

## EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

# Social Security Experience Panels: Pension Age Winter Heating Payment

## Background

The Scottish Government is now responsible for some of the benefits previously delivered by the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the work to prepare for this change, in 2017 the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

**Department  
For Work  
and  
Pensions**



**Scottish  
Government**



Over 2,400 people who have recent experience of receiving at least one of the benefits devolved to Scotland registered to take part in the Experience Panels when they were launched. As Social Security Scotland is now an established agency and the majority of benefits are live, the Experience Panels will close in April 2024.

## About the research



This visual summary sets out the findings from a survey on Pension Age Winter Heating Payment (PAWHP).



The Scottish Government are introducing this new winter heating payment as a replacement for the DWP-delivered Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) in Scotland in winter 2024/25. The payment will remain linked to an individual reaching state pension age, and will be a universal, non-means tested payment.



The survey was conducted with Experience Panels members from November to December 2023.

The survey asked panel members about proposals for PAWHP including:

- Eligibility
- Timing of payment
- Payment rates
- The potential impact of the payment on different communities and groups



The survey was distributed to 2,047 panel members. 164 responses were received.

## Replacing Winter Fuel Payment with Pension Age Winter Heating Payment



The majority of respondents (71 per cent) agreed with the proposal to replace Winter Fuel Payment with Pension Age Winter Heating Payment on a 'like-for-like' basis under Social Security Scotland. Only ten per cent disagreed.



Almost three quarters (72 per cent) of respondents agreed with the proposed name of 'Pension Age Winter Heating Payment'. However, slightly more than a fifth (21 per cent) disagreed.



More than four-fifths (83 per cent) of respondents agreed that the proposed format for PAWHP would be an effective way for the Scottish Government to provide financial support to older people.

### Timing of payment



When asked about the timing for the payment, the majority (80 per cent) of respondents said that the current November – December payment window used for WFP was the most suitable.



Older respondents and those with a physical disability were more likely to prefer the current payment window.



Comments in support of the current payment window referenced minimising disruption, but also emphasised that the payment needs to be delivered on time, as soon as possible.



Those in support of earlier payments stated that they needed to use their heating earlier in the year, or that it would help with advance planning for the winter months.

Quote from panel member:



“Heating is necessary in rural areas from start of October and I like to get my tank filled before the cold weather starts. We have to pay for our heating before we use it and it is expensive.”



Those in favour of a later payment suggested that the weather was worse later in the winter, or that it would help with budgeting decisions over the Christmas period.

Quote from panel member:



“I'd expect to have higher heating expenses later in the winter so the money would be more use then.”

## Eligibility and qualifying week



Survey respondents were asked for their views on eligibility for Pension Age Winter Heating remaining linked to an individual reaching state pension age. Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of respondents agreed. However, just over a fifth (21 per cent) disagreed.



Younger respondents were more likely to disagree that the payment should be linked to reaching state pension age.

Quote from panel member:



“[PAWHP] should be paid to everyone when they reach the age of 60. People aged 60 have the same needs as someone aged 67.”



The Scottish Government is proposing to maintain the current timetable for having the qualifying week in September. Four-fifths (80 per cent) of survey respondents agreed with this.



Respondents who disagreed said it was unfair that people miss out on the payment if they have birthdays soon after the qualifying week period. Some suggested an extended qualifying period, or an option for those who have birthdays soon after to make manual applications for the payment.

Quote from panel member:



“There must be a cut-off date, but you should extend for those birthdays October to December to claim via paper form. It’s [a] shame folk lose out by a day or week.”

## Eligibility criteria and value of payments



Survey respondents were asked how clear and easy to understand they found the criteria for different values of payment. Most respondents (70 per cent) agreed that the eligibility criteria were clear. Just over one in ten (14 per cent) disagreed.



There was no clear consensus on the value of the payments, with mixed responses. Slightly more respondents agreed (41 per cent) than disagreed (34 per cent) that the value of payments was appropriate.



However, there was a clear distinction between responses from respondents who live in different locations. Slightly more than half (51 per cent) of urban respondents agreed that the value of payments is appropriate, compared to only 15 per cent of rural respondents.



Some respondents suggested that the value of the payment should be higher, referencing increasing costs of living over time.

Quote from panel member:



“I feel the payments should be higher for people on low incomes than people who have higher incomes. The amount hasn't been changed for a long time and should be brought in line with current costs.”



Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of survey respondents agreed with maintaining the value of payments for people in residential care. Respondents who had caring responsibilities were more likely to agree with the payment rate for those in residential care compared to non-carers.



Around three-fifths (61 per cent) of respondents agreed that people in residential care who are in receipt of Pension Credit should not receive PAWHP. However, a fifth (20 per cent) disagreed.



Almost all (91 per cent) survey respondents agreed that PAWHP should continue to be provided as a one-off payment each winter. Similarly, almost all (95 per cent) survey respondents agreed that PAWHP should be provided as a cash payment directly into a client's bank account.



Almost nine in ten (88 per cent) survey respondents agreed that people should be able to opt out of receiving the payment.

## Support for island communities



Many respondents highlighted the higher costs of island living, due to weather, infrastructure and higher fuel costs for off-gas grid households.



Some respondents suggested that island communities should receive a higher value payment to reflect these costs, or that the payment could be differentiated by the type of fuel that they used.

Quote from panel member:



“Perhaps an additional amount is required for unique circumstances and environmental challenges.”



Some respondents highlighted that island communities have less robust infrastructure than those on the mainland. A few suggested there should be additional planning in place to provide for these communities in the event of extreme weather or disruption which prevents access to fuel supplies.



Some respondents suggested that island residents could be prioritised to receive payments first, or receive an earlier payment.



Other respondents noted that housing on islands is often older or in poorer condition, causing difficulties with heating properties and installing improvements such as insulation. Suggestions included prioritising

island communities for assistance with new heating solutions such as heat pumps or local energy generation.

Quote from panel member:



“Make the off-grid people [and] rural and island communities’ people the first ones to get the new heating systems which are expected in the future: heat pumps, air drawn in from outside property, electricity from wind-farms supplying homes locally.”



Several respondents noted that the challenges faced by island communities are not unique and were often shared by those living in rural areas, such as the costs associated with solid fuels and less established infrastructure and transport links.



Other respondents suggested that due to the circumstances of island or rural life, higher heating costs and weather conditions, there should be expanded eligibility for fuel payments. Suggestions included widening eligibility to cover all households that were off-gas grid, including disabled or vulnerable households, or assessing cases on an individual basis.

## Other communities and groups



Many respondents suggested that a fuel payment should also be provided for people with disabilities, as people with disabilities can be affected by cold weather due to their conditions or because they have limited mobility, resulting in higher heating costs. Some suggested that this should be a universal payment, without age limits.





Other suggestions included extending the coverage of the payment through lowering the eligible age for people with disabilities, or including people with disabilities who are unable to work.

Quote from panel member:



“People below pensionable age who have health or mobility issues but maybe can't work, should also qualify. Perhaps a payment for all vulnerable groups would be fairer and more inclusive.”



A few respondents highlighted the additional costs associated with running healthcare equipment or mobility aids e.g. electricity costs from charging devices.



Some respondents suggested that other groups may need additional support with heating costs during winter due to their living situation or type of housing. These included people living in caravans or trailers, people who are homeless or have been in prison, or those living in poorly insulated properties.

Quote from panel member:



“In Scotland many people live in buildings made of stone blocks, so no cavity wall insulation for them. Also, the older tenements would need to have more insulation between floors.”

## Redeterminations and appeals



Almost two thirds (63 per cent) of survey respondents agreed with the proposed timescales for Pension Age Winter Heating Payment redeterminations and appeals. However, more than a quarter (26 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed.



A few respondents commented that they disagreed with the timescales as they felt that they were too long, potentially leaving vulnerable older people without extra financial support for heating during the winter months when it is needed most.

## What's next?



The Scottish Government have recently consulted on proposals for Pension Age Winter Heating Payment, which closed on 15 January 2024. The range of views identified in the consultation and outlined in this report will be useful in supporting further policy development.



Independent analysis of the consultation responses is underway. This will support policy development ahead of finalising draft regulations and policy on PAWHP to replace the UK Government's Winter Fuel Payment this winter (2024/25). The analysis report and Scottish Government response is expected for publication in April 2024.



Draft regulations will be presented to the Scottish Commission on Social Security for scrutiny later in Spring, ahead of regulations being laid in parliament in September.



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