

Social Security Experience Panels: Agency Opening Hours - Visual Summary of Survey Findings

Background

The Scottish Government will become responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of work to prepare for this change, Scottish Government have set up the Social Security Experience Panels. There are more than 2,400 people on the panels who have experience of these benefits.

**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



The Experience Panels are made up over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits that will be devolved.



The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to create Scotland's new social security system.

**2,400+
Experience Panel
members**

About the research

This report summarises the Agency Opening Hours survey which took place in June 2018. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part.



2,456
invites



436
survey responses
(online, paper and phone)

The research explored:



- when people would need to contact Social Security Scotland



- how people want to contact Social Security Scotland

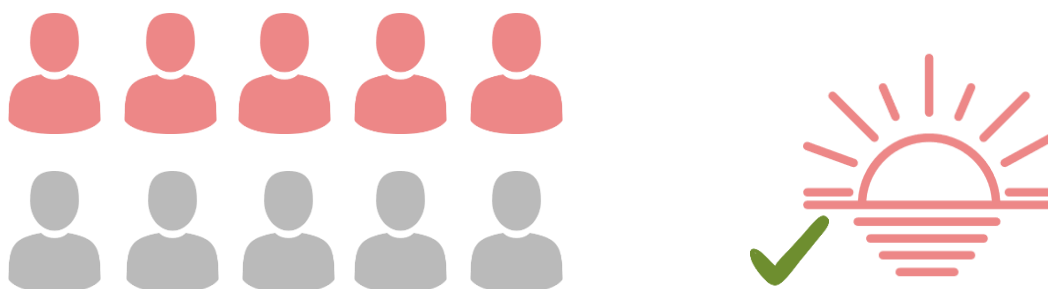
Opening Hours

We asked participants when they would need to contact Social Security Scotland outside of working hours (9am – 5pm).¹

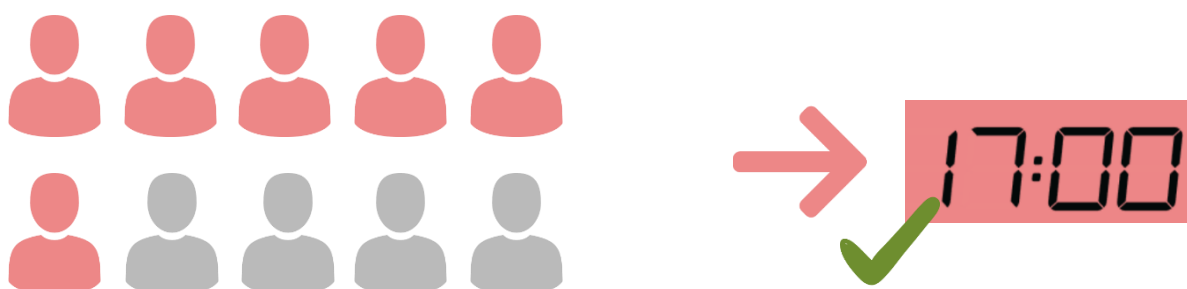


Many participants said they would need to contact the agency outside of these times, but others said they would only need to do this “sometimes”.

Half said they would want to be able to contact the agency **between 8am and 9am** “sometimes, most of the time, or all of the time”.

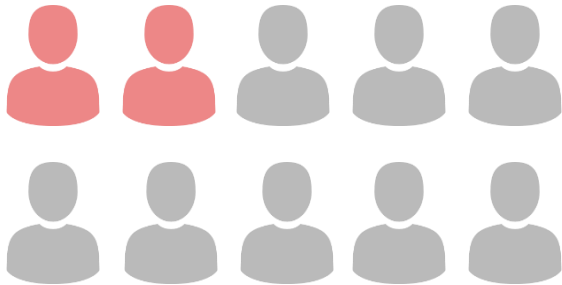


Just over six out of ten participants said **they would want to be able to contact the agency after 5pm.**



¹ Values are rounded. Full details can be found within the full research report, available on www.gov.scot

Two out of ten said they would want to be able to contact the agency **after 8pm**.

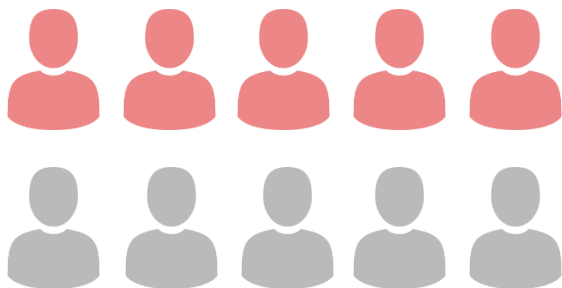


Participants said that they would need to be able to contact the agency at these times because of work or because of caring responsibilities.

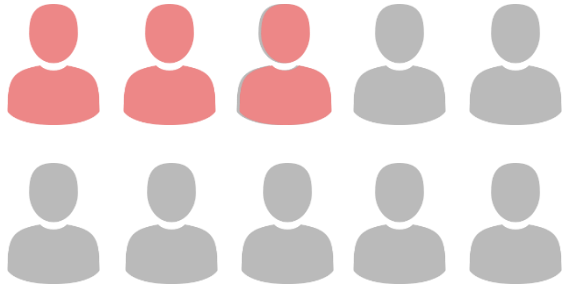
“It should take account of the fact that people who claim benefits also work full time, or have appointees or carers who do”

We also asked participants how often they would need to contact the agency on weekends and public holidays.

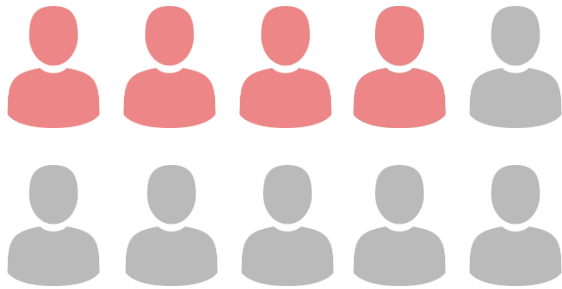
More than half of participants said they would want to be able to **contact the agency on a Saturday**.



Just over three in ten participants would want to **contact the agency on a Sunday.**



And **just over four in ten** said they would want to **contact the agency on a public holiday:**



Some participants wanted to be able to contact Social Security Scotland at any time if something went wrong:

“Sensible hours would be fine – what would be helpful is some kind of crisis line immediately available i.e. 24/7. Phone or online skeleton service would definitely help with the impression of truly providing a welfare safety net”

Many participants told us they felt stressed when they couldn't contact the agency after they received a letter from DWP:

“Getting a letter on Friday saying something must be provided, or your money is being stopped or some other thing when you can't contact anyone to verify is very stressful”

“Letters sent out arrive on Saturday leaving you anxious all weekend to get issues sorted out”

Participants told us they wanted to speak to the agency as soon as possible once they received a letter.

Some participants felt that having someone who could solve their problem was more important than being open long hours.



“Opening hours are less important than having someone with the expertise to respond to my query...”

Others believed shorter waiting times were more important:

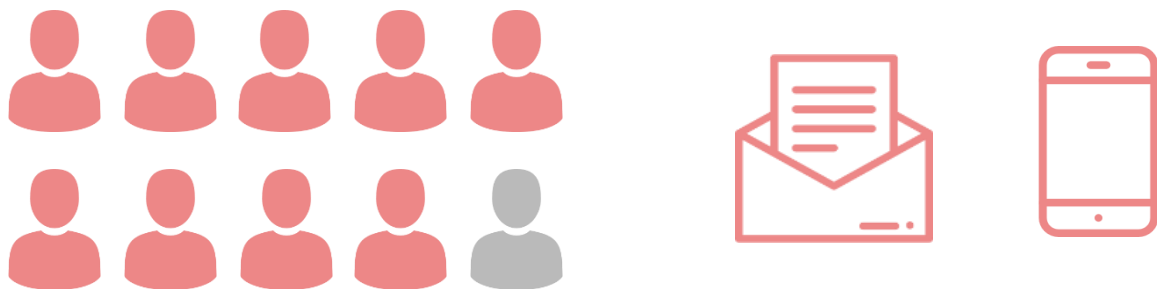


“It's not so much about opening hours, it's about making sure someone is able to answer the phone [...] Spent many an unhappy 30-40 mins waiting for phones to be answered”

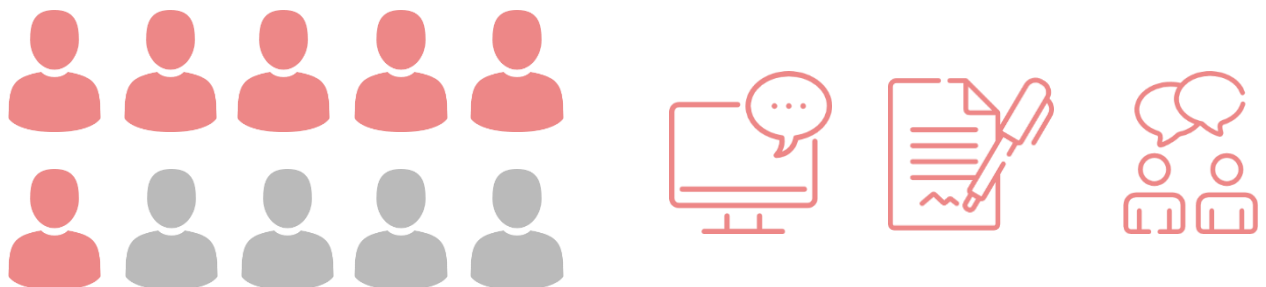
Contacting Social Security Scotland

We asked participants how they would want to contact Social Security Scotland.

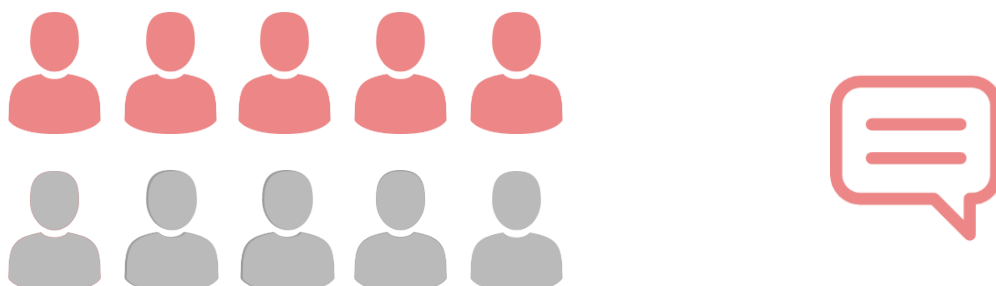
Almost **nine in ten** participants said they would contact the agency by **phone** and/or **email** **all, some, or most of the time**.



Almost **six in ten** participants said they would contact the agency by **web chat, post** and/or **in person** **all, some or most of the time**:



Just over **five in ten** participants said they would contact the agency by **text message** **all, some or most of the time**.



Only a **quarter** of people said they would contact the agency through **social media**. **Three quarters** of people said they would **rarely** or **never** use this method.



We also asked participants about **accessible communication methods**.



BSL



Less than one in ten participants would want to contact the agency using an interpreter, a BSL interpreter or type talk **all of the time**, **most of the time** or **sometimes**.

We asked participants **why they wanted to contact the agency in the ways they chose**.

Most participants wanted to contact the agency by telephone and email. **A common reason for preferring email was that it created a written record:**



“Everything can be recorded [...] so if there is any issue the document can easily be referred to and looked up”

“Being able to contact Social Security Scotland through email would be most advantageous. It would also enable accurate records to be kept with ease.”

Some participants felt digital communication was more accessible:

“Email would be my preference. I struggle to speak on the phone as it worsens my ME symptoms. Online chat would be a fantastic resource...”

Participants said they would like to choose how they contacted Social Security Scotland.



This would allow them to choose the method easiest for them.

Making sure that contacting the agency was easy and accessible was important to many participants. Having different ways to contact the agency was seen as a positive way of making sure it catered to everyone's needs.

Next Steps

We are committed to using the feedback to inform further decision making on how Social Security Scotland provides its services.

That's why the findings from this research have been used to shape decisions about opening hours for the first benefits being delivered by the agency. For example, in line with the findings, Social Security Scotland operates a telephone helpline which is open between 08:00-18:00, Monday to Friday. And some of the preferred contact methods discussed are already available.

Over time, the agency will make as many methods of contact available so that making contact is as straightforward as it can be. And we will continue to work with the Experience Panel to further inform the development of Scotland's social security agency.

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. Please contact James.Miller@gov.scot for further information.



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St Andrew's House
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ISBN: 978-1-78781-347-2 (web only)

Published by the Scottish Government, November 2018