Communications colleagues, this question was changed to 'How easy or difficult have you found making contact with Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients' for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 surveys. Figures from 2022-23 are therefore not available for this question and are not included in the written text.

Table 7: How would you rate your experience of speaking to Social Security Scotland staff on behalf of clients?

Partner respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 180)

Response options	
Very good	12%
Good	31%
Neither good nor poor	24%
Poor	14%
Very poor	12%
Don't know / Not applicable	7%

Around two-fifths (43%) of respondents rated their experience of speaking to staff as good or very good; a lower proportion than in 2022-23 (50%) and 2023-24 (47%). Around a quarter (26%) rated it as poor or very poor (compared to 14% in 2022-23 whilst 2023-24 saw the same proportion of 26%). Around a quarter (24%) selected 'neither'.¹²

In written comments, some respondents spoke positively about contacting Social Security Scotland and said they'd had no issues using either phone or webchat. Some said they got through on phone or webchat in a reasonable timeframe, with a couple noting that call waiting times had improved. As in previous years, some respondents praised the webchat service and were pleased that there was an alternative, and sometimes faster, option compared to phone.

"We always have a good experience contacting Social Security Scotland with no issues arising, whether it's via telephone or live chat. The fact that there is a live chat was really good for us as a charity in time restricted appointments as it's generally quicker than waiting on hold for an answer on the telephone." **Partner respondent**

"Didn't wait too long to get through and when I did the person was very good." **Partner respondent**

¹² Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3).

“The telephone response times have improved dramatically and the staff seem to be more informed than they used to be.” [Partner respondent](#)

Other positive comments described good experiences of interacting with Social Security Scotland staff when supporting clients. These comments praised the manner of staff, often describing them as helpful, friendly, polite and well-informed.

“I have spoken to really polite and helpful staff at Social Security Scotland which is a real breath of fresh air!” [Partner respondent](#)

“Met a Social Security Scotland member of staff at [a third sector forum] - spoke very well, very open, person centred. [Others] spoke very highly of her too. I rarely need to signpost people to Social Security Scotland but if I do in the future I would be very comfortable with passing them on to this member of staff.”
[Partner respondent](#)

The majority of comments, however, described mixed or negative experiences of contacting the organisation and speaking to staff on behalf of clients. Poor experiences were commonly to do with difficulty contacting Social Security Scotland, specifically in relation to long waits to get through on phone and webchat. Some said their call was disconnected either whilst still in the queue or after getting through to an advisor and were frustrated by this. There were similar comments about webpages timing out whilst waiting to get through on webchat. Comments often talked about the additional strain and stress that long call wait times caused both for partners and the clients they supported.

“Long wait times to get through on the phones, even webchat. Advisers usually very polite and knowledgeable though once you get through to one. Should be easier to get in touch, vulnerable clients have short attention span and temper and are not prepared to wait. This goes against the principles of accessibility and fairness.”
[Partner respondent](#)

“[...] Attempting to call Social Security Scotland can be difficult. Due to not having an adviser line, there are times we need to wait almost an hour to get through. This means we sometimes waste appointments trying to get through unsuccessfully and makes it more difficult to do our jobs. I have had times where I have waited 45 minutes on hold waiting for my call to be picked up, only for the adviser to immediately disconnect. In these instances, I normally do not have time to wait on hold again, so need to terminate the call with the client and make them wait on a new appointment, delaying their help. I understand not having an adviser line means that everyone is supposed to have the same service, but this does delay things for our vulnerable clients that cannot phone on their own as we often have to make them wait for the next available appointment, which can be a few weeks away. [...]”

Partner respondent

Other issues with contacting Social Security Scotland on behalf of clients included: not receiving call backs where promised by staff, difficulty with security questions at the beginning of a call, problems with language interpretation, and issues with third party consent to act on behalf of clients. Similarly to previous years, respondents called for easier communication options for partners who support clients including: a dedicated partner phone line or email service and a specific team of named staff to deal directly with client queries and issues. There were further calls for smoother processes for registering third party consent and acting on behalf of clients, as also highlighted in previous years.

“It can frequently take an hour to get through on the phone which is completely unacceptable. When we do get through we are unable to speak on behalf of clients without the client present - even in cases where we have sent a signed mandate, it seems that this is not visible to the call handler. If they can find the mandate they tell us they can't share information about the award. Call backs are promised and do not happen. The actual staff are not the issue - they seem to be frustrated with the policies in place too as they prevent them from helping. We have no one to go to to raise these issues as the local partnership lead no longer exists and we have been told not to discuss issues with the local delivery team.”

Partner respondent

“Time taken to get through to an adviser on the phone – 30 mins plus; number of security questions asked of clients is laborious - sometimes more than 10 questions; same goes for webchat; lack of direct line or email pathway to Social Security Scotland for partner organisations.”

Partner respondent

Where comments described problems and delays contacting Social Security Scotland, these respondents commonly went on to say that staff were helpful and supportive when they did get through. There was a sense among some comments that the service received from staff was a positive aspect of otherwise difficult experiences of communicating with Social Security Scotland.

“When I can get through to speak with someone, the staff are generally very good. They speak with clients as if they were human beings and don't just want them off the phone. It is difficult getting through to someone however.” [Partner respondent](#)

“The waiting time for calls to be answered hasn't improved. However, the manner of the staff is usually perfect.” [Partner respondent](#)

On the other hand, some respondents described mixed or poor experiences of speaking to staff on behalf of clients. Comments often said knowledge varied across different staff members and that some staff had provided conflicting or incorrect information to partners and clients. Some respondents said staff hadn't had the right knowledge to answer their query and were frustrated by this, particularly after experiencing long waits to speak to an adviser. In some cases, respondents said staff went away to check the answer with senior colleagues and were generally satisfied with this although it had led to a loss of confidence in staff knowledge among some respondents.

“Advisers do not always know what they are talking about. Spoke to one whom was excellent and was not able to assist but took the issue to a manager who did get back to us and we were able to resolve the issue.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Some of the staff I have spoken to have not known the benefit entitlement rules for some of the benefits. For example, for Best Start Foods, if claimants are either under 18 without entitlement to Universal Credit, or have no recourse to public funds, advisers on the phone have told me they are not eligible to apply for Best Start Foods. I have then had to read out the guidance to them. It can be very difficult when you are getting told different information each time you call based upon Social Security Scotland staff experience. I have sometimes been told the guidance is incorrect, despite me reading it directly from Social Security Scotland's website and knowing it is definitely correct. [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

“It takes so long to get through on the phone or chat - often staff are unaware of what I am asking - not experienced enough and then pass to case manager which doesn't actually give you an answer.” [Partner respondent](#)

In addition to comments on staff knowledge, some respondents said staff manner and helpfulness varied depending on who they spoke to with a sense that this also sometimes depended on the benefit in question. A few comments said staff manner was poor and that some staff were unhelpful and unprofessional. Similarly to previous years, respondents felt staff needed better training on things like third party consent, benefit entitlement, and understanding client needs in order to provide a more reliable and consistent service.

“I would have chosen the option 'both good and poor' for both questions, if it had been there. Some/most interactions have been good, but some (the minority) have been poor. Some staff have been very keen to assist and others less so.”
[Partner respondent](#)

“Some staff have no common sense. I called the helpline for an update and the advisor refused to provide any information, although I am an authorised person on my client's case. The advisor was rude and unprofessional.” [Partner respondent](#)

“For bereavement benefits the staff are more understanding. In Adult Disability Payment they are so busy they want you off the phone as soon as possible and are definitely not on the customer's side. [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

5.3 Applications

The partner survey asked respondents who support clients about their experiences of going through the application process with or for clients (Table 8).

Table 8: How easy or difficult have you found going through the application process with or for clients?¹³

Partner respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 181)

Response options	
Very easy	8%
Easy	22%
Neither easy nor difficult	24%
Difficult	29%
Very difficult	9%
Don't know / Not applicable	7%

Three in ten (30%) respondents said it was easy or very easy to go through the application process with or for clients. A slightly lower proportion of respondents said it was easy or very easy than in previous years (32% in 2022-23 and 34% in 2023-24). Nearly four in ten (39%) said it was difficult or very difficult (compared to 36% in 2022-23 and 29% in 2023-24). Around a quarter (24%) said it was neither easy nor difficult.¹⁴

Most written comments were about supporting clients to apply for Adult, Child, and Pension Age Disability Payments. There were positive comments about both online and paper applications for disability payments, saying these were generally straightforward to complete and that questions were clear. Some said online applications were user-friendly and were at times quicker and easier to complete than paper forms. A few respondents found that it was straightforward to complete applications with some clients but more complex for others depending on their specific needs. A few comments said that the application process for disability benefits reflected Social Security Scotland's principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

¹³ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

¹⁴ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3).

“The online and paper applications are clearly laid out and easy to complete.”
Partner respondent

“[...] I appreciated being able to review the questions/answers at the end of each [online] section.” Partner respondent

“Clearly, many questions must be asked in order to ensure that claims are properly completed and validated, but Social Security Scotland manages to do so in a non-confrontational manner. The claims process is not intimidating, and is not unduly complex.” Partner respondent

Issues raised with online applications for disability payments included difficulty setting up and logging in to clients' online accounts, problems uploading supporting information, the online form timing out, and occasional system crashes. However, comments said online applications worked well on the whole despite technical issues.

“Online applications work well. System crashes occasionally but this is rare. Easy to save forms and upload documents.” Partner respondent

“[...] There are also issues in terms of the webpages timing out, despite being active in typing on them and clicking on and off the text box throughout. This is disheartening considering quite some time may have been spent.”
Partner respondent

With paper applications, respondents said questions were clear but repetitive and that some clients were overwhelmed when they saw the length of the physical form. Some said both online and paper forms were time-consuming to complete and highlighted the emotional toll for clients repeatedly going over their condition in detail. There were calls for shorter versions of the paper forms without the detailed guidance and images for partners to use with clients. Other suggestions included larger text boxes on paper forms and changes to the online form to allow clients the chance to better explain their disability or health condition.

“The application process is ok, however applications are too lengthy and include far too much explanatory information and pictures, to the point that it can be quite patronising. A lot of clients have been put off applying themselves as they receive "a book" to complete. While the intentions behind this are noble, in practice it is simply annoying and time consuming at best.” [Partner respondent](#)

“It is a very lengthy application which can take hours to get through. This in itself is a barrier for a lot of people. The application does not always give applicants the opportunity to express the challenges they face - this is especially difficult on the online application as it cancels out parts of the form it sees as not relevant. This can lead to important information being missed.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Despite having some knowledge of Adult Disability Payment, I struggled with assisting my client to apply for the mobility component. On a paper form, you could tick the 200m box and give more information in later questions. My client didn't want to claim she couldn't walk at all so ticked the 'over 200m' box online but this prevented her from giving more information about the very severe limitations to that. I believe a reminder on each activity about being able to do an activity reliably would have reassured her that she wasn't claiming something that was untrue.”
[Partner respondent](#)

A handful of respondents made similar comments in relation to Carer Support Payment, saying the application form was complex, lengthy, and took a long time to complete with clients. A few comments mentioned other payments like Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grant. Respondents said it was easy and straightforward to help clients apply for these benefits, and there was similar positive feedback about applications for disability payments made under Special Rules for Terminal Illness.

“Some applications are very easy to make online (Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant).” [Partner respondent](#)

“For many customers who are claiming under Special Rules, or [those who] we help to make an online claim, it is easy. [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

“[...] there is no need for a [Carer Support Payment] form for underlying entitlement to be 40 pages.” [Partner respondent](#)

Other issues with applications included:

- a lack of training, information or support for partners on understanding applications for Pension Age Disability Payment as a newer benefit;
- issues with accessing and submitting PDF application forms;
- and problems with client identification at the start of the application process where clients didn't have access to photo identification, particularly for clients applying for Pension Age Disability Payment and homeless clients.

A few respondents left positive comments about the Local Delivery service but said it had been difficult to arrange an appointment over the phone and felt a dedicated Local Delivery helpline would be beneficial.

“I have found the application process easy. However, the ID process for the claimants is not so easy especially if they lack photo ID.” [Partner respondent](#)

“[...] We are coming across many issues with this as clients are unable to get through on the phone due to your lengthy waiting times and if they miss your attempt to call them they only have the generic number to call back on. There should be a dedicated number for booking [Local Delivery] appointments [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

Some respondents left comments about issues that happened in the period between submitting an application for a client and the client receiving their decision. Application processing times were commonly mentioned as a key issue for disability benefits, with many respondents expressing frustration that some clients were still waiting a long time for a decision. Some respondents described poor or limited communication from Social Security Scotland in the interim period between submitting clients' applications and receiving decisions. There were also several examples where Social Security Scotland had not fulfilled promises to source supporting information for clients.

"[...] Communication is good initially but becomes less consistent if more information is required. To wait 12 weeks and then be told something more is needed within 14 days feels very unfair and remains a challenge."

Partner respondent

"I have to say difficult just now because of the length of time it is taking to make decisions. It is still several months before we hear of an initial decision then if re-determination and tribunal appeal come into the equation it is even longer. I am currently involved with multiple clients who are still in this process 18 months+ after they first applied." Partner respondent

5.4 Consultations for Adult Disability Payment

If a client has applied for Adult Disability Payment, Social Security Scotland will aim to make a decision based on the client's application form and supporting information. In some cases, Social Security Scotland may ask a client to take part in a consultation to get extra information. A consultation is a conversation with one of Social Security Scotland's health and social care practitioners. The consultation is a chance for the client to talk to Social Security Scotland about how their condition or disability affects their life. It helps Social Security Scotland to make a decision on the application. A consultation is not a diagnosis or medical examination of the client's condition, and only covers areas of the application that Social Security Scotland needs more information about. Consultations can be done by phone, by video call, at a local public venue, or in a client's own home.

Just under half of partner respondents who work with clients said they had supported clients with a consultation for Adult Disability Payment in 2024-25. These respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that Social Security Scotland had prioritised client wellbeing during the consultation process.¹⁵ Around three in ten agreed that client wellbeing had been prioritised and a similar proportion disagreed. Around two in ten said they neither agreed nor disagreed. The wording of this question was changed for the 2024-25 survey in order to reflect the measures in the revised Charter Measurement Framework. Figures for previous years are therefore not reported this year. They will be included in future reports where possible.¹⁶

Respondents were asked to comment on the consultation process for Adult Disability Payment, including what was working well and what could be improved. Positive comments described consultations as easy and straightforward. There was praise for Social Security Scotland's health and social care practitioners who had worked on consultations, with respondents describing them as polite and supportive. Comments said that practitioners had prioritised and focused on client wellbeing as part of consultations.

"Consultations are very easy compared to [the Department for Work and Pensions]. A very straightforward process with straightforward questions." [Partner respondent](#)

¹⁵ Fewer than 100 respondents answered this question. Results tables are therefore not included in the report.

¹⁶ The 2023-24 survey asked 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following... Social Security Scotland protected and prioritised client wellbeing during the consultation process'. This was changed to 'How much do you agree or disagree that Social Security Scotland prioritised client wellbeing during the consultation process?' for 2024-25.

"I felt the staff member was very person-centred and solely concerned for the client's well-being." [Partner respondent](#)

"Polite staff that want to aid clients through the process." [Partner respondent](#)

"Clear that the priority was support, with a clear understanding that the clients required this." [Partner respondent](#)

Mixed and negative experiences tended to be about partners and clients not trusting practitioners or the consultation process. In one instance, a respondent described their client's poor experience with a staff member. Another respondent said the client they were supporting was unable to take part in a consultation in their preferred way.

"Clients know that practitioners are trying to catch them out. I have a client whose input from a practitioner contradicted what the GP and consultants stated. They apparently know more about the medical conditions than GP and consultants. That doesn't even make sense!!" [Partner respondent](#)

"My client provided answers via telephone. He did not feel these answers were taken into account and feels the friendly nature of the conversation worked against him. He felt most of the things discussed were not noted, with the focus only being on a couple of the things he said he was able to do, rather than the many things he said he could not do." [Partner respondent](#)

"Client wanted a face-to-face appointment in a specific location and was told that this couldn't be allowed." [Partner respondent](#)

"Staff member was ill-informed, made incorrect assumptions, had difficulty understanding client's accent and was dismissive in tone. A very poor, judgemental experience - failed the dignity test!" [Partner respondent](#)

Suggestions for improvement included providing clients with more guidance and information about what the consultation will involve ahead of the appointment to help them know what to expect. There were mixed suggestions about how and when consultations should be used. Some felt consultations carried out over the phone could be stressful for some clients and have an inadvertently negative effect on their overall application and decision. One respondent shared their experience where consultations had been carried out with clients who had been diagnosed with terminal or progressive conditions and felt this was inappropriate.

“Clients need more information about what a phone consultation will include. A lot of clients assume this will be very daunting and made to catch them out on their answers, however I know as an adviser it is more of a fact finding exercise and only seeks to strengthen the information given to Social Security Scotland - if clients had access to a guide on what this call included I think it would benefit both the client and Social Security Scotland.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I don't feel like practitioners should be able to 'pick and choose' the things they note in the decision making. With information not being written down like on an application, it could be easy for them to focus on one point and ignore others, which is what my client felt happened. It should also not take precedence over a written application. If a client has anxiety, they may forget to mention some things that were written in their paper form. I feel the paper form should take precedence. Asking someone who has said they find it difficult engaging with people, to take part in a telephone consultation, could have a negative impact on their award.”

[Partner respondent](#)

“I imagine it's a checks and balances method which helps decision makers, but staff training and attitudes need work. It shouldn't be required in all cases, e.g. if a client has a medically authenticated progressive/terminal condition which is not going to improve, subjecting them to further scrutiny is counterproductive for all involved.”

[Partner respondent](#)

On the other hand, other respondents felt that some of the clients they support would have benefitted from a consultation but were not offered this during the application process. These respondents wanted consultations to be offered more widely and viewed them as a positive opportunity for clients to discuss and describe how their disability or health condition impacts their daily life. It should also be noted that there was an unclear distinction among a few respondents of the difference between consultations and phone calls from Social Security Scotland that asked for more information about clients' application answers.

“I am not always aware of someone contacting clients to discuss their issues. I believe an assessment should always be done when assessing a client. If there is a lack of evidence following your contact to GPs, I really do think that there should be contact made to the client to offer the chance to gather evidence from their GP. I do not think people realise how limited you are in receiving the information. It seems very basic and should be changed to better help the client.” [Partner respondent](#)

“[...] Two of [the clients] I am currently supporting to tribunal would have benefitted from a consultation. It is mine and other colleagues’ experience that consultations are just not happening.” [Partner respondent](#)

5.5 Accessibility of Social Security Scotland’s service

Partner respondents who work with clients were asked how accessible they thought Social Security Scotland’s service is for clients (Table 9). Respondents were asked to score the accessibility of Social Security Scotland’s service on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is ‘not at all accessible’ and 10 is ‘very accessible’. The term ‘accessible’ in this context mean that people can use Social Security Scotland’s service where, when and how they choose. This means making sure that all parts of Social Security Scotland’s service are easy to use by everyone.

Table 9: On a scale of 0 to 10, how accessible do you think the service is for clients?¹⁷

Partner respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 177)

Response options	
High (8-10)	20%
Medium (4-7)	55%
Low (0-3)	24%

Over half (55%) of respondents gave the accessibility of Social Security Scotland’s service a medium score between 4 and 7. A fifth (20%) gave a high score between 8 and 10, and around a quarter (24%) gave a low score between 0 and 3. The wording of this question was changed between 2023-24 and 2024-25.¹⁸ Figures from previous years are therefore not available for these findings. They will be included in future reports where possible.

In written comments, respondents gave positive examples of things that had helped to make the service accessible for clients. Some said the choice of ways to contact Social Security Scotland had helped clients to access the service. There were also positive comments about the accessibility of applications, specifically having multiple ways to apply including online, on paper, and over the phone. There was praise for the fact that online forms could be saved and completed in stages.

Other examples of good accessibility included:

¹⁷ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

¹⁸ The 2023-24 partner survey asked ‘How accessible do you think the service is for clients?’ with response options ‘Very accessible / Somewhat accessible / Not at all accessible’. This was reviewed and changed to ‘On a scale of 0 to 10, how accessible do you think Social Security Scotland’s service is for clients?’ for the 2024-25 survey in order to give respondents a wider range of response options.

- the ability to receive letters in accessible formats like large print and easy read
- the option to ask for communication in another language,
- the availability of the Local Delivery service to support clients,
- having multiple ways to submit reviews and re-determinations,
- and the provision of clear and straightforward information online.

“Having the option to complete the form online makes the service more accessible to those who have mental health issues that may prevent them from answering or making phone calls.” [Partner respondent](#)

“The Local Delivery service when clients have used them have been great.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Having the online chat function in addition to calls is great for some clients who struggle with hearing issues or speaking to people.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I like that clients are always asked whether they need communication in another language or if they are sight impaired.” [Partner respondent](#)

Others said that whilst the overall service was straightforward and user-friendly for most clients, it was not accessible for all. Many comments mentioned call and webchat waiting times as a barrier to clients accessing the service. Some said long waits on the phone were particularly problematic for clients who weren't able to contact the service via digital means. As in previous years, there were many examples of digital exclusion for clients without access to online information or digital skills. A few respondents emphasised that some clients didn't have access to either phone or internet and were excluded from communicating with Social Security Scotland altogether. There were calls for more opportunities for face to face contact with Social Security Scotland. Some respondents also said video calls and email communication would help to make the service more accessible for clients.

“[...] Often clients who need to use your services are digitally excluded and rely on face to face or phone contact and this is not easily accessible.” [Partner respondent](#)

“We have a number of clients who do not have internet access or phones and this group struggle to access the service.” [Partner respondent](#)

Other accessibility issues were to do with Social Security Scotland’s processes. Several said clients faced difficulties with security questions and identification when trying to access the service. There were also problems with interpretation in practice. Whilst some respondents appreciated that interpretation was offered and reported positive experiences, others said this aspect of the service could be improved. A couple of respondents said the interpretation tools in place were not effective for all clients’ needs. A few comments highlighted that some clients would be unable to access the service without partner support. There were calls for better promotion of the support Social Security Scotland can offer to clients to access the service, such as help from Local Delivery.

“[...] It can also be difficult that Social Security Scotland do not allow us to use our own interpreter. We use a reputable interpretation company. There have been times I have called Social Security Scotland with a client and an interpreter on the phone. I have then been told my interpreter needs to disconnect the call so Social Security Scotland can get their own translator, only for no translator to be available.”

[Partner respondent](#)

“British Sign Language feature is very welcome however the vast majority of our service users do not use British Sign Language for communication. I work with deafblind people so accessibility can be very difficult for them as many can neither read online, hear on the phone, or have appropriate skills/access for online.”

[Partner respondent](#)

“There doesn't seem to be enough awareness that Social Security Scotland staff can come round to people's houses / meet them in the community to help them fill out forms etc.” [Partner respondent](#)

6. Working for Social Security Scotland: Staff experiences

This chapter covers staff respondents' experience of working for Social Security Scotland in 2024-25. It looks at staff confidence and knowledge, experiences of training and guidance, support for staff, and experiences of communication. It matches up with the first section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter ('A people's service').

6.1 Delivering a service without discrimination

Staff respondents were asked how confident they felt to deliver a service without discriminating (Table 10). By 'delivering a service', we mean the services staff deliver to colleagues, clients and partners and the way they do their jobs across all areas of the organisation.

Table 10: In the past year, how confident have you felt to deliver a service without discriminating against others?¹⁹

All respondents

(Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,562; in 2023-24 = 1,481; in 2024-25 = 991)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Very confident	48%	45%	57%
Confident	45%	44%	36%
Not confident	6%	8%	6%
Not at all confident	2%	3%	2%

Most (92%) staff respondents said they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service without discriminating against others (compared to 93% in 2022-23 and 89% in 2023-24). Just under one in ten (8%) said they didn't feel confident about this.

Written comments often talked about what had helped staff respondents to feel confident not to discriminate. Many said empathy and fair treatment was a core part of their own personal values and that they were committed to applying this to their role. Some said they had sought a role in Social Security Scotland because the organisation's values aligned with their own principles. Others emphasised that they regularly prioritised and referred to the values of dignity, fairness and respect as well as the Civil Service Code in their everyday work and felt this helped them to consistently do their job

¹⁹ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

without discriminating. Many described a positive internal culture amongst their teams and colleagues that focused on equality and inclusion.

“As someone from the LGBTQ+ community, I know what it feels like to be discriminated against so I actively adapt my language to every person I communicate with to ensure they're being treated as an equal.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I believe that all of my colleagues live our values, we treat everyone with dignity, fairness and respect. I am confident we do deliver a service without discriminating against others.” [Staff respondent](#)

Other things that helped respondents to feel confident included: experience developed in their current or previous role; internal guidance; self-led learning; formal training; and the availability of tools to meet clients' needs such as video calls and interpretation for clients who use British Sign Language. Some respondents were acutely concerned about challenging their own unconscious bias but said training, guidance and peer support had helped them to feel more confident. Some said they thought Social Security Scotland's internal processes and policies were designed to be people-centred which made it easier to feel confident about delivering a fair service for clients.

“Case Managers have great support from Practitioners and I think this helps to develop knowledge and guidance rather than using online resources or going by previous experience or unconscious bias. Everyone is different so it's great to get that input from other colleagues to help reach the best possible conclusion for clients.” [Staff respondent](#)

“[...] in Pension Age Disability Payment I am very confident each client is getting a fair determination due to the framework used to make our decisions. It appreciates the individual's challenges overall as opposed to numerically scoring them.” [Staff respondent](#)

“[...] Have attended many inclusive training courses and try to apply this learning where I can.” [Staff respondent](#)

Those who lacked confidence most often said it was due to practical constraints or problems within Social Security Scotland. These respondents felt strongly about not

discriminating, and that the organisation itself had the right principles in place, but said internal processes, policies and systems had led to unfair treatment of some clients and staff. Others said high workloads and internal pressure on performance made it difficult to ensure they were delivering a service free from discrimination. A few had witnessed discriminatory behaviour among some colleagues and were concerned about a negative culture forming within the organisation.

As in previous years, some comments said staff needs were not always prioritised to the same extent as client needs, leading to the unfair treatment of some colleagues. There were calls for improvements to processes for specific groups clients (such as clients dealing with addiction and clients in prison), better interpretation and translation tools, and for equality and diversity to be embedded more consistently across the organisation.

“There are so many areas of the business that policy and guidance is not fit for purpose and vulnerable clients are being discriminated against as they can't meet our 'happy path'. On the other hand, the staff working with these clients try to move heaven and earth to allow these clients to not be penalised.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have been advised we are unable to send translated copies of completed application forms to clients who do not speak English, meaning they do not get the same level of information provided to them accessibly like an English speaker would.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I don't think enough focus is given on equality and diversity or emphasis on Equality Impact Assessments. There are a lot of areas in the business who do not have an Equality Impact Assessment as part of their design or development of processes and guidance and there are systems that do not meet our accessibility requirements.” [Staff respondent](#)

6.2 Knowledge and skills

The staff survey asked all respondents how confident they felt in their knowledge and skills to do their job (Table 11).

Table 11: In the past year, how confident have you felt in your knowledge and skills to do your job?²⁰

All staff respondents

(Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,566; in 2023-24 = 1,485; in 2024-25 = 994)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Very confident	22%	27%	27%
Confident	60%	56%	57%
Not confident	15%	15%	13%
Not at all confident	3%	2%	2%

Most (85%) respondents said they felt confident or very confident in their knowledge and skills to do their job (compared to 82% in 2022-23 and 83% in 2023-24). Under a fifth (15%) said they didn't feel confident.

In written comments, respondents often said they were confident in their skills and abilities at work and felt that they were good at their job. Many said their skills, qualities and knowledge had been gained through professional and personal experience prior to joining the organisation. Others said their confidence and competence came from learning and experience in their current role, particularly where they had worked in the job for a long time. Other comments described colleagues who were supportive and willing to help, saying that these colleagues made respondents feel more confident to do their job. Some described supportive line managers who kept their team up to date and provided help and training. Experiences of line manager support are covered in more detail in section 6.4.

²⁰ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

“I am confident in the knowledge and experience I brought to this role. Since joining Social Security Scotland my learning has increased. I have confidence and self awareness in myself that when I don't have the correct information for a client I will obtain the info and get back to them. I don't expect to know everything and feel I can admit a knowledge gap without shame or embarrassment.” [Staff respondent](#)

“We have learning opportunities all the time which is great. Within our team we are very supportive of each other and someone is always happy to help if another is struggling, having forgotten the process or are fighting with guidance.”
[Staff respondent](#)

Some respondents left comments about not feeling fully confident in their knowledge and skills. Some said this was due to being new to their role and feeling that a learning curve was to be expected, with faith that their knowledge and abilities would improve over time. Other respondents (including those with lengthy experience in the job) felt there was always more to learn and that continuous learning was important for keeping up with the changing nature of the job and service.

“I am a new hire, so I had to learn a lot. Even now I feel there is a lot that I need to learn, or learning I need to cement. However I am very confident in the resources and team support I have access to.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I am always learning and guidance always changes, this is the nature of the organisation as we want to do our best which means changing to fit our clients' needs and directives to deliver. I have access to a wide resource i.e. my colleagues, my line manager, guidance and bulletins. I am always happy to receive feedback no matter if it is constructive or positive.” [Staff respondent](#)

Issues that prevented respondents from feeling knowledgeable and skilled included: unhelpful or unsupportive peers and managers; internal processes and systems that were unreliable, confusing or changed often; and unclear direction from senior management. There were mixed experiences of training and guidance with some respondents feeling confident thanks to good quality training and guidance whilst others reported poor experiences. Some client-facing respondents specifically said they felt unprepared and unqualified to discuss medical issues with clients. Experiences of training and guidance are reported in full in section 6.3.

“I definitely have the knowledge and skills to do my job, but when I require support to develop I do not get that due to the line management situation.” **Staff respondent**

“My role is not clearly defined and is new in [Social Security Scotland]. Subsequently, it has been sometimes hard to know what my priorities should be, and it has felt subject to demands from other business areas. I am very confident in my knowledge and skills, but don't always receive honest and timely feedback.” **Staff respondent**

The survey also asked respondents who interact with clients, or will do so in future, about their knowledge of the independent advocacy service (delivered by VoiceAbility)²¹ and organisations and services that can provide support to clients (Table 12).

Table 12: How much do you agree or disagree with the following...²²

Staff respondents who work directly with clients or will do so in the future
(Number of respondents = 404)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I know how to provide clients with information about a range of organisations and services that can provide support	82%	10%	8%
I know how to refer clients towards the independent advocacy service	65%	13%	21%

²¹ The Scottish Government offers a free independent advocacy service to support disabled people across Scotland to access Social Security Scotland’s benefits. The independent advocacy service provides free and independent advocacy to anyone who identifies as disabled and requires support to communicate. The service is delivered by VoiceAbility - a charity with experience in delivering independent advocacy services. VoiceAbility is a separate organisation to Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government. 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.

²² Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Around eight in ten (82%) respondents agreed they knew how to provide clients with information about support organisations and services. Around six in ten (65%) agreed they knew how to refer clients towards the independent advocacy service. Just under one in ten (8%) disagreed that they knew about support services and around one in five (21%) disagreed that they knew how to refer clients to the advocacy service. The wording of these statements was changed for the 2024-25 survey in order to reflect the measures in the revised Charter Measurement Framework.²³ Comparable figures from previous years are therefore not available for these findings. It will be included in future reports where possible.

Finally, the survey asked respondents who interact with clients, or will do so in future, about their knowledge of the re-determinations and appeals processes (Tables 13 and 14).

Table 13: How much do you agree or disagree with the following... I know enough about the re-determinations process to explain it clearly to clients

Staff respondents who work directly with clients or will do so in the future (Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,051; in 2023-24 = 969; in 2024-25 = 404)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Strongly agree or agree	53%	70%	76%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	14%	11%
Disagree or strongly disagree	27%	16%	13%

²³ For context, the 2023-24 staff survey asked 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following... A. I know about a range of advice and advocacy services that are convenient for clients and B. I know how to refer clients to advice and advocacy services'.

Table 14: How much do you agree or disagree with the following... I know enough about the appeals process to explain it clearly to clients

Staff respondents who work directly with clients or will do so in the future (Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,051; in 2023-24 = 969; in 2024-25 = 404)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Strongly agree or agree	40%	51%	56%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	22%	16%
Disagree or strongly disagree	36%	27%	28%

Around three-quarters (76%) felt knowledgeable about the re-determinations process (compared to 53% in 2022-23 and 70% in 2023-24). Over half (56%) felt knowledgeable about the appeals process (compared to 40% in 2022-23 and 51% in 2023-24). Around a quarter (28%) disagreed that they knew enough about the appeals process. Fewer (13%) disagreed that they knew enough about the re-determinations process.²⁴

In written comments, many said these topics were a fundamental part of their role and they had gained knowledge through specific training and guidance as well as practical experience over time. A few said experience from previous roles had helped them to feel knowledgeable, especially in relation to the support services available for clients. Some had made it a priority to develop their expertise in these topics through self-directed learning and felt a personal responsibility to keep this knowledge up to date in order to provide a good quality service for clients. Others said that whilst they didn't have detailed knowledge or practice in these areas, they knew the basics and were confident about where to find internal guidance and felt comfortable asking colleagues for help.

"I have access to a good directory of local services and support. I used to work in independent advocacy so I understand the role that it plays, and I support clients to complete re-determinations and appeals so I understand the processes."

Staff respondent

²⁴ It should be noted that the 2024-25 survey asked all respondents 'Do you work directly with clients to help them use Social Security Scotland's service?' whereas previous surveys asked 'Do you interact with Social Security Scotland clients as part of your job?'. This means that in previous surveys a very small proportion of non-frontline staff who interacted with clients but were not responsible for helping them to use Social Security Scotland's service answered questions about knowledge of the re-determinations and appeals processes. However, they were not asked about this in 2024-25. This concerns a very small proportion of respondents and therefore does not affect the comparability of findings across reporting years.

“These are part of my core role. [...] There are so many [organisations] it is impossible to know about them all, but I do my best to keep up and will do research for particular clients I am due to see.” [Staff respondent](#)

“We generally don't deal with these sorts of queries but I feel my knowledge is sufficient to signpost clients appropriately and I know where to find the information should I need to get clarification for them.” [Staff respondent](#)

Those who didn't feel knowledgeable said this was due to insufficient training and feeling that these topics could be better explained to client-facing staff, particularly appeals. Some said guidance was poor and difficult to find, with suggestions for more streamlined information for staff. Some had faced problems when trying to signpost clients towards support services including some services being unable to assist clients. A few were not familiar with these topics because they are not relevant to their role.

“I have signposted clients to organisations and they have told me they no longer offer this service or that they are impossible to engage with. They have often tried the suggestions I have so sometimes it does feel a bit like a tick-box exercise and of no use to the client.” [Staff respondent](#)

“No real resource to refer to and the [internal guidance system] is disorganised, often difficult to find guidance, and frequently poorly written or not in date.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I've never had any training on how to deal with re-determinations or appeals. There is guidance but I would prefer an actual class with a trainer so we can ask questions. Guidance makes the assumption it's written so that everyone can understand it easily - it's not!” [Staff respondent](#)

“It would be useful to have a list of agencies and their contact details to refer clients to when they need additional support. Right now all of that information is scattered across different places.” [Staff respondent](#)

6.3 Experiences of training and guidance

Respondents commonly mentioned experiences of guidance and training in their written responses to the questions about knowledge and skills covered in section 6.2 above. This section reports their experiences of training and guidance in full detail.

Some respondents were positive about internal guidance, saying it had enabled them to do their job well and with confidence. Some said even when there were gaps in their knowledge or confidence they knew where to find the right resources to help them. However, others had experienced issues with guidance including guidance being outdated, unclear, open to interpretation, hard to navigate and incomplete. Some said that procedures and guidance changed frequently and found it difficult to keep up, especially as there were often problems with communicating changes. Some said they were not consulted or told about the changes or were informed at short notice, whilst others said changes were not explained clearly. This had led to a lack of confidence among some respondents and inconsistent ways of working that made it hard to meet clients' needs and to deliver a quality service.

"[The internal guidance system] and online learning portals are regularly updated to ensure we have the most up to date information and skills." [Staff respondent](#)

"As the system and guidance I am using changes, no one can be fully confident, but I am able to follow the guidance and procedures allowing me to be confident in the role I am in." [Staff respondent](#)

"Information and guidelines can be confusing and at times totally [contradicts] itself." [Staff respondent](#)

"The guidance is constantly changing and is not always communicated well. Especially to part-time workers who may not be present when the information is being shared." [Staff respondent](#)

On training, some respondents said there was ample access to good quality training which made them feel knowledgeable, skilled and supported to do their job. Respondents had undertaken training on topics like understanding disabilities and health conditions, using internal systems and processes, new Social Security Scotland benefits and changes to aspects of the service, and role-specific skills. Training and learning covered a number of formats including: internal and external e-learning, webinars, formal courses, workshops, upskilling sessions, in-person training days, and

learning on the job. Some said training was available to keep updated with changes to the service and to advance their skills. A few found being a trainer had helped to improved their confidence.

“Through excellent training/consolidation at the start of my career with Social Security Scotland. This gave me excellent skills and knowledge of how to do my job correctly. There are also e-learnings to keep me updated with changes within the organisation to ensure that I have the best possible knowledge and skills to do my role.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have just started a new role and the training has been fantastic. I feel very able to do the job ahead. [...]” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have good clinical knowledge in my specialism. I have had to develop my understanding and knowledge in other areas by seeking out and attending relevant training. One of the best this year was a workshop on how aids can support individuals with physical difficulties [...]. This was excellent and I really felt I learned something. The workshop was also really well delivered with a lot of use of diagrams which really helped me to understand rather than lots of words on a Powerpoint.” [Staff respondent](#)

Other respondents mentioned issues with training including: a lack of access to relevant training, poor quality training, and barriers to completing training in practice. Barriers to accessing training included: restricted budgets; high workloads and pressure to achieve targets leaving limited time for learning and development; and training being delivered in formats that weren't accessible for all. For example, a respondent said in-person training is inaccessible for them and puts them at a disadvantage. Respondents often said they were not offered sufficient training for their role and felt that any training they did receive did not prepare them for the role. For example, a few respondents described a lack of training in accessibility to support colleagues' needs at work.

“My knowledge and skills come from my previous experience and training, not from any training I have been provided at Social Security Scotland.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have the skills and experience to be able to do my job. I would like to develop further skills but the current financial situation makes this difficult.”
[Staff respondent](#)

“There's been a lack of training opportunities and [for] the limited opportunities [there are], managers want the training done in person at either Glasgow or Dundee offices. This mentality of everything being in person really isolates staff with personal challenges such as disabilities or due to their location. They cannot facilitate an overnight stay for classroom based training. [...]” [Staff respondent](#)

In addition to formal training, respondents said peer learning and self-directed development had helped them to feel confident and skilled to do their job. In instances where guidance and training was insufficient, respondents described learning from discussion with peers, word of mouth, sharing workarounds, and shadowing or observing colleagues. Although some highlighted this positively, others said it had often led to inconsistent working practices. Some respondents felt a personal responsibility to seek training and keep themselves up to date. However, others were uncomfortable relying on self-directed or peer learning in the absence of more formal training or support.

“I have extensive experience in my profession and actively gather feedback to continuously improve.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Things sometimes change without warning and the system sometimes throws things out that don't make sense, but overall we all share knowledge and get through it all together.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I feel confident in my job role but feel a lot of this is self-taught, through experience, or through word-of-mouth amongst colleagues. Each person does the job differently, but I feel the job is often more about 'learning on the job' rather than learning before you carry out the role which can leave you feeling apprehensive [...] as there is not often guidance in place to confirm your solution to a problem or query for example. The role is full of 'workarounds' where people have come up with temporary solutions to problems.” [Staff respondent](#)

Some comments mentioned specific training or learning needs. This commonly included training to do with delivering Social Security Scotland's service for clients such as specific benefits, payments, re-determinations and appeals, and administration procedures for specific case types. Some said they would benefit from more training in accessibility, including neurodiversity and how to support colleagues. There were also calls for training on internal systems and technology, manager training, other role-

specific training, and more learning about the organisational structure and what different departments do.

“I feel that my current knowledge is enough to do my job, although additional technical training would help to deliver better quality.” [Staff respondent](#)

“[...] we as client advisors are not given enough training. We have limited time away from telephony in Adult Disability Payment and due to this it is very difficult to ensure that I am fully up-to-date with guidance. Other areas which are important for client services, such as payments, re-determinations and appeals especially I feel that we are underprepared to deal with due to no focus on our training.”

[Staff respondent](#)

“Due to policy/guidance changes in the review space it has felt that everything has been turned on its head. It is a side step to the training we had. I have found my confidence in the decisions I make has been eroded. I have asked for retraining but it seems that is not something that is available. Whilst we have excellent staff trying to interpret guidance to train others, it has left us all with second-hand interpretation of the guidance. Training needs to come from learning and development, either in person and/or [online].” [Staff respondent](#)

6.4 Support for staff

The staff survey asked all respondents to rate the support they'd received from their line manager during 2024-25 (Table 15). If respondents had multiple line managers over the course of the year, they were asked to focus on their most recent one.

Table 15: Thinking about the past year, how would you rate the support you've had from your line manager?²⁵

All staff respondents
(Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,562; in 2023-24 = 1,484; in 2024-25 = 997)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Very good	59%	56%	59%
Good	23%	23%	21%
Sometimes good, sometimes poor	14%	15%	13%
Poor	2%	3%	4%
Very poor	1%	2%	3%

Most (80%) respondents rated support from their line manager as good or very good (compared to 82% in 2022-23 and 79% in 2023-24). Around one in ten (13%) said support had been mixed. A small proportion (7%) said they'd had poor or very poor support from their line manager (compared to 3% in 2022-23 and 6% in 2023-24).

Positive comments said line managers were supportive, approachable and understanding of both work and personal issues. Some described having frequent and good quality communication with their line manager, including regular one to ones, and felt they were always available and willing to help. Other respondents said they felt empowered by managers including having the right level of autonomy within their roles and feeling confident to provide ideas and feedback. Several said line managers had supported them with professional development including applying for and gaining promotions. Some also gave specific examples of when line managers had been supportive of personal circumstances and it was clear that this support had significantly improved working experiences for respondents.

²⁵ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

“My manager is very responsive, caring and friendly. I get good feedback from them and always feel free to go to them for advice, which is always useful.”

Staff respondent

“My line manager is exceptional. With her I have the perfect balance of having the autonomy I need to do my job as well as knowing that if I need support it will always be there. She will often help us pursue answers to questions which can impact the way something is done across the whole [of Social Security Scotland]. She is able to appropriately challenge the status quo when this is required. On a personal level she is kind and respectful.”

Staff respondent

“I am lucky enough to have had two line managers this year. Both are very supportive of me and my family caring responsibilities. In both teams we had a meeting at least every two days to cascade updates and share best practice. I needed a fixed late shift and office days for caring responsibilities - this was accommodated without any hassle to me at all. Our monthly one to ones are always positive and I was glad to achieve a promotion which was the goal we set last year.”

Staff respondent

Where respondents described mixed experiences, comments often said line managers had the right technical knowledge but lacked the right experience, skills or training for effective people management or vice versa. Many felt line managers were trying their best but were being let down by issues like: high workloads, poor communication from more senior colleagues, and problems with internal procedures and policies. A few respondents believed Social Security Scotland’s overall culture and aims had shifted recently to become more focused on processes and targets and were concerned about the impact this was having on line managers’ ability to do their jobs. In other mixed experiences, some respondents felt they would benefit from in-person interactions with their line manager in offices but that organisation-wide travel restrictions had prevented this.

“Operational pressures mean that it can be difficult to have or give support, even protected time has to be sacrificed if there are competing urgent/critical priorities - but it doesn't mean that line managers don't care, they are just doing the best they can to get through sometimes.”

Staff respondent

“My previous line manager was very knowledgeable with guidance etc. but not very understanding in terms of your own personal needs. My current is very understandable in terms of your own personal needs but not very knowledgeable with guidance etc.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have a great manager, but due to being based in a different office, there are times when she is not aware of things due to not being there in person. She comes to the office we are based in as often as Finance say she is allowed a train ticket.”
[Staff respondent](#)

Respondents with negative experiences talked about a range of issues, including: poor communication; feeling micromanaged; unreasonable workloads; additional needs not being met; not receiving feedback on performance; not getting support or time for development; and poorly managed change within their team. Some respondents said these issues had led to stress and burn out. Some felt their manager lacked both the technical knowledge and management skills required for their role. A few had been without a line manager for prolonged periods of time and had not received support or check-ins from other managers. There were also comments about receiving no communication from line managers when absent from work. Some comments mentioned bullying, unfair treatment and exclusionary behaviours by managers. A few respondents said they tried to provide ideas and feedback but these weren't taken on board, whilst others didn't feel comfortable to provide feedback within their team. Many noted inconsistencies in how policies and processes were applied by different managers across the organisation.

“Micromanaging, double-checking I'm doing my work, unnecessarily questioning me about what I'm doing - no trust at all.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Sometimes my manager will expect me to do extra tasks without first discussing whether I have capacity to do so, or will sometimes set an unrealistic deadline without discussing if it is actually achievable.” [Staff respondent](#)

“[...] Faced discrimination, inappropriate behaviour, and microaggressions on the grounds of being disabled. [...]” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have had no monthly conversations with my manager since the middle of last year. For the mid year review, I had to type this up myself with my rating just being added and uploaded, with no further discussion or agreement. Important information is not relayed to us promptly putting clients at risk of poor service or incorrect decisions. They appear to be in endless meetings but we never hear of the outcomes of these. We never have team meetings. Unless I approach them, I can go a full week without any engagement with them. I do not feel valued at all.”

Staff respondent

Respondents were asked whether they’d had any additional needs or accessibility requirements at work in 2024-25 (Table 16).

Table 16: In the past year, have you personally had any additional needs or accessibility requirements at work?²⁶

All staff respondents

(Number of respondents in 2023-24 = 1,484; in 2024-25 = 986)

Response options	2023-24	2024-25
Yes	33%	40%
No	67%	60%

Four in ten (40%) respondents answered ‘yes’ (compared to 33% in 2023-24).²⁷ The survey asked respondents who answered ‘yes’ whether they told anyone about their needs or requirements (Table 17) and, if so, whether they got what they needed (Table 18).

²⁶ The wording of this question has been adapted slightly compared to the wording used in 2023-24 to add the word ‘personally’. In 2023-24 the question was worded as: ‘In the past year, have you had any additional needs or accessibility requirements at work?’ It should be noted that this change could have impacted responses for this question and the follow up questions of ‘Did you tell anyone about your needs or requirements?’ (Table 17) and ‘Did you get what you needed?’ (Table 18) for 2024-25.

²⁷ Full figures were not reported for this question in 2022-23. Comparable findings are therefore only available for 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Table 17: Did you tell anyone about your needs or requirements?

Staff respondents who had additional needs or accessibility requirements at work
(Number of respondents in 2023-24 = 488; in 2024-25 = 395)

Response options	2023-24	2024-25
Yes	98%	98%
No	2%	2%

Table 18: Did you get what you needed?

Staff respondents who told someone about their needs or requirements
(Number of respondents in 2023-24 = 476; in 2024-25 = 386)

Response options	2023-24	2024-25
Yes	58%	57%
Partially	28%	30%
Not yet	8%	4%
No	6%	9%

Of the respondents who had additional needs or accessibility requirements, almost all (98%) told someone about their needs (the same proportion as 2023-24). Over half (57%) said they got what they needed (compared to 58% in 2023-24). Three in ten (30%) said their needs were partially met. A smaller proportion said their needs had not been met yet (4%) or not met at all (9%).

Respondents were asked to comment on their experience of raising additional needs or support requirements at work. Often, support and adjustments were needed due to disabilities, physical injuries, and health conditions including mental health conditions. A few respondents mentioned needs related to neurodiversity. Some respondents said personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities and bereavement had prompted a need for support.

Some respondents had faced no issues when discussing their requirements with managers and relevant colleagues. They said line managers were compassionate and supportive and felt understood when discussing their needs.

“I have needed working flexibility to manage [symptom] and appointments due to a couple of long-term health conditions. My manager has listened to me and supported me the best he could and pointed me to additional support, which I have taken advantage of. I know my needs change and I know my manager will support me as they do.” [Staff respondent](#)

“My line manager listened to my needs and together we discussed how to address this. My situation has greatly improved.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I had to take unexpected leave at short notice... I was given support, over and above of what I expected... [the situation was] a bit more tolerable knowing I have my manager’s support.” [Staff respondent](#)

Other respondents highlighted concerns about discussing their needs such as feeling like a “nuisance” or a “burden”, that needs weren’t listened to or taken seriously, and that they had to justify or evidence their needs in order to get support. Some comments described the emotional toll of discussing sensitive or personal issues which weren’t always understood and sometimes required repeated conversations with multiple colleagues. Some said managers needed a better understanding of the impact of disability or other health conditions. Of the few who hadn’t told anyone about their needs, one respondent said they found discussing their needs awkward and uncomfortable.

“Feeling like we [disabled staff] are a burden and has impacted morale.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have found the process really intrusive and have been asked lots of personal information about my circumstances that other members of the team have not needed to share.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I think what could be improved is that senior leaders need to understand that these are very private and as long as they are agreed with your direct manager you should not have to explain yourself or your adjustments to other managers. This can be very upsetting when you are challenged on why you may need adjustments and not something you might want to share.” [Staff respondent](#)

Comments showed that respondents had requested or received various forms of support, including:

- Occupational Health assessments, employee passports, and carers passports;
- Equipment for home- and office-working e.g. customised chairs and rise and fall desks;
- Assistive software;
- Flexible working such as changes to working pattern or location;
- Support to attend an office e.g. disabled car parking or personal evacuation plans.

Those who got what they needed often credited line managers as being proactive and prompt in helping them to get the right adjustments. Some respondents reported a good experience of completing an employee passport and having support put in place as a result. There were also positive comments about health and safety colleagues, saying they had responded quickly and effectively to requests. Some respondents who had a good experience highlighted how flexible working policies had been an important form of support, particularly those with health conditions and caring responsibilities.

“Process of obtaining employee passport has been good and adapted as conditions changed.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Due to being a carer for my [relative] in a palliative situation my line manager supported me with flexibility of office attendance. This enabled me to work from home and be there for my [relative]. I attended when I could and my manager put trust in me to do as much as I could.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Health and safety team were very quick to help.” [Staff respondent](#)

Other respondents described issues with accessing and receiving support. Issues included a lack of clarity about the types of support available or who to contact for particular needs; long waits for measures to be put in place; inconsistencies in support across different managers and business areas; feeling employee passports were “ignored”; and needs being frequently questioned or reviewed. Some said their requests were not actioned at all, even in cases when evidence was supplied by Occupational Health assessments. Others said adjustments to working pattern or work tasks had been implemented on a temporary basis but would have preferred they were permanent. Some respondents mentioned issues with office adjustments such as equipment going missing, issues with the office environment, or insufficient support in place for personal evacuation plans. There were a small number of comments from respondents who said business needs were prioritised over the needs of staff.

“I feel there could be better guidance about who to contact for equipment etc. [...]”
Staff respondent

“My manager has always been incredibly supportive regarding any adjustments I require. However, I still feel there is this attitude of 'adjustments aren't meant to be permanent' which I find absurd considering most disabilities are, in fact, permanent. This doesn't come from my manager, but from [HR] who I feel are not considerate and empathetic enough towards colleagues with disabilities.” Staff respondent

“My passport was completely ignored by my line manager. I was forced to change working patterns due to my agreed reasonable adjustments being ignored.”
Staff respondent

“[Not knowing if personal evacuation personnel are available] makes me feel rejected and of no consequence. I have to arrange this myself outside my working hours regularly.” Staff respondent

Suggestions to improve included better training and guidance for managers on supporting staff, including understanding and supporting disabled staff; applying and adapting workplace policies for different circumstances; and supporting staff with employee passports. There were also calls for clearer information on what support is currently available and a wider range of available adjustments to meet different needs. Some suggested having a self-referral process for staff to contact trained teams who provide support. Respondents said this would minimise the need to share personal information with direct colleagues and line managers and help staff to understand the

full range of available support. One respondent said this would be particularly helpful for staff who are experiencing issues with their line manager. Some respondents said that Social Security Scotland could do better as an employer in their overall approach to providing support for staff, particularly disabled staff.

“Managers should be given more guidance on using their discretion in [supporting staff] and not blindly follow policy.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I found getting information on this was quite hard. For example, I was asked what reasonable adjustments I would require, I found this really hard to answer due to not knowing what was available to me in the way of options. Having dedicated people trained to carry out Employee Passports etc who would be able to listen to and look at the difficulties you face and make suggestions as to what options would be available to help would work better than this being tasked to your line manager.”

[Staff respondent](#)

“More information on what reasonable adjustments are available as I had to look externally for information regarding this.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I feel self-referral for additional support needs (such as equipment or various software) would be better as at times I do not want people to know about my conditions and how it affects me.” [Staff respondent](#)

6.5 Inclusive communication

This section looks at staff respondents' experiences of inclusive communication within their role. Staff survey respondents were asked about their experience of delivering a service based on inclusive communication (Table 19). By 'delivering a service', we mean the services staff deliver to colleagues, clients and partners and the way they do their jobs across all areas of the organisation.

Table 19: In the past year, how easy or difficult has it been to deliver a service based on inclusive communication?²⁸

All staff respondents
(Number of respondents = 992)

Response options	
Very easy	22%
Easy	36%
Neither easy nor difficult	26%
Difficult	12%
Very difficult	3%

Over half (58%) of respondents said it was easy or very easy to deliver a service based on inclusive communication. Around a quarter (26%) said 'neither' and 16% found it difficult or very difficult. The wording of this question was changed for the 2024-25 survey.²⁹ Comparable figures for previous years are therefore not available for these findings. They will be included in future reports where possible.

The survey asked staff respondents how easy or difficult it had been to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs (Table 20). By this, we mean how staff communicate internally at work with colleagues rather than externally with clients and partner organisations.

²⁸ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

²⁹ The 2023-24 survey asked 'In the past year, how confident have you felt to deliver a service based on inclusive communication?'. After consulting with Social Security Scotland's Inclusive Communication colleagues, this was changed to 'In the past year, how easy or difficult has it been to deliver a service based on inclusive communication?' for the 2024-25 survey.

Table 20: In the past year, how easy or difficult has it been to communicate with colleagues in a way that feels inclusive of your needs?³⁰

All staff respondents
 (Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,555; in 2023-24 = 1,487; in 2024-25 = 996)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Very easy	43%	37%	37%
Easy	37%	36%	37%
Neither easy nor difficult	13%	17%	16%
Difficult	6%	7%	8%
Very difficult	1%	2%	3%

Around three-quarters (73%) of respondents found it easy or very easy to communicate with colleagues in a way that felt inclusive of their own needs (compared to 80% in 2022-23 and 74% in 2023-24). One in ten (10%) said it was difficult or very difficult and 16% said ‘neither’.

Respondents were asked to comment on their experience of delivering a service and communicating with colleagues in an inclusive way. Some respondents talked about their own experiences of inclusive communication, some talked about delivering inclusive communication to clients, and others talked more generally about communication within the organisation. Some simply stated that inclusive communication is part of what they do, either as part of their personal approach, or as integral to their job role.

“My role ensures that I am very aware of the need to be inclusive in all aspects of my work.” **Staff respondent**

“Being kind to others requires no effort most of the time.” **Staff respondent**

³⁰ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

Respondents made positive comments about the support they had received from their manager and colleagues in meeting their individual needs, for example support with dyslexia and adjustments to the office environment. Email and Microsoft Teams were frequently cited as effective and timely channels for communicating with colleagues.

“I have found my colleagues/manager very inclusive and easy to talk to. When in operations, it could be difficult to hear on the phones so communicating was stressful due to hearing issues.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I haven't experienced any issues regarding being able to contact any colleagues I've needed. All have been friendly and usually [respond] in a reasonable timescale depending on demands. Teams and email have been the easiest routes.” [Staff respondent](#)

“In all the teams I have been part of, my experience has been very good. I have never seen anyone not being allowed to share their views, or put recommendations for improvement to management. Everyone is treated equally.” [Staff respondent](#)

Where support was lacking, respondents mentioned a range of issues. Some talked about their specific needs not being met, such as having difficulty hearing in noisy work environments, requests for information in writing not being met, and accessibility software taking a long time to get, and then not working well.

“I have a hearing impairment, it makes it difficult for me to hear in noisy or busy environments, even in busy Teams calls with lots of colleagues. I can also find it hard to speak in these sorts of calls, particularly if people are talking across each other.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Getting [accessibility software] in here is an issue in the first place as it is a long-winded process and then you have the lovely experience of it not working half of the time, to the point where there is a Social Security Scotland chat of [software] users to see if there are any fixes to the issues. This chat has no one in IT, it is all members of Social Security Scotland client delivery.” [Staff respondent](#)

Others talked about challenges communicating with colleagues, other departments, or senior colleagues. This included challenges related to hybrid working, or being asked

not to talk in the office, as well as reliance on acronyms and jargon making communication inaccessible.

“We do not have regular team meetings where all members of the team are present, meaning that you have to rely on catching up with others where you have time and there is no real opportunity to discuss things fully, or share working practices or ideas with your colleagues.” [Staff respondent](#)

“At times communicating can be quite difficult. I feel there isn't sometimes the time given to properly discuss activity and there's an overreliance on emails and Teams messages. I feel there can be too many channels to communicate, meaning perhaps important information being lost or missed. Sometimes small, irrelevant things are given time when bigger issues are ignored.” [Staff respondent](#)

Turning now to comments related to delivering inclusive communication for clients. These largely focused on ways in which processes made it difficult to deliver for clients. Many respondents said that the absence of email communication posed a significant limitation on inclusive communication. This was particularly in terms of speed, client preferences, and accessibility needs, such as for deaf clients or those experiencing anxiety. Respondents also highlighted that inbound email would reduce call volumes and allow clients who work during the day to contact the service.

“Not being able to email/text clients [about] specific things is an issue. If we are asking clients to upload information, it would be improved significantly by being able to send them a link as those who struggle to use technology often require this.” [Staff respondent](#)

“We say to clients that we offer reasonable adjustments for their preferred communication method but always reject email as a communication method, even if that's the only way a client can communicate, and they then need a representative because they are unable to communicate in a way that meets their needs... We need to start offering a more modern communication method fit for modern times in 2025 like email or, if not email, a client portal similar to the Universal Credit journal. Webchat can be improved or even replaced if we have an online journal/portal-type communication method because even on webchat many clients are told to call up even when they can't. We don't always check and honour clients' communication needs and that needs to improve.” [Staff respondent](#)

Some comments discussed specific processes for communicating with clients who communicate in different ways. While some highlighted the translation and interpretation processes as good, others said that interpreters were sometimes unavailable, rude, or did not show up, and described the translation process as slow and sometimes low quality, with limited training and knowledge among staff for both.

“An example of service-based inclusive communications is the translation services that we currently use. I believe these are great and I have used them for various languages.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Arranging interpreters has sometimes been an issue - they're not available or haven't turned up for the appointment.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Difficult to deliver translations or alternative formats. Often requires delaying decision letters, complicated requests etc.” [Staff respondent](#)

Issues were also mentioned with processes for other formats, for example large print, as well as inadequate training and guidance on accessibility. In many cases, the guidance was described as not fit for purpose or out of date.

A handful of comments pointed to specific accessibility gaps, such as for clients who communicate with pictures, Deaf clients, translation for some specific letters, and working with clients with low literacy.

“In our team, when we send letters to clients with the requirement that they have large print letters, we are under instructions to make the letters Arial font, size 16, and entirely bolded.

[...] It was also raised by another team member that upon accessing letter templates in [the internal system] (while trying to find exactly this guidance) they can see that another team have set the letters up in font 18 with headers bolded and underlined. While our instructions are font 16, no underlining. And now apparently no bolding either.

At the time, we did directly ask why there was no consistency for large print letters.

We were not answered.” [Staff respondent](#)

"[...] Regarding delivering a service - system issues and a lack of training/guidance means clients rarely receive the alternative communications they've requested, such as large print or translated letters. If clients indicate on a form that they don't want phone calls, this doesn't show up on [case system], so unless you scan through all previous forms to check, it's missed. Many applications also indicate that the client may need support, but unless they've engaged with Local Delivery during their first review, if I'm correct, this means they're not eligible to receive help from Local Delivery during future reviews etc. This is not only unfair to the client, it also becomes difficult for staff to engage with them and get the information we need."

Staff respondent

Some respondents used this question to discuss communication more generally, with both colleagues and clients. Respondents most often mentioned communication within the organisation in relation to processes, guidance and training, as well as issues around systems, workload.

On communication issues around guidance and training, comments noted concerns about out of date guidance and poor management of changes to guidance, including changes not being communicated in a systematic or consistent way. Respondents said that this, alongside a lack of training on various aspects of the role and inconsistencies in the timing of training, had led to differences in communications and approaches between teams and affected the quality of service they could deliver.

"I feel that the communications in Social Security Scotland are one of the main things that lets us down. For example guidance changing and being updated, but not advising the users of this." Staff respondent

Whilst some respondents said their team worked in isolation and felt this hindered cross-organisation communication, others noted they found it easy to engage with other departments.

"The wider business does not speak to each other effectively, we all work in pockets making it difficult for staff and clients." Staff respondent

"I find it very difficult finding the right person to answer my query. It is pot luck whether or not you find someone who is a) willing to help you and b) the right person to help you." Staff respondent

“It is very easy to talk to other members of staff within other departments. All staff have been professional and helpful.” **Staff respondent**

Some respondents expressed that they don't have time for good communication with clients as they felt under pressure to work harder and hit targets rather than deliver a good service for their clients.

“[...] It has now been proposed that we use inbound hold instead of wrap to take notes, which would only make waiting times for calls longer and confuse/frustrate clients. I believe this is so our stats look better. Managers check in on longer wraps/chats under the illusion of making sure you are doing okay and don't require help, however it always feels like an urge to hurry up whatever you are doing. We cannot provide a good, consistent service to our clients if we feel we are constantly in a rush to end each conversation and move on to the next. Not to mention, there are so many flaws with [the case system] which make it much more difficult to perform our jobs.” **Staff respondent**

Staff respondents who interact with clients in any way as part of their role (either to use the service or in other ways) were asked how confident they felt to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways (Table 21).

Table 21: Over the past year, how confident have you felt to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways?³¹

Staff respondents who interact with clients in any way as part of their role (Number of respondents = 820)

Response options	
Very confident	35%
Confident	53%
Not confident	9%
Not at all confident	3%

³¹ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

The majority (89%) of respondents felt confident or very confident to interact effectively with clients who understand information and express themselves in different ways. Around one in ten (11%) didn't feel confident to do this.³²

In positive written comments, respondents commonly said communicating with clients was a crucial part of their role and they felt confident to meet a range of individual needs. Many felt their confidence came from professional experience gained in their current job or in previous roles. Some said their own personal experience of communicating in different ways had helped them to be understanding and empathetic towards clients' needs. Many viewed it as a personal priority to listen to and meet individual requirements in order to treat clients with dignity, fairness and respect. For example, a few said they proactively checked clients' communication requirements at the start of an interaction, or ahead of time where possible, in order to make the experience as smooth as possible for the client. Some said training had helped them feel skilled and knowledgeable in this area, with a few noting that training had recently improved. Some mentioned they had the tools they needed to meet clients' needs, such as translation and interpretation services.

"I primarily do home visits. Every client is different and I always need to be kind, empathetic, and aware of this." [Staff respondent](#)

"I went through re-training with regards to telephone communication last year, it was better than the original training I received when I joined Social Security Scotland." [Staff respondent](#)

"[...] I do my best to tailor the approach to each individual and their needs, and I feel that within Social Security Scotland we are mindful of this, and have tools in place to facilitate." [Staff respondent](#)

³² Previous surveys asked this question of staff who worked directly with clients to use the service, or who would work directly with clients in future. The survey was changed in 2024-25 to instead ask this question of all staff respondents who interact with clients in any way as part of their role (either to use the service or in other ways). Due to this change, it isn't possible to provide comparable findings from previous years. It can be noted that findings were relatively similar in previous years though, with 87% selecting confident or very confident in 2022-23 and 89% in 2024-25. 13% didn't feel confident in 2022-23 and 11% didn't feel confident in 2023-24. However, this trend can only be noted anecdotally due to the change in respondents being asked this question.

“This is my job, this is what I'm trained to do and I hope that I do it very well.”

Staff respondent

Respondents who lacked confidence commonly said this was due to insufficient training, experience and support in using communication systems, tools and techniques, including the use of telephony as a whole. Some respondents said that the lack of training and support had led them to feel anxious about interacting directly with clients, particularly where clients had specific communication needs. Comments mentioned other issues including: difficulty using interpreters and translated letters; uncertainty over how to simplify wording in decision letters; and not having access to the right tools or resources to meet all communication needs.

“Very little training in terms of actual telephone engagement and little to no real training around dealing with clients who communicate or engage differently.”

Staff respondent

“I have no experience with using expression cards, social stories etc.”

Staff respondent

“There's not many ways to communicate with clients who express themselves differently. For example, phoning someone hard of hearing or with speech difficulties, I try my best, but often panic and resort to sending letters or requesting information from their GP, which feels discriminatory. [...] Also, we've been told to simplify our justifications to make them easier to read, but [...] we've not been given any guidance on how to simplify justifications while maintaining their reasoning or transparency.” Staff respondent

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

This section is about partner and staff respondents' experiences of giving feedback, including their views on how open Social Security Scotland is to receiving feedback and making improvements. It matches up with the third section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter called 'A learning system'.

7.1 Partner experiences of giving feedback

The partner survey asked respondents whether they thought Social Security Scotland is open to and acts on feedback (Table 22).

Table 22: Partner respondent views on feedback³³

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 190-192)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know / Not applicable
Social Security Scotland is open to feedback	36%	29%	15%	19%
Social Security Scotland acts on feedback	14%	31%	24%	32%

Around a third (36%) of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland is open to feedback. 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. Around one in ten (14%) agreed or strongly agreed that the organisation acts on feedback. Around a quarter (24%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

A lower proportion of respondents agreed with these statements than in previous years. In 2022-23, 58% of respondents agreed Social Security Scotland was open to feedback with 50% agreeing in 2023-24. A higher proportion (29%) selected 'neither agree nor disagree' in 2024-25 when asked if Social Security Scotland is open to feedback than in previous years (19% in 2022-23 and 22% in 2023-24).

In 2022-23, 20% of respondents agreed that Social Security Scotland acted on feedback with 25% agreeing in 2023-24. A higher proportion (32%) selected 'don't know / not

³³ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

applicable' when asked if Social Security Scotland acts on feedback in 2024-25 than in 2022-23 (29%) and 2023-24 (23%).³⁴

In 2024-25, respondents who work in partnership with Social Security Scotland were two times more likely to agree that Social Security Scotland is open to feedback, and three times more likely to agree that feedback is acted on, compared with those who support clients. It is also worth noting that, for both statements, 'don't know / not applicable' was selected by a notably higher proportion of respondents who support clients than those who work in partnership.³⁵

In written comments, some respondents felt that Social Security Scotland was open to feedback and had a genuine aim and desire to continuously improve the service for clients. A couple of comments mentioned that this was embedded in the organisation's values, whereas others felt Social Security Scotland had an obligation to take feedback on board due to their position as an executive agency of the Scottish Government. There were a few examples of instances where Social Security Scotland had acted on the feedback provided by respondents and their colleagues. A couple of respondents said they were unsure whether their feedback had been actioned but trusted the organisation to log and listen to constructive feedback from partners.

"I believe Social Security Scotland is always looking to improve." [Partner respondent](#)

"They are obliged to do so." [Partner respondent](#)

"We have seen first hand that the feedback is actioned, and so we are quite happy even if we don't get a response or update directly." [Partner respondent](#)

"I'm not sure whether [Social Security Scotland] acted on my feedback or not. I do however think [they] take constructive feedback on board in the spirit in which it's intended." [Partner respondent](#)

³⁴ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3). It should be noted that the following clarification wording was added to this survey question in 2024-25: 'Based on any relevant experience in your role (whether you have personally given feedback or not) how much do you agree or disagree with the following...' whereas previous surveys simply asked 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following...'.

³⁵ Results tables are not included for this comparison due to small numbers.

Some respondents commented that whilst Social Security Scotland welcomed feedback, they believed it wasn't always simple or straightforward to implement changes and make improvements. Others said they were beginning to notice improvements being made, but that this had taken a long time. There were calls for Social Security Scotland to communicate more clearly and publicly about whether feedback had been actioned and, if not, the reasons for delays or lack of change.

"All organisations are open to feedback. Implementing [it] is not always easy - but if reasons were given or stated that changes are being made, it would make people think feedback is worth sending." [Partner respondent](#)

"I do not doubt that Social Security Scotland genuinely wishes to take feedback. However, it is unclear to me which feedback is acted on, and why (not). It might assist Social Security Scotland to publish feedback it has received and actioned in a specific section of its website in order to promote awareness that Social Security Scotland takes feedback seriously." [Partner respondent](#)

"I feel that action is being taken now but it has been a lengthy process."
[Partner respondent](#)

In other comments, respondents were less satisfied with Social Security Scotland's approach to feedback. Some felt that feedback from partners had not been listened to or actioned. They said the organisation as whole hadn't welcomed feedback including examples where staff were not receptive to ideas for improvement. Others felt that the organisation wanted to appear open to feedback but did not act on suggestions in practice. Some respondents said they and their colleagues had provided feedback multiple times about specific issues and were frustrated when this hadn't been acknowledged or led to change. There were calls for more engagement with partners and for a greater focus on inviting partner feedback and insights, particularly at meetings and events.

"Ask for feedback but don't change anything." [Partner respondent](#)

“I disagree that Social Security Scotland acts on feedback as there has been feedback at training sessions and through delivery teams and the information coming forward is “that’s the way it is!”. I attend an Adult Disability Payment forum through Citizens Advice Scotland and we put forward the difficulties clients face but we are still discussing the same issues so therefore I don’t believe Social Security Scotland acts on feedback very well, as changes would be made.”

Partner respondent

“Do not believe the people on the helpline are interested in feedback. However, the people answering the calls are not the ones to change how things are done.”

Partner respondent

Partner respondents were asked about their experience of providing, or wanting to provide, feedback to Social Security Scotland (Table 23).

Table 23: In the last year, have you given Social Security Scotland any feedback about how they could improve?

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 193)

Response options	
Yes, I have given feedback	35%
No, I haven’t wanted to give feedback	44%
I wanted to give feedback but don’t know how	21%

Around a third (35%) said they had given feedback. A lower proportion of respondents had given feedback than in previous years (55% in 2022-23 and 51% in 2023-24). Around a fifth (21%) said they wanted to give feedback but didn’t know how to do this (compared to 24% in 2022-23 and 20% in 2023-24).³⁶

Comments showed that respondents who provided feedback had most commonly given suggestions directly to Social Security Scotland staff, usually during online meetings, events or training sessions. Some comments described positive experiences of providing feedback where respondents felt listened to and saw their feedback actioned.

³⁶ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year’s findings (see footnote 3).

Respondents who had positive experiences commonly said they hadn't heard back directly from Social Security Scotland in response to their feedback. However, respondents said they were content enough with this because they felt their feedback didn't require a response, trusted that they would receive a response in due course, or noticed their feedback had been actioned.

"When we let Social Security [Scotland] know about the [asterisk] tick box on the Pension Age Disability Payment application, we didn't hear back after this, but it has since been updated as a result and now has a tick at that box rather than the [asterisk]." [Partner respondent](#)

"It was at the user forum I went to where I made observations about the time taken to answer phones and to process Adult Disability Payment applications, but I also had many positive things to say about the compassionate, respectful way staff treated applicants when I or clients contacted them. I didn't expect a direct response but hope my comments and those of other attendees informed the findings in some way." [Partner respondent](#)

"Feedback was provided at a recent meeting however these meetings are quarterly so no update provided yet. Hopefully will be provided at the next meeting."
[Partner respondent](#)

Other respondents said they were dissatisfied with their experience of providing feedback. Similarly to previous years, issues included feeling that feedback was dismissed, ignored or had not been acted on. Some respondents expected or were promised a response to their feedback but had experienced long delays in hearing back or had not heard back at all.

"I had a Teams meeting and expected to receive further feedback after this but to date I have heard nothing." [Partner respondent](#)

"Feedback provided at online events with suggestions being made - presenters advised they would feed this back but no changes have been made and no further contact made. The same feedback is given by at least one attendee at every event I have attended over the last year." [Partner respondent](#)

"I suggested that Citizens Advice Bureaus be provided with Change of Circumstance forms to save the client or us waiting for a long time on the phone. I received a vague negative response which did not seem to understand the point I was making or appreciate the reasons for the request." [Partner respondent](#)

"Felt ignored." [Partner respondent](#)

Those who said they wanted to give feedback but didn't know how were asked to comment on their experience. Respondents commonly said they were unaware of the feedback process or that there had been no clear channel or opportunity for them to provide feedback. A couple said they had been put off by difficulties contacting Social Security Scotland. In one response, there was concern that challenging the status quo could negatively impact clients using the service in future.

"I can't say I noticed the option before. I have had to apply for benefits in my own right and always gave feedback but as someone who works in supporting clients, I haven't noticed anywhere to provide feedback apart from through Social Security Scotland newsletters." [Partner respondent](#)

"It is very difficult to contact Social Security Scotland and get any response. I am not aware of any way other than at the end of a training session." [Partner respondent](#)

"Capacity to feedback, worry that it may impact people we are supporting in the future." [Partner respondent](#)

"There should be a simple direct link to use for feedback that is easy to find on your website without trawling through unnecessary information." [Partner respondent](#)

7.2 Staff experiences of giving feedback

The survey of staff asked respondents if they would speak up if they noticed issues in Social Security Scotland (Table 24).

Table 24: How much do you agree or disagree with the following... I would speak up if I saw something that wasn't working, or something I thought was wrong, in Social Security Scotland

All staff respondents

(Number of respondents in 2022-23 = 1,567; in 2023-24 = 1,488; in 2024-25 = 997)

Response options	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Strongly agree	43%	41%	39%
Agree	43%	39%	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	10%	11%
Disagree	4%	5%	7%
Strongly disagree	2%	5%	3%

Most (79%) staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would speak up if they saw something wasn't working or thought something was wrong in Social Security Scotland (compared to 86% in 2022-23 and 80% in 2023-24). One in ten (10%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would speak up (compared to 6% in 2022-23 and 10% in 2023-24). A similar proportion (11%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Written comments showed that many respondents felt a responsibility to raise issues and provide feedback in order to help improve Social Security Scotland as a workplace and as a public service. For some, continuous improvement was a key aspect of their daily work and they felt confident to speak up on this basis. Some emphasised the importance of challenging poor behaviours or attitudes, such as bullying and discrimination, and felt strongly about speaking up about this. A number of respondents felt supported and safe to raise issues in the organisation, particularly with their line manager and other colleagues.

"I feel empowered in my team and with my line manager, and her line manager, to speak up about potential improvements or where I don't agree with something. It may be that that thing can't be changed, but I am listened to and my opinion is considered." [Staff respondent](#)

“I have done this many times in the past and will continue to do so in the hope of improving working conditions for staff and experiences for clients.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Everyone deserves to be treated fairly and without discrimination. I would challenge any behaviour as such within [Social Security Scotland].” [Staff respondent](#)

Those who had spoken up or given feedback commonly said this was about things like: ways of working; issues with internal systems, processes and procedures; communication and support for colleagues; and problems with guidance. Respondents had usually given feedback directly to line managers, senior colleagues, or the teams responsible for certain areas of the business. A few had been involved in improvement workshops or had responded to requests for feedback about specific processes and systems. Some said their feedback was encouraged and valued and that issues were addressed quickly and effectively. There was a sense of confidence and trust among some comments that feedback was taken seriously within the organisation and often led to change. Examples of improvements based on staff feedback are presented in section 7.3.

“We have processes for raising issues through our management chain and frequent opportunities to do so.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I have brought up a couple of things I have disagreed with in the past and these were sensitive issues which were dealt with in an appropriate manner.” [Staff respondent](#)

“There have been a great deal of suggestions with regards to our processing applications on the system which we have brought [to] our manager regularly and we always get feedback so we know they're always followed through. If they ever aren't, we're generally always given clear reasoning as to why this is the case.” [Staff respondent](#)

“The suggestion was about peer support for a specific group of colleagues. It is being progressed through the correct channels. I am confident it will be implemented.” [Staff respondent](#)

However, other respondents reported negative or mixed experiences of speaking up about issues in Social Security Scotland. Many felt their concerns had been dismissed or not listened to, and that their feedback was not welcomed or acted upon. There were several instances where respondents hadn't heard back about their feedback or suggestions. Some believed there was no point in speaking up as they felt staff feedback didn't lead to change. There was frustration that some suggestions had been stuck in a backlog for a considerable amount of time. Some didn't feel safe or supported to speak up and were concerned about how it would be received. Several said they had experienced negative consequences or reactions after raising concerns or giving feedback.

"I have made quite a few suggestions about things that are not working and improvements that could be made, but it seldom seems to achieve anything - even when the fix could be relatively simple. I find that discouraging, and I am not sure about the value of flagging this up any more." [Staff respondent](#)

"We just get told things will be fed up the line with nothing ever coming back which is frustrating [...]". [Staff respondent](#)

"I have [given feedback] in the past and been told that's just the way it is and was made to feel silly for saying." [Staff respondent](#)

"I want Social Security Scotland to deliver the best, most efficient service possible for the people of Scotland. However, from current experience, any feedback that is given that differs in any way [to] the opinions/decisions of our [manager] is forcibly shut down and you are then branded "overly opinionated" and a "troublemaker". You are also on the end of petty behaviour and discrimination, bordering on bullying." [Staff respondent](#)

7.3 Improvements based on feedback

The third section of the Charter Measurement Framework asks for examples of how lessons learnt are used to improve the service.

In the staff survey, respondents mentioned a range of instances where feedback had led to improvements and changes within the organisation. Examples were often about improvements to internal processes and guidance which made it easier for staff to do their jobs.

“That the guidance on if a client enters or leaves hospital needed updated as it did not tell you to update the evidence, so the client was still being paid Adult Disability Payment when in hospital despite them calling in to let us know. This has now been updated.” [Staff respondent](#)

“Raised concerns about GP log and process has since been changed.”
[Staff respondent](#)

“A manual process was changed to an automated one, resulting in more streamlined work and removing the risk of human error.” [Staff respondent](#)

There were also changes to ways of working in certain business areas such as restructuring teams, better communication, improved HR procedures, and different approaches to the way cases are handled and processed.

“Reorganisation of [business area] to improve ways of working and team culture was adopted.” [Staff respondent](#)

“There are a number of suggestions acted on. An example is the approach to the way we work and creating a priority approach, making Special Rules for Terminal Illness cases our first one.” [Staff respondent](#)

“I raised concerns about how information was communicated within my wider team. I approached my manager and senior manager about how I thought things could be improved. I was then given the opportunity to survey staff and compile an options paper which was presented to my senior leaders and suggestions have been implemented.” [Staff respondent](#)

“[...] it was discovered that [the HR system’s] automated emails were using [recruitment] candidates’ first names rather than their 'preferred' name. This resulted in someone contacting us upset that we didn't use this. We have now found a way around this and all candidates applying for a role are now contacted using their preferred name.” [Staff respondent](#)

Other examples were to do with improving Social Security Scotland’s service for clients based on lessons and feedback. Comments mentioned changes to client communication including clearer letters, more effective telephony, and changes to contact options based on long-term feedback from clients, staff and partners. There were also improvements to application forms and how payments are made to clients.

“[...] the strides we are making to improve client contact and communications is progressing in ways that both clients and colleagues have been asking for, for a long time. [...]” [Staff respondent](#)

“A colleague had discussed our inbound telephony system and how to improve the coverage to make sure that all client calls were answered within a relatively quick time. This was implemented and extended the sessions to maintain a higher coverage of staff on inbound calls.” [Staff respondent](#)

“The letters we were sending out for [confirmation of pregnancy] forms for Low Income Benefits section for Best Start Grant. The letters were only requesting one side and the quality team had been in touch and advised we need both sides. So I asked for the letters to be changed right away as client contact would drive up and clients applications would be delayed due to only having one letter to send which is not requesting the full information. I brought this up at a meeting and advised this needs to be changed and the manager took this away and the letters were amended once legal were consulted.” [Staff respondent](#)

“The way in which we process large payments to clients who may lack capacity to deal with the money - checks and balances are now put in place so the money can reach the client safely.” [Staff respondent](#)

8. A Learning System: Partner experiences of things going wrong and making complaints

This chapter looks at feedback from partner respondents who said something had gone wrong during their experience with Social Security Scotland. It also looks at partner experiences of making complaints. It matches up with the third section of the Charter Measurement Framework and Our Charter ('A learning system').

8.1 Experiences of things going wrong

In the partner survey, some respondents left written comments describing things that went wrong during their experience with Social Security Scotland. Examples were commonly about problems with communication, information, and policies, processes and systems.

On communication, problems and mistakes included: partners receiving client award letters with no explanation as to why or which client the letter referred to; not hearing back about queries; and not being called back when their helpline call was disconnected. Several had given specific instructions for communicating with vulnerable clients but said Social Security Scotland had not done this effectively or consistently which led to additional problems and confusion for some clients. There were also problems with interpretation where Social Security Scotland were unable to provide interpreters for clients, and mistakes with translation where partners had received translated letters instead of the English copy.

"[...] Adult Disability Payment decision was sent out to a very vulnerable person's ex-power of attorney. It had been communicated to Social Security Scotland when the application was made that the [client] no longer wished the individual [to be] named as power of attorney [...] However, when the decision was made it was sent to the power of attorney, potentially placing the [client] at further risk of harm. [...]"

Partner respondent

"Better care should be taken before letters are issued, for instance I've had letters (as an adviser) that have been printed in Arabic which was clearly meant for the client and not the adviser." Partner respondent

Some respondents mentioned mistakes and problems to do with misleading or inaccurate information. For example, there were instances where clients had contacted Social Security Scotland to ask a question about the decision on their application and staff had advised them to submit a re-determination. This had led to a reduction in or loss of award for some clients who had not intended to challenge their award. Respondents felt staff had misled clients on these occasions and should be better trained to give clients transparent information about the re-determination process. Other

examples included: receiving incorrect or conflicting information about cases and reviews; being told application forms were lost but receiving other communication to say the form was received; and being incorrectly signposted to the Department for Work and Pensions for specific queries.

“Experience of clients calling Social Security Scotland to ask a question and ending up doing a re-determination when it was not the client's intention. Their benefit that had been awarded is lost and a lengthy process has to be gone through to get the benefit reinstated (if possible) through appeal procedures which, although not part of Social Security Scotland, take up to two years at times.” [Partner respondent](#)

“[...] I had submitted info for a client's leave to remain and when I called the [client adviser said] they had received the information but that the form was still rejected. I didn't think this made sense as the dates of when I submitted the information was not too late for it not to have been accepted. Each time I rechecked the information and highlighted my concerns, I was told the application had been rejected. A few weeks later my client received Adult Disability Payment and so it never really made sense why I was told this on the phone.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Our client (appointee) was misinformed by the helpline staff about the time limit for her daughter completing the Child Disability Payment to Adult Disability Payment form for her daughter. This resulted in Child Disability Payment stopping before Adult Disability Payment was in place. This caused additional stress to the family. [...] The emotional and financial impact created difficulties for the whole family unit and removed any independence the daughter had.” [Partner respondent](#)

Other problems were about policies, processes and systems. Many of these examples were specifically to do with the application process, including: receiving incorrect paper forms from Social Security Scotland; applications and change of circumstances forms going missing; and not being notified about lost forms and having to chase these up. There were some examples to do with inconsistent or inaccurate decision-making where it was evident that supporting information had not been fully considered. Some respondents mentioned written errors in decision letters. There were also examples where processes for terminally ill clients had gone wrong, including insensitive staff interactions and delayed outcomes on applications and change of circumstances. Other examples included: problems with the case transfer process; payments being suspended with no clear reason given; and information not being uploaded to internal systems in an accurate or timely manner.

“[The] number of cases recently that have been completed online and then 'gone missing' is concerning; same goes for paper application process; clients being asked to provide information that has already been provided during application process.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Clients are often sent decision notices with incorrect information which does not make any sense. It seems as though templates are being typed over when the previous information has not been fully removed. [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

There was mixed feedback about how Social Security Scotland had handled problems and mistakes. A few respondents said Social Security Scotland had admitted when they made mistakes, although some felt this hadn't always led to direct change or improvements. Some reported problems to staff and said issues were resolved, but others felt staff hadn't understood the problem or situation. Specific findings on partner experiences of making complaints are presented below.

“[...] [staff] have always been very friendly and helpful (and apologetic on occasions when Social Security Scotland have stuffed up).” [Partner respondent](#)

“As a third party representative with signed authorisation to act on behalf of my client, I was not able to lodge a date of claim for my client because I failed security tests which were inappropriate for me. [...] I made my views known in feedback and was pleased that someone got back to me to confirm that this should not have happened and put things right. It was a stressful experience.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I tried webchat once (never again) and got a guy who refused to admit [Social Security Scotland] had made a mistake as they had sent the client [the wrong form]. I only wanted an envelope as we downloaded and completed the appeal form. He refused to send the envelope to me but did eventually send it to the client. [...]” [Partner respondent](#)

As in previous years, many comments expressed frustration with the lack of formal escalation route to flag problems with certain cases. However, some respondents gave positive feedback about Social Security Scotland's recent escalation pilot and were hopeful that this would be implemented more widely.

“There is no escalation route for when things go wrong and we have tried all possible ways to get it corrected. This is very frustrating for me as an adviser and very frustrating and upsetting for claimants.” [Partner respondent](#)

“The team within the escalation pilot have been very helpful and we hope that this continues. Queries are answered quickly and this has been a huge benefit to our clients.” [Partner respondent](#)

8.2 Experiences of making complaints

The partner survey asked all respondents whether they thought Social Security Scotland responds to complaints effectively based on any relevant experience in their role (whether they had personally made a complaint to Social Security Scotland or not). Around four in ten respondents answered this question. Of those, around two in ten agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland responds to complaints effectively. Around three in ten disagreed or strongly disagreed and around five in ten said 'neither'.³⁷

The survey asked respondents whether they had made a complaint to Social Security Scotland (Table 25) and, if so, about their experience of complaining or wanting to complain.

Table 25: In the last year, have you made a complaint to Social Security Scotland?

All partner respondents
(Number of respondents = 194)

Response options	
Yes	22%
No	74%
I wanted to make a complaint but don't know how	4%

Less than a quarter (22%) of respondents had made a complaint whilst around three-quarters (74%) had not. 4% of respondents said they wanted to complain but didn't know how to do this. This was the first year that the survey asked partner respondents about their experience of complaints. Figures for previous years are therefore not available for this survey question. They will be included in future reports where possible if this question is asked in future surveys.

Of those who had made a complaint, around five in ten had submitted their complaint using Social Security Scotland's online feedback form and around two in ten had sent their complaint in a letter. Fewer respondents had submitted complaints by webchat or directly to staff either via phone, email or in person. Around five in ten received a response from Social Security Scotland about the complaint, or said Social Security Scotland had contacted the client directly where partners had complained on clients' behalf. Around three in ten had expected a response from Social Security Scotland but didn't hear back about their complaint. A few didn't hear back from Social Security Scotland but noticed the issue they complained about had been fixed. Around five in ten

³⁷ Fewer than 100 respondents answered this question. Results tables are therefore not included in the report.

disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with how Social Security Scotland resolved their complaint whilst around three in ten were satisfied.³⁸

In written comments, some respondents said Social Security Scotland had worked well at handling complaints and shared positive experiences of going through the complaints process either for themselves or on behalf of clients. They described the complaints process as simple and easy and said that complaints were often resolved quickly. Some respondents praised the communication they (or clients) received in response to the complaint saying it was prompt and that Social Security Scotland updated them on the progress of their issue.

“Complaints process very straightforward and the response was swift. Have been pleasantly surprised at effectiveness of complaints process. To be commended.”
Partner respondent

“I have made complaints online for clients and clients have been contacted promptly and had their issues resolved. This service is great, really helpful.”
Partner respondent

“I have made one complaint. I particularly liked the communication provided once complaint made and that it remained with the same member of staff until resolved.”
Partner respondent

Other respondents shared mixed views and experiences of complaints. Some were satisfied with the complaints process itself, or felt it had improved in recent years, but were frustrated that issues with the service hadn't been fully resolved or addressed in response to their complaint. Some mentioned mixed experiences of staff manner or knowledge when going through the complaints process. Others said the response to complaints had varied on a case by case basis, with some complaints being resolved smoothly and quickly and others not.

“I shouldn't have had to complain in the first place. The investigation and reply were quite quick which is an improvement on what it used to be. Over the last year I have had to [complain] much less than I had to in previous years which is evidence that the system is improving.” Partner respondent

³⁸ Fewer than 100 respondents answered this question. Results tables are therefore not included in the report.

“The complaints process went ok however the overall issues weren’t resolved. I felt that the contact from Social Security Scotland only wanted me to agree that everything was fine so the complaint could be closed quickly.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Online application went missing for around a year. Raised a complaint and, as expected, response was 'we will sort our procedures' which is all that could be asked for. However, clients are reporting the same issue, meaning the procedures haven't been sorted and the glitch remains, causing unnecessary delays and distress.” [Partner respondent](#)

“I have spoken to several clients who have made complaints. More than one received no reply to their complaint within the timeframe set out by Social Security Scotland, which means their issues were not addressed in a timely manner. Another client said that their complaint was resolved quickly and resolved well, so there have been instances of the complaints process working well. Another client has had to make several complaints over the course of applying for a few different benefits and has come away feeling that the process is pointless, as they felt that the members of Social Security Scotland staff they spoke to gave them conflicting information on how to move forward.” [Partner respondent](#)

Negative experiences were commonly about communication during the complaints process. This was most often to do with not receiving an initial response from Social Security Scotland in the timeframe they expected or not hearing back at all. Some described having to chase Social Security Scotland for a response to their complaint and were frustrated by this. Other issues to do with communication included: difficulty returning phone calls after receiving voicemails from Social Security Scotland about the complaint and not being included in communication to do with complaints from vulnerable clients.

“Took two letters to get a response, and when we replied we didn't get a response to that. This has now been about a year in the making.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Neither myself nor the client received any contact back regarding the complaint until my client complained to her MSP - at which point action was taken.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Complaints are not dealt with timeously and there is no attempt to engage with the welfare rights worker even when it has been explained the client is very vulnerable. We deal with people who have SEVERE mental health problems who self harm or attempt suicide and legitimately cannot deal with things like complaints and forms and in failing to engage with their support network you are absolutely failing them.”
Partner respondent

“Complained on behalf of a client and in complaint requested contact to be made with myself on client’s behalf (as requested by client). No contact was made with myself and after further calls by the client the issue eventually was resolved and was a very stressful experience for the client.” **Partner respondent**

As well as not getting an initial response from Social Security Scotland in the timeframe they expected, some also said it took a long time for their issue to be fully resolved. Other issues with the complaints process included: complaint forms being lost, feeling that Social Security Scotland did not welcome complaints, and dissatisfaction with the final outcome of a complaint.

“There were delays in the conclusion of several complaints that I made on behalf of my clients and this causes me concern for those who do not have the support of an agency to go through this process.” **Partner respondent**

“I was made to feel I was the only person complaining.” **Partner respondent**

“Complaint form lost but found when called to query [...] Complaint was answered incorrectly as complaint not read or understood properly.” **Partner respondent**

Those who said they wanted to complain but didn’t know how said this was due to issues like: being unsure of the complaints process, scepticism over whether anything would be done about the complaint, and worry from clients over whether the complaint would lead to negative consequences. A couple of respondents said they were put off complaining due to poor interactions with staff.

“I called with a client whose award had been reduced in error when transferring from Personal Independence Payment. However, despite advising of this on the phone and advising of the regulations to cover this, we were told there was no complaints procedure and the client would have to report a change of circumstances.”

Partner respondent

“I was unsure how to complain and if I ever did figure it out would it actually be looked into.” Partner respondent

“I called the helpline as an authorised person and was refused to be given any updates by the advisor, who completely ignored the fact that I was a named appointee on the form. The advisor ended the call abruptly and after waiting nearly an hour to get through I was not willing to call again.” Partner respondent

“I would have made many complaints over the past year but my clients have been afraid that it could impact their decision outcome.” Partner respondent

9. Next Steps

The research findings provide insight into the experiences of Social Security Scotland staff and partners during the year 2024-25. Findings from this report appear in the relevant sections of the [Charter Measurement Framework report](#) for this year. They will be shared across Social Security Scotland to inform continuous improvement activities.

We will shortly begin designing next year's bespoke research for the 2025-26 Charter Measurement Framework.

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

This annex looks at partner respondents’ experiences of using the Social Security Scotland website and the guidance and resources provided by Social Security Scotland for its partners. It also covers their experience of the communication channels used by Social Security Scotland to share information with partners, such as social media and events. Respondents who support clients were also asked about their experience of using the mygov.scot website to access information about Social Security Scotland’s service and benefits. The findings will be passed to National Engagement and Corporate Communications colleagues to support continuous improvement in Social Security Scotland.

10.1 Partner views on Social Security Scotland’s website, guidance and resources, and communication channels

Partner survey respondents were asked about their experience of using Social Security Scotland’s website and finding information (Table A1). Social Security Scotland’s website (socialsecurity.gov.scot) contains information about the organisation including news and events, publications, and guidance and resources for stakeholders. This website is different to the mygov.scot website which contains information about Social Security Scotland’s service and benefits, including how to apply.

Table A1: Partner respondent views on Social Security Scotland’s website³⁹

Respondents who had used Social Security Scotland’s website
(Number of respondents = 177-179)

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
It was easy to navigate the website	68%	20%	12%	1%
I was able to find the information I was looking for	73%	11%	15%	1%
The information was easy to understand	82%	9%	7%	2%

Around two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to navigate Social Security Scotland’s website (68%) and around three-quarters said they were able to find the information they were looking for (73%). A lower proportion of respondents

³⁹ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

agreed that it was easy to navigate the website and find information than in 2023-24 (75% and 80%). Over one in ten (12-15%) disagreed with these statements (compared to 10-11% in 2023-24).

Most (82%) said the information on Social Security Scotland’s website was easy to understand. Again, a lower proportion of respondents agreed with this than in 2023-24 (87%). Less than one in ten (7%) disagreed with this (compared to 4% in 2023-24).⁴⁰

Social Security Scotland’s website contains a range of public-facing guidance that is used to make decisions on applications for benefits. Partner respondents were asked whether they had used Social Security Scotland’s guidance (Table A2).

Table A2: Over the last year, have you used Social Security Scotland's guidance?

Respondents who had used Social Security Scotland’s website
(Number of respondents = 179)

Response options	
Yes	63%
No, I didn’t know the guidance existed	31%
No, the guidance is not relevant to me	6%

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents had used the guidance. Around a third (31%) didn’t know the guidance existed. This question was introduced for the first time in the 2024-25 survey. Figures for previous years are therefore not available for this survey question. They will be included in future reports where possible if this question is asked in future surveys.

⁴⁰ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year’s findings (see footnote 3). Data isn’t available for 2022-23 as these questions were introduced for the first time in the 2023-24 survey.

Respondents who had used Social Security Scotland’s guidance were asked further questions about their experience of finding and using the guidance (Table A3).

Table A3: Partner respondent views on guidance⁴¹

Respondents who had used the guidance on Social Security Scotland’s website
(Number of respondents = 112-113)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following...:	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
It was easy to find the guidance I needed on Social Security Scotland’s website	64%	17%	19%
The guidance on Social Security Scotland’s website helped to answer my questions	72%	12%	17%

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to find the guidance they needed on Social Security Scotland’s website. Almost three-quarters (72%) agreed that the guidance helped to answer their questions. Less than a fifth (17-19%) disagreed with these statements. Figures for previous years are not available as the response options were changed between 2023-24 and 2024-25.⁴² They will be included in future reports if this question is asked in future surveys.

⁴¹ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

⁴² The response options ‘I didn’t know the guidance existed’ and ‘The guidance is not relevant to me’ were removed for 2024-25 as they were no longer relevant following the introduction of the new question ‘Over the last year, have you used Social Security Scotland’s guidance?’ which precedes this question in the survey.

Social Security Scotland has a range of resources that partner organisations can share with clients such as fact sheets, leaflets and posters. Partner respondents were asked whether they had used these resources (Table A4).

Table A4: Over the last year, have you used Social Security Scotland's stakeholder resources?

All respondents
(Number of respondents = 194)

Response options	
Yes	58%
No, I didn't know the resources existed	24%
No, the resources are not relevant to me	18%

Over half (58%) of respondents had used the resources. Around a quarter (24%) didn't know the resources existed. This question was introduced for the first time in the 2024-25 survey. Figures for previous years are therefore not available for this survey question. They will be included in future reports where possible if this question is asked in future surveys.

Respondents who had used Social Security Scotland’s resources were asked how useful they found these resources (Table A5).

Table A5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following... Social Security Scotland's stakeholder resources are useful⁴³

Respondents who had used Social Security Scotland’s resources
(Number of respondents = 113)

Response options	
Strongly agree	19%
Agree	59%
Neither agree nor disagree	16%
Disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	1%

The majority (79%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland’s resources are useful. Very few (5%) disagreed with this. Figures for previous years are not available for this survey question as the response options were changed between 2023-24 and 2024-25.⁴⁴ They will be included in future reports if this question is asked in future surveys.

⁴³ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding and results in written text may differ slightly to tables where two response options have been combined for reporting purposes.

⁴⁴ The 2022-23 and 2023-24 surveys included ‘I didn’t know these resources existed’ as a response option to the question ‘How useful are the resources that are designed for clients?’. For context, this response option was selected by 27% of respondents in 2022-23 and 16% of respondents in 2023-24. However, previous findings should only be noted anecdotally as the survey was changed in 2024-25 to instead include a specific question on whether respondents knew about and had used the resources.

Social Security Scotland uses a range of communication channels to share information that is relevant to partner organisations. Partner respondents were asked how useful they have found each of the channels (Table A6).

Table A6: How much do you agree or disagree that the following communication channels have been useful to you?⁴⁵

All respondents
(Number of respondents = 187-194)

	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree	I didn't know this channel existed	This is not relevant to me
Social Security Scotland's website	72%	20%	7%	1%	1%
Events run by Social Security Scotland (online or in-person, such as benefit roll-outs, awareness sessions and workshops)	53%	22%	10%	5%	10%
Events run by other organisations where Social Security Scotland has an information stand (such as conferences)	25%	33%	5%	6%	31%
Face-to-face meetings	20%	27%	9%	9%	36%
Social media	30%	30%	11%	5%	23%
Stakeholder newsletter	52%	25%	5%	7%	11%
Media coverage	26%	41%	8%	4%	21%

⁴⁵ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Of the communication channels listed, the highest proportion (72%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Social Security Scotland's website had been useful to them. Around half agreed that the stakeholder newsletter (52%) and Social Security Scotland-run events (53%) were useful. Less than half agreed that the following channels had been useful: social media (30%), media coverage (26%), events run by other organisations where Social Security Scotland has an information stand (25%), and face-to-face meetings (20%). A notably higher proportion of respondents said these channels were not relevant to them compared to each of the other channels (between 21% and 36% compared to between 1% and 11% for other channels). Across all channels very few said they did not know the channel existed (from 1% to 9%). Figures for previous years are not available for these findings as the question wording was changed between 2023-24 and 2024-25.⁴⁶ They will be included in future reports if this question is asked in future surveys.

Respondents left mixed comments about their experience of using Social Security Scotland's website. Positive comments said information on the website was accessible and easy to understand. Some noted the design of the website, saying its layout and language made it easy to navigate and find information. Others felt the layout was overwhelming and complex which made it difficult to find the information they were looking for. Some said they had to contact Social Security Scotland directly for advice and guidance instead. Some respondents said they used Google instead of the website to navigate to different pages and felt the website was poorly designed for first-time users. For example, some highlighted a lack of clear direction on the homepage about how to claim and said contact information was difficult to find. Suggestions to improve the website included: having clear links to relevant legislation and regulations; direct access to easy read documents about each benefit and how to apply; and posting public updates about waiting times for decisions across different benefits.

"This is actually one of the better websites from the point of view of accessibility and navigation. All of the information is readily available, the site is user-friendly, and I think that you have pitched the language at just the right level to allow both service-users and professionals to interact at the required level." [Partner respondent](#)

"There are no waiting times published for the decisions on applications. We require this to advise our clients and for the clients to access." [Partner respondent](#)

⁴⁶ The 2022-23 and 2023-24 partner surveys asked 'How useful have you found the following communication channels?'. After consulting with Social Security Scotland's Communications colleagues, this wording of this question was changed to 'Over the past year, how much would you agree or disagree that the following communication channels have been useful to you?' for the 2024-25 survey.

“Sometimes it takes a long time to scroll through all the topics which are connected to the search bar, even when this is filtered through Guidance for example.”

Partner respondent

Respondents were asked to comment on their experience of using Social Security Scotland’s guidance, resources and communication channels. Positive comments said online resources were helpful and easy to navigate. Respondents mentioned specifically being able to print off guidance in different languages to suit diverse groups of clients. Others mentioned being able to share updates on Facebook amongst their clients and using guidance to inform their own workshops and focus groups.

“I regularly share updates / information from Facebook / email resources with our service users. We have also had workshops in our charity hub offering advice for our service users. All of this has been very beneficial.”

Partner respondent

Other respondents commented that some of Social Security Scotland’s resources were not always accessible for people with limited digital skills. Respondents who had attended online information sessions found these were delivered too quickly with limited time to interact or ask questions and made the suggestion of an in-person seminar option. Other suggestions included: better search functions in guidance and resources to make information easier to find; printed resources made more widely available to share amongst clients; transcripts of webchat conversations; and to work more collaboratively with partner organisations to co-design Social Security Scotland’s communications materials before implementation.

“Resources such as decision making guidance used to be easier to access but now have to go looking for them. Not sure if this was done purposefully or for whichever reason.”

Partner respondent

“[I] attended an online information session and found it to be too quick, not enough time to interact, ask questions. Although they do send the slides, there was not enough face to face time. [I] receive the newsletter and this is informative for updates, arranged seminars etc, but would prefer to have at least one face to face seminar, where we can meet and talk directly.”

Partner respondent

10.2 Partner views on the mygov.scot website

Partner survey respondents who support clients were asked about their experience of using the mygov.scot website and finding information (Table A7). Mygov.scot is a Scottish Government-run website. Although Social Security Scotland is not directly responsible for this website, it has important information about Social Security Scotland's service and benefits, including how to apply, and is in place to help clients and partners access the service.

Table A7: Partner respondent views on the mygov.scot website⁴⁷

Respondents who support clients
(Number of respondents = 161-163)

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
It was easy to navigate the website	71%	13%	15%	-
I was able to find the information I was looking for	78%	10%	11%	-
The information was easy to understand	78%	12%	9%	-

Just under three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to navigate the mygov.scot website (71%) and over three-quarters said they were able to find the information they were looking for (78%). A lower proportion of respondents agreed that it was easy to navigate the mygov.scot website and find information than in 2023-24 (76% and 79%). Just over one in ten (between 11-15%) disagreed with these statements (compared to 6-10% in 2023-24). Over three-quarters (78%) said the information on the mygov.scot website was easy to understand. A slightly lower proportion of respondents agreed with this than in 2023-24 (80%). Around one in ten (9%) disagreed with this (compared to 5% in 2023-24).⁴⁸

Respondents were asked to comment on their experience of using the mygov.scot website. There were mixed comments about how the website was laid out. Some respondents found the layout simple and easy to follow and said finding information was easy. Others said it was difficult to find the information they were looking for.

⁴⁷ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

⁴⁸ Figures from previous years are not included in tables for partner findings and are not directly comparable with this year's findings (see footnote 3).

Respondents highlighted that having to create an account to sign up was a potential barrier for some clients applying for benefits. Issues with mygov.scot accounts included clients forgetting or struggling to reset passwords and the login button being difficult to locate on the website. Respondents expressed their desire for a separate website or webpages for partners to use with clients and used Shelter Scotland as an example of a website with this capability.

“Easy to navigate, well set out.” [Partner respondent](#)

“The mygov.scot website is not easy to navigate, especially when trying to assist clients to make use of it in order to access the various benefit applications. There appears to be various ways you can reach the main page, either from the link on how to apply for Adult Disability Payment or directly. This is rather confusing for people and it could be much simpler and easy to reach, navigate, and understand its purpose.” [Partner respondent](#)

“Usually in this website several times in a month. Sometimes difficult when helping clients sign in to their mygov.scot my account - should have a bigger link to this somewhere.” [Partner respondent](#)

11. Annex B: About the partner survey respondents

This Annex presents a summary of partner respondents' background characteristics. In some cases, results have been suppressed where the number of respondents in a category is low in order to prevent disclosure. This is shown by # in the tables. To prevent the suppressed figure being calculated from other values shown, the next smallest category has also been suppressed in the table. This has been done in cases where there was a risk of respondent disclosure.

Table B1: Which of the following best describes the way you engage with Social Security Scotland?

Response options	All respondents (Number of respondents = 195)
I work with clients / potential clients of Social Security Scotland (for example with applications and finding information)	75%
I work in partnership with Social Security Scotland on behalf of my organisation (for example as part of the Operational Reference Group or attending online or in-person events)	7%
Both of the above	18%

Table B2: Over the past year, have you engaged with Social Security Scotland in any of the following ways?*

Response options	All respondents (Number of respondents = 193)
I have interacted directly with Social Security Scotland staff (for example with Local Delivery colleagues)	60%
I have attended an event run by Social Security Scotland	51%
I have sent a query or requested information / data from Social Security Scotland	51%
I have received resources from Social Security Scotland	46%
I have attended an event run by another organisation where Social Security Scotland was present (such as conferences)	29%
My organisation ran an event which Social Security Scotland attended	#
I am a member of the Operational Reference Group	#
I have engaged with Social Security Scotland in another way ⁴⁹	30%

* Respondents could select more than one option

Suppressed due to low numbers

⁴⁹ It should be noted that some respondents selected 'Other' and left written comments that overlapped with the other categories for this question. For example, some respondents described the various ways they had engaged with Social Security Scotland staff.

Table B3: Organisation type*

Response options	All respondents (Number of respondents = 194)
Third Sector or Charitable Organisation or Advice Provider	64%
Local Government – welfare rights	22%
Other Local Government (health and social care partnership, benefits and revenues, social services)	6%
Other Government Department (for example the Scottish Government, UK Government, or Department for Work and Pensions)	#
NHS or Health Profession	5%
School or Further/Higher Education	#
Other Public Sector	#
Social Landlord / Housing Association	5%
Other	4%

* Respondents could select more than one option

Suppressed due to low numbers

Table B4: Does your organisation primarily offer advice, support or information to a specific client group?*

Response options	All respondents (Number of respondents = 173)
Disabled people	86%
People with health conditions (including mental health conditions)	85%
Carers (including kinship carers)	79%
People on low incomes	77%
People of State Pension age	75%
People aged 16 to 24	68%
Minority ethnic groups	63%
Homeless people	63%
Care Experienced people	60%
LGBTI communities	59%
Veterans	56%
Gypsy / Traveller / Roma / Showman / Showwoman groups	48%
Other	14%

* Respondents could select more than one option

Table B5: How many people are employed in your organisation including voluntary staff?

Response options	All respondents (Number of respondents = 194)
2 to 4	#
5 to 24	23%
25 to 49	23%
50 to 99	17%
100 to 249	#
Over 250	19%
Don't know / Not applicable	11%

Suppressed due to low numbers

12. Annex C: About the staff survey respondents

This Annex presents a summary of staff respondents' demographic and background characteristics. In some cases, results have been suppressed where the number of respondents in a category is low in order to prevent disclosure. This is shown by # in the tables. To prevent the suppressed figure being calculated from other values shown, the next smallest category has also been suppressed in the table. This has been done in cases where there was a risk of respondent disclosure.

Table C1: Gender

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 990)
Women	58%
Men	31%
Other	#
Prefer not to say	#

Suppressed due to low numbers

Table C2: Age

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 991)
16 to 24	#
25 to 34	20%
35 to 44	25%
45 to 54	24%
55 to 64	18%
65 or over	#
Prefer not to say	11%

Suppressed due to low numbers

Table C3: Ethnicity⁵⁰

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 986)
White groups	89%
Minority ethnic groups	5%
Prefer not to say	7%

⁵⁰ Results in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means results in tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table C4: Whether day-to-day activities are limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 990)
Yes, limited a lot	9%
Yes, limited a little	24%
No	60%
Prefer not to say	7%

Table C5: Carer status (cares for someone with a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness, or problems related to old age)

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 988)
Carer	29%
Not a carer	64%
Prefer not to say	7%

Table C6: Grade from most junior to most senior

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 987)
A-band	22%
B-band	63%
C-band	8%
Senior Civil Service	#
Other	#
Prefer not to say	#

Suppressed due to low numbers

Table C7: Working pattern (scheduled number of working hours per week)

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 992)
21 hours or less	#
Between 22 and 34 hours	12%
35 hours	81%
Prefer not to say	#

Suppressed due to low numbers

Table C8: Time in service in Social Security Scotland⁵¹

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 817)
Less than 1 year	9%
1 to 3 years	30%
3 to 5 years	44%
More than 5 years	17%

Table C9: Interaction with clients as part of job role

Response options	All respondents (number of respondents = 996)
Interacts with clients as part of job role, or will do so in future	41%
Does not interact with clients as part of job role	59%

⁵¹ On 04 February 2026 we identified and corrected an error in this table. It previously read: Less than 1 year - 31%, 1 to 3 years - 11%, 3 to 5 years - 9%, More than 5 years - 48%

13. How to access background or source data

The data collected for this report:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact ResearchRequests@socialsecurity.gov.scot for further information. This email address is for research related requests only. Any unrelated queries (e.g. benefit information) will be automatically deleted.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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ISBN: 978-1-80643-119-9