

Social Security Experience Panels - Designing the case transfer process



EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY



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Introduction

In February 2019, the Scottish Government carried out a survey, individual and group interviews with Experience Panel members to understand their views on the case transfer process from DWP to Social Security Scotland. We also asked Experience Panels members what Social Security Scotland can do to make the transfer from DWP as stress free as possible.

This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panel programme of research. The work will inform key decisions in the design of the case transfer process.

This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work.

Summary

Notifying clients of the case transfer process

Most respondents were happy or didn't mind either way to be contacted about their case transfer when the benefit in question went live or their case was three months away from being transferred. The majority of respondents were happy to be contacted about their case both a month before transfer and after it had transferred.

Contact throughout the process

Most panel members thought that it should be Social Security Scotland who contact clients to tell them about their transfer. Panel members were fairly split on whether they thought they would want to contact anyone after they had received letters about their transfer. When asked where they would go for more information about their case transfer, the most popular option with respondents was to contact Social Security Scotland direct.

Cases to be prioritised for transfer

The vast majority of panel members were in favour of cases to be transferred as the corresponding benefits go live. Similarly, panel members were strongly in favour of the idea that those who have an upcoming reassesment should be prioritised for transfer. Views were mixed on other ideas for who should transfer first.

Case information to transfer

In interviews, we discussed what information Social Security Scotland should take over as part of a case transfer. Nearly all those asked were happy with Social Security Scotland taking over application information. Again, the majority of participants were happy for information submitted for evidence to be taken over. Views were mixed on taking over assessment information and case management information.

Background and research methods

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits previously delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions. As part of the work to prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels. Over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland have registered as panel members.

The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design a new social security system that works for the people of Scotland, based on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

To deliver the benefits devolved to Scotland, the Scottish Government have established Social Security Scotland ('the agency') who will be responsible for administering Scotland's new social security system. The new agency is taking over a number of benefits from DWP and we have worked with Experience Panel members to understand what they think the process for transfering clients should be like and their expectations surrounding the transfer.

This report details the key themes which emerged from a survey and ten individual and group interviews which took place in February 2019. The research explored:

- Views on how to notify clients of the case transfer process;
- What information should be provided to clients before their transfer;
- Who clients would want to talk to and where they would go for more information;
- Priorities for who should transfer from DWP to Social Security Scotland first;
- What information about clients and their benefits Social Security Scotland should take over as part of the transfer and;
- What Social Security Scotland can do to make the transfer happen as smoothly as possible.

Participants were recruited from the Scottish Government Social Security Experience Panels. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey and individual and group interviews. The survey and interviews covered similar content, with the survey being used to understand general opinion and the interviews exploring particular topics in more depth.

This project formed part of a larger series of work which took place throughout February 2019 and covered various other topics.

Within this paper, 'participants' refers to those who took part in interviews and 'respondents' refer to those who completed the survey. Some Experience Panel members may have completed the survey and also taken part in an interview

The Social Security Experience Panels are a longitudinal research project. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have

experience of at least one of the benefits that are being devolved to Scotland. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the respondents only, and are not indicative of the wider Scottish population. Percentages are given only to give a broad sense of the balance of opinion across respondents.

Interviews

Ten individual and group interviews were held in locations across Scotland¹. interviews varied in size, ranging from 1 to 5 panel members at each session.

Survey Method

All 2,456 Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey. Participation in Experience Panels research is optional, and in this case 559 people chose to complete the survey (a response rate of 22.7 per cent).

This information was added to information from the 'About Your Benefits and You'² and 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far'³ surveys. The demographic data collected in these surveys was linked to the information supplied by participants of this survey as part of the longitudinal data set for this project. Once linked to the demographic data, 69.2% of survey respondents were matched in this way.

Around 6 in 10 respondents for who we could link to demographic data identified as 'woman or girl' (61 per cent) with almost 4 in 10 respondents identifying as 'man or boy' (39 per cent).

Table 1: Gender of survey respondents (n=380)

Gender	%
Woman or girl	61
Man or boy	39
Total	100

The majority of respondents were 45 or over (84 per cent). 16 per cent of respondents were under 45 with no respondents aged 80 or over.

¹ Glasgow, Hawick, Greenock, Perth, Edinburgh, Dundee and Stirling

² Scottish Government (2017). *Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Quantitative Research Findings.* [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/

³ Scottish Government (2018). Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far. [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/

Table 2: Age of survey respondents (n=387)

Age	%
Under 25	1
25 – 44	15
45 – 59	54
60 – 79	30
80 or over	0
Total	100

Almost nine in ten survey respondents (88 per cent) considered themselves to have a disability or long term health condition.

Table 3: Disability status of survey respondents (n=387)⁴

Disability Status	%
Disabled	88
Not Disabled	12
Total	100

Just less than half of respondents acted as a carer for a family member or friend (48 per cent).

Table 4: Caring status of survey respondents (n=363)

Carer Status	%
Carer	48
Not a carer	51
Prefer not to say	1
Total	100

⁴ Respondents were able to select more than one response to this question. The percentages are of all respondents, not disabled ones.

Over four fifths of respondents were from urban areas (84 per cent)⁵.

Table 5: Location of survey respondents (n=354)

Location	%
Urban	84
Rural	16
Total	100

Respondents took part from 31 of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland.

Survey respondents who took part had experience of claiming a wide range of benefits. The most common benefits claimed by survey respondents were Personal Independence Payment (74 per cent) and Disability Living Allowance (71 per cent). The least common benefits claimed were Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit (6 per cent) and Sure Start Maternity Grant (6 per cent).

Table 6: Respondents benefit experience ⁶(n=135)

Benefit	%
Personal Independence Payment	74
Disability Living Allowance	71
Winter Fuel Payment Carer's Allowance	41
Cold Weather Payment	36
Winter Fuel Payment	35
Discretionary Housing Payment	23
Scottish Welfare Fund	18
Attendance Allowance	18
Universal Credit	17
Severe Disablement Allowance	17
Funeral Expenses	8
Sure Start Maternity Grant	6
Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit	6

⁵ 17 per cent of the Scottish population lives in rural areas

⁶ Participants had experience of applying for (themselves or someone else) or receiving these benefits within the last 3 years, but were not necessarily in receipt of the benefit at the time of the survey.

More detailed demographic information on the Experience Panels as a whole can be found in 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far'⁷.

Notifying clients of the case transfer process

We asked survey respondents and interview participants their views on how we should notify clients that their case will be transferred from DWP to Social Security Scotland.

We presented survey respondents with a list of possible points of contact and asked them whether or not they would be happy to be contacted at each of these points.

We asked respondents whether they would be happy 'Being contacted on the day Social Security Scotland takes over a benefit for new claims only. At this point you would be told that your case will be transferred in due course.'

The majority of survey respondents said they would be happy to be contacted at this point or that they didn't mind either way.

Table 7: Contact when the benefit goes live (n=531)

	%
Yes	58
No	14
I don't mind either way	29

In interviews, participants spoke of how Social Security Scotland is an organisation that is unfamiliar to many. Some participants stressed the importance of not assuming Social Security Scotland will be an agency known to the general public. Participants suggested that clients should be provided with clear information that lists all the benefits that Social Security Scotland will take over and benefits that will remain with DWP.

We asked survey respondents if they would be happy 'being contacted three or four months before your case transfers to let you know your case will be transferred shortly.' Six in ten respondents said they would be happy to be contacted at this point (60 per cent) whilst around a quarter said 'I don't mind either way' (26 per cent.)

⁷ Scottish Government (2018). Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far. [Online] Available at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083

Table 8: Contact three of four months before transfer (n=533)

	%
Yes	60
No	14
I don't mind either way	26

In interviews, the majority of participants said they would like to be contacted at this point. However, some participants questioned whether or not being contacted at this point was neccessary. Some participants suggested a national campaign that included information about the case transfer process on television, radio and newspapers would be a welcome addition alongside letters.

We then asked participants and respondents whether they would be happy 'being contacted one month before your case transfers to let you know the exact date of your transfer.' Over 8 in 10 survey respondents said they would be happy to be contacted at this point (85 per cent) whilst around 1 in 10 said 'I don't mind either way' (11 per cent.) Only 4 per cent of respondent said they would not be happy to be contacted at this point.

Table 9: Contact one month before transfer (n=540)

	%
Yes	85
No	4
I don't mind either way	11

In interviews, participants said at this point in time they would like to know the exact payment date and the amount they were going to receive. Another suggestion was to cross check client's details before the transfer. It was also suggested that this point of contact should include an example of what the payment from Social Security Scotland would look like on a client's bank statement. Participants spoke of the confusion and anxiety it may cause if they were to see a payment from Social Security Scotland rather than DWP.

Finally, participants and respondents were asked whether they would be happy 'being contacted after your case has transferred to let you know your case has transferred successfully.' Just over 8 in 10 survey respondents said they would be happy to be contacted at this point (84 per cent.) 1 in 10 respondents said that they would not be happy being contacted at this point (10 per cent).

Table 10: Contact after your case has transferred (n=529)

	%
Yes	84
No	10
I don't mind either way	6

In interviews, the majority of respondents welcomed this point of contact, saying that it would be helpful and provide reassurance that their case had transferred with no problems. However, some said that this letter would not be needed if they were to be paid correctly and on time.

Other Information

We asked participants and respondents if there was anything else they would like to know at each of these contact points. Many respondents spoke about whether or not they would need to do anything as part of their transfer. This included resubmitting evidence and filling in more forms:

"You need to know if there is anything you need to do at any of these points. This should be clearly stated at each point and if there is nothing you need to do then this should be stated"

"Is there anything I have to do? Any form to fill in?"

Many respondents said they would like to know if their case transfer would involve another assessment:

"I'd like to know what's involved, I.e. is it a straight transfer with an assessment in due course or a transfer and no assessment needed."

"Would I need to have an new assessment to qualify or would current assessment dates stand?"

Survey respondents spoke of the need for contact details to be clarified so that they knew who to go to if they had a problem:

"Somebody to contact either by phone / email or in person if I have any questions or problems"

"Who I can contact if I need more information or require any help. Who to contact if something goes wrong."

Contact throughout the case transfer process

We asked participants and respondents who they thought should contact clients to tell them about their case transfer. Almost three quarters of survey respondents said Social Security Scotland should contact clients about their case transfer (73 per cent.) Just over 2 in 10 respondents said sometimes Social Security Scotland, sometimes DWP (22 per cent) whilst 5 per cent of respondents said DWP should contact clients to tell them about their case transfer.

Table 12: Who should contact clients (n=556)

	%
Social Security Scotland	73
DWP	5
Sometimes Social Security Scotland, sometimes DWP	22

For respondents that had selected 'sometimes Social Security Scotland, sometimes DWP', we asked them why they had chosen this option. A popular reason for selecting this option was that many people would be unaware of Social Security Scotland so having letters from both would legitimise the agency:

"The DWP initially so we know it's genuine. Some people won't know about Scotland taking over certain benefits and may ignore the letters from you or think they're a scam."

Many respondents spoke of how both Social Security Scotland and the DWP are responsible for the transfer so would like to here from both agencies:

"I'd like to hear from both so I know the case transfer process is working from both sides"

Survey respondents also spoke of how they would like to receive contact from both agencies in case of any errors:

"That way it would be both parties involved informing of the change and would be harder to slip through the net."

In interviews, participants echoed the views of survey respondents. Similar to the point about Social Security Scotland being an unfamiliar agency, participants said it would depend on the stage of the transfer whether or not letters came from Social Security Scotland or DWP. Many expressed the view that initial contact should come from DWP and contact closer to the transfer should come from Social Security Scotland.

We asked Experience Panel members if they think they would have to contact anyone when they received any of the letters about their case transfer. Responses were fairly split with just over half of respondents saying yes (57 per cent) and the other 43 per cent saying they would.

Table 13: Contact after questions (n=554)

	%
Yes	57
No	43

We asked respondents and participants who they would want to contact. The most common response was Social Security Scotland. Other popular points of contact included:

- Whoever the letter came from. Many said they would contact whoever the letter came from, either DWP or Social Security Scotland;
- DWP:
- Citizen's Advice Bureau;
- A client's advocate; and
- A client's social worker.

In both the survey and interviews, many expressed the desire for a named person to be assigned to their case. Panel members spoke of their past experiences struggling to find the correct person to speak to and suggested a person allocated to their case would help them find answers to their questions. Participants in interviews spoke in depth about the frustrations of having to repeat themselves to various different people. They spoke about the need for ownership of their case.

Looking for information about their transfer

We asked panel members where they would go to find an answer to a question they may have about their transfer. The most popular option was to contact Social Security Scotland direct with almost 9 in 10 respondents selecting this option (89 per cent.) Just over half of respondents said they would go online to find an answer (55 per cent.) The least popular option was contacting DWP direct, with just over a quarter of panel members saying they would do this to find an answer (27 per cent.)

Table 14: Respondents preferences for finding information (n=554)

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Contact Social Security Scotland direct	89	11
Look online	55	45
Contact an advice service such as Citizens Advice Scotland	32	68
Contact DWP direct	27	73

Some respondents gave alternative answers to this question. These included independent benefit advisors, welfare rights organisations, MPs and MSPs, carer's organisations, advocates and family and friends.

In interviews, participants spoke of the importance of having publically displayed information about the case transfer process. Suggestions included having information in public spaces like community centres, doctor surgeries and libraries.

Alternative modes of contact

We asked panel members if they would like to be contacted about their case transfer in another way alongside a letter. Survey respondents were fairly split with around half saying they would like to be contacted via text (52 per cent) whilst the other half said they would not (48 per cent.)

Table 15: Contact via text (n=467)

	%
Yes	52
No	48

We also asked survey respondents if they would like to be contacted through email. Just over 8 in 10 respondents said yes (83 per cent) whilst 17 per cent said no.

Table 16: Contact via email (n=539)

	%
Yes	83
No	17

In interviews, participants were generally open to the idea of being contacted through email. However, concerns were raised over those who do not have access to the internet and participants were still keen for the vast majority of information to come through post. Some participants emphasised that contact through paper was best as it kept a record that they could later use for proof.

Participants spoke about the usefulness of an online service that could provide clients with information about their transfer. Some spoke of a personalised portal, where you could sign in online and track your case as well as report any problems.

Concerns over technology and an electronic transfer were present throughout survey and interview. Many expressed fears that their information and data may not be secure and referred to previous examples of government bodies mishandling information. Panel members in many instances were of the view that testing the system was key in order for the case transfer process to run smoothly.

Priorities for who transfers first

In interviews with participants, we discussed who should transfer from DWP over to Social Security Scotland first and in what order the benefits should transfer. We also asked participants what we could do to ensure the case transfer process was fair and safe.

Benefit by benefit transfer

We discussed the idea that benefits should transfer on a benefit by benefit basis, as they go live. This means that the order in which people transfer would be determined based on the order in which benefits moved over from DWP to Social Security Scotland. Most participants were generally welcoming of this idea and said that it would be easier for both clients and agency staff. Participants also spoke of the importance of making sure clients were up to date on what benefits would be transferring first to avoid confusion for clients. Throughout interviews, participants were keen that Social Security Scotland took its time to transfer cases to ensure mistakes are not made.

Transfer by reassessment date

We spoke with participants about what cases should transfer over first once a benefit was being transferred from DWP to Social Security Scotland. One of the ideas we discussed was prioritising those with upcoming assessments, so that clients who had an upcoming reassessment would be transferred to Social Security

Scotland first. This would mean that their reassessment would be done by Social Security Scotland rather than DWP.

Participants were strongly in favour of this idea. A large number of participants said that they would rather their assessment be done by Social Security Scotland than DWP and spoke of their previous negative experiences of assessments.

Futhermore, participants told us that transferring by reassesment date would help to minimise stress for clients. Participants spoke of how the period of time running up to an assessment can be stressful and make clients feel anxious. Knowing that their assessment would be done by Social Security Scotland would help reduce this stress.

Transfer by geographical area

Another idea that was discussed within interviews was transferring cases based on a geographical area.

Participants responses were fairly mixed on this option. A few benefits of transferring cases based on geographical area were raised by some participants. Firstly, participants noted that it would mean information in local areas would be consistent and that you would be transferring over at the same time as your neighbour. Participants also spoke of how it would better prepare services and resources in local areas to help assist with any problems or questions that may arise throughout the process.

However, some participants were not in favour of transferring cases based on location. It was suggested that transferring by geographical area may place a strain on local resources if there were to be any problems with the transfer. This was likened to the strain on foodbanks and citizens advice centres during the introduction of Universal Credit. Many participants noted that this was an unfair way of selecting who should transfer next and one participant referred to it as a "postcode lottery."

We asked participants how we should select who transfers first if the geographical approach was taken. A popular suggestion was to transfer those in smaller, more rural areas first. Participants explained that this would allow the system to be tested and if mistakes were to happen, they would happen on a smaller scale. Other suggestions included transfer based on local authority area and by randomly selected postcodes.

Transfer by health condition

Another idea that we dicussed with panel members was that cases should transfer over based upon a qualifying health condition. Most participants were not in favour of this idea on the basis that it would be difficult to decide which health conditions should be prioritised. Participants also spoke about the varying nature of many health conditions and how it would be unfair to prioritise some conditions over others. Generally, participants were keen that cases were not transferred depending on health conditions.

However, many participants recognised terminal illness as a condition to be prioritisied within the case transfer process. The majority of participants thought that those with terminal illness' should transfer over first. The most common reasons for this were to help reduce stress and limit the contact needed with DWP. On the other hand, a few participants thought those with a terminal illness should transfer over last. For these participants, it was thought that transferring the terminally ill over last would give them less to worry about and minimise stress.

Random transfer

We also discussed the idea of transferring cases randomly, for example, by a computer algorithm. Participants in interviews tended not to favour this option. However, some participants thought this was the fairest way to transfer cases and that it would not single any one person or group out.

Many participants noted a number of drawbacks of randomly transferring cases. Some thought that it may be difficult to try an explain why the transfer was random and that people would feel left out. Participants also spoke about the uncertainty that random case transfer would bring and that it wouldn't be helpful if clients had no idea of when they will transfer. Furthermore, participants spoke about the confusion random transferring could cause, especially in cases where people within the same household transferred at different times.

Other ideas for transfer order

We asked participants if they had any other ideas as to how we could transfer cases in a fair and safe manner. Some participants talked about doing it alphabetically or even in reverse alphabetical order. Others talked about doing it by age with suggestions including youngest clients first and oldest clients first.

Many recognised that there was no clear way to select what cases should transfer over first. However, participants spoke about the need for transparency when it came to deciding what cases should transfer over first. Participants suggested that clients should be made aware of what would qualify a case to be prioritised as well as an explination for any prioritisation.

Overall, transferring cases based on assesment data was most supported, as was benefit by benefit transfer. Panel members had mixed views on transfer based on geographical area and random case transfers. Transferring based on health condition was not popular with panel members, with the exception of terminal illness. Throughout, the priorities of panel member were ensuring no more DWP assesments and transparent, fair transfer of cases so clients could know when to expect their own case to transfer.

Case information to transfer

In interviews, we asked presented participants with the different types of information that Social Security Scotland may take over as part of a client's case transfer. We asked participants how they felt about Social Security Scotland taking over the different information types. We explained to participants that some information is essential for Social Security Scotland to take over as part of a clients case. This includes payment information, personal information (such as a client's address and contact information) and award information. All participants asked agreed that this information should be transferred as part of a clients case.

Application information

We asked participants how they felt about application information being transferred. This includes information given as part of an application including details about a client's condition, hospital details, health care professional details and care home details. Nearly all participants asked said they would be happy for Social Security Scotland to take over this information. Participants thought that transferring this information would be helpful to both the client and Social Security Scotland if it meant they would not have to fill out any more forms.

Assessment information

We asked participants how they would feel about Social Security Scotland taking over information from previous assessments. Participants' views were mixed on this. Some participants saw no problems with Social Security Scotland taking over this information and thought it would be better for Social Security Scotland to have all the information that DWP currently hold as part of a client's case. Some participants requested that Social Security Scotland staff view the contents of previous assessments with a critical eye if the information is to be transferred However, some participants thought that assessment information should not be taken over. The most common reason for this was that participants did not feel the information from their assessment was accurate or correct. Participants spoke of their previous experience of assessments with DWP and some said they would like a fresh start with Social Security Scotland.

Case management information

Participants were asked how they felt about Social Security Scotland taking over case management information as part of a case. Case management information includes all contact a client previously had with DWP. For example, calls made to the DWP, calls the DWP made to a client and letters sent to DWP.

Again, participants' views on Social Security Scotland taking over this information were mixed. Some participants wanted this to be transferred so that there was a fully comprehensive record of a client's circumstances. However, many participants saw this information as irrelevant and questioned whether it would be needed. Similarly to assessment information, some participants also spoke of wanting a fresh

start with Social Security Scotland and therefore didn't want this information transferred.

Information submitted for evidence

We asked participants their feelings on Social Security Scotland transferring information submitted for evidence as part of a case transfer. Information submitted for evidence includes documents that prove who you are like passports and birth certificates. It also includes evidence for applications, for example, letters from health care professionals.

The vast majority of participants said they would like Social Security Scotland to take over this information. The most common reason for saying this was that it would save a client having to re-gather and re-submit that information themselves. Participants talked about previous poor experiences with sending evidence to DWP. They explained that sending information was often expensive and on some occasions, the DWP had lost the information they submitted for evidence.

What's Next?

The panel members' views on notifying clients of the case transfer process will form the basis of the client contact strategy and designing the contact materials.

The feedback from Experience Panel members on what data and documentation should be transferred from DWP as part of clients' case transfer will be included in data workshop discussions which are ongoing with DWP.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Experience Panels in the development of Scotland's new social security system. This will include further research on individual benefits in addition to work to assist in the development of Social Security Scotland.

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How to access background or source data The data collected for this social research publication □ 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. □ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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