

Social Security Experience Panels: Agency Buildings

Background

The Scottish Government are becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).



To prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the **Social Security Experience Panels**.



2400+

people with
experience of
benefits



**Social Security
Experience Panels**

Experience Panel members all have experience of **claiming at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland**.

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

About the research

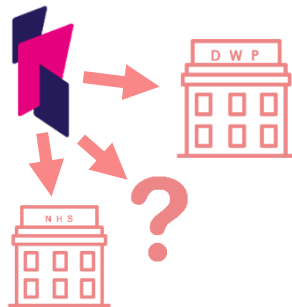
This report gives the findings of research with panel members about what Social Security Scotland's buildings should be like.



The research explored:



Where buildings should be located, how they should look and what facilities they should offer



Participant's views on co-locating with other organisations



Participant's views on how long face to face meetings should last and privacy

Survey respondents were aged between

25 – 79



37%

Man or boy



63%

Woman or girl



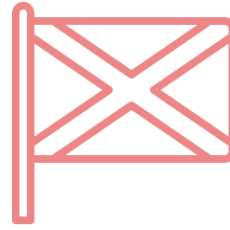
64%

lived in an urban location



23%

lived in an rural location



Respondents took part in

30

out of

32

local authority areas

Most survey respondents had a **disability** or **long term health condition**, including:



chronic pain



severe hearing impairments



severe visual impairments



other kinds of long term health condition

Just under four in ten survey respondents were:



a carer due to **old age**,



a carer to a **child**, or



a carer to an **adult**.

Reasons for visiting a Social Security Scotland building

Social Security Scotland wants to make sure that visiting an agency building or venue is as easy as possible for clients and that when they arrive, they can access the services they need.

We asked survey participants **if they would ever want to speak to Social Security Scotland in person.**



85%

would want to speak to someone face to face at one point



67%

would want to visit a building at one point

We asked participants **why they would want to speak to someone in person.**

‘I find using the phone very difficult...’




‘As a person with hearing loss, I sometimes find it difficult to hear on the telephone...’

‘One can tell one’s story more effectively face to face...’



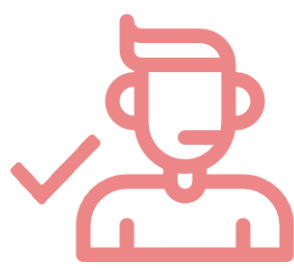
‘Face to face allows a more personal view to be created’



Some participants told us that they felt doing things face to face meant:

 <p>a faster service</p>	 <p>things would be done right first time</p>	 <p>they could get reassurance</p>
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People often said that a face to face appointment had **added value over doing something online**. For example, participants told us face to face appointments could:

 <p>offer document checking</p>	 <p>signpost them to other services</p>	 <p>Give a feeling that 'nothing could go wrong'</p>
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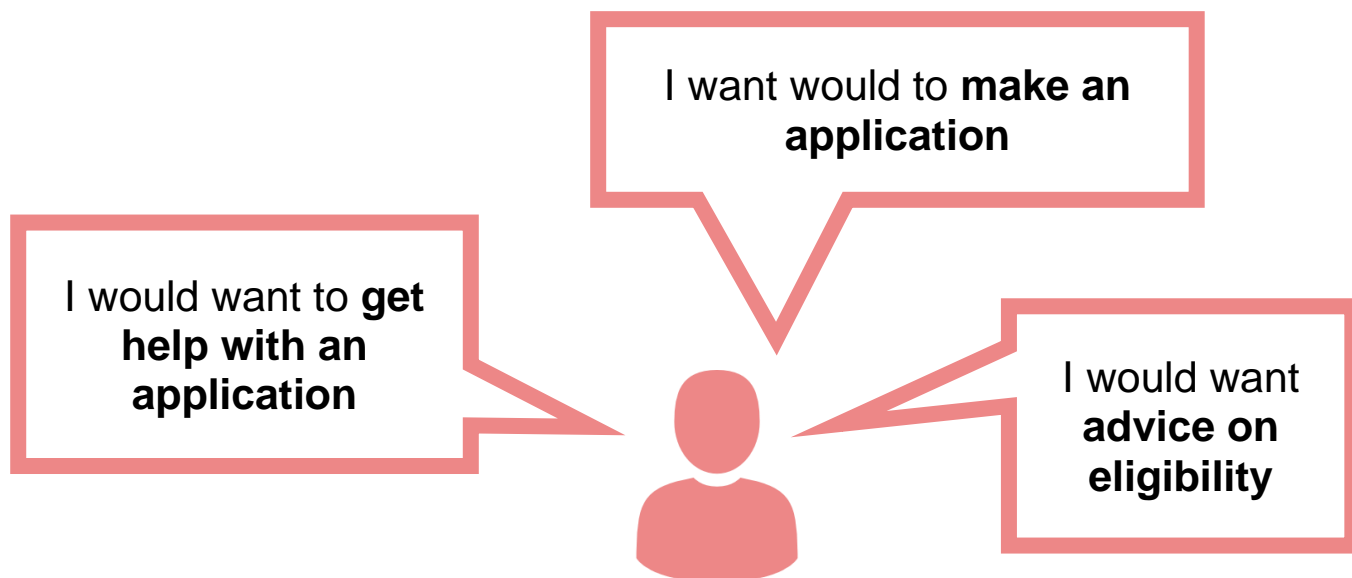


Not all participants were keen on face to face appointments. Some people told us they would only come into an office if it was an emergency.

These participants told us that they **found it difficult to travel, did not like being in public places or just preferred doing things online**.

We asked participants **what they would want to do when visiting a Social Security Scotland office.**

More than two thirds of participants told us:



Other common reasons for wanting face to face contact included:



- Getting information about other support services available



- Making a complaint or giving feedback



- Checking the status of an application

Older participants tended to want to do more things face to face than **younger participants.**

Location of agency buildings



Participants told us that **a well-located and large car park was essential.**

Most participants said they expected the building to have a car park with spaces directly in front of, or very close to the entrance of the building:

‘Parking and pick-up spaces right outside the door.’

Many participants gave examples of times where a lack of car parking made their journey difficult:

‘I was down in [location] and the car parking to the appeal centre was 550 yards away [...] Halfway there was a bench and I didn’t know if I was calling for help to get there or an ambulance for the client I was helping...’



Most participants said **they could not, or did not want to use public transport** as it was stressful, unreliable or took too long.

‘Accessible parking [is] absolutely essential. Assuming people can rely on public transport is not an option.’

Participants also told us about the area around the building.



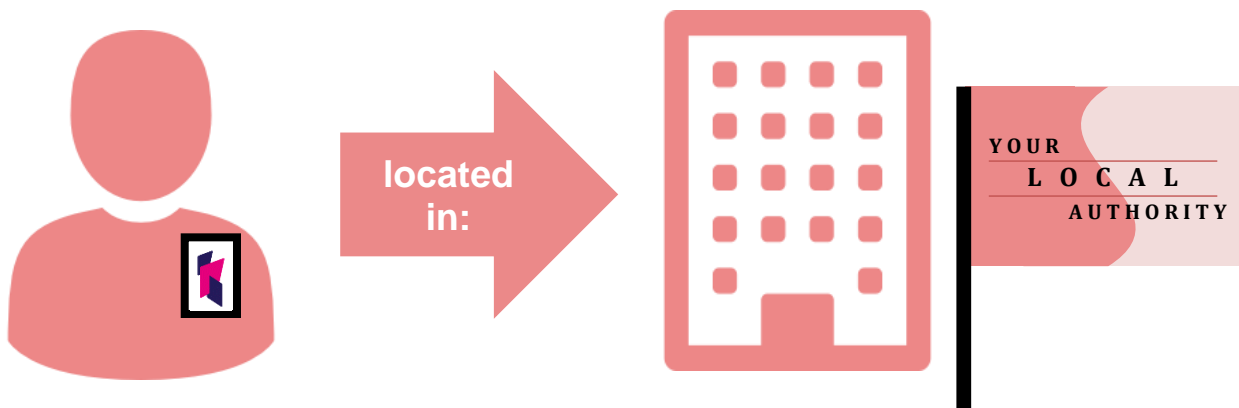
They felt it should **not be too hilly** and that the **entrance to the building should not involve stairs**.

Some people told us having benches on the route to the building would be useful:

‘...if it’s a long way to walk, having seated areas in between.’

Co-locating with other organisations

Co-locating is where Social Security Scotland **shares a building with other organisations**, such as your local authority.



Co-locating with local organisations allows Social Security Scotland to have a local presence across the country.

This means that **people won't have to travel too far to speak to someone from Social Security Scotland** face to face.



Around two thirds of survey respondents were happy for Social Security Scotland to co-locate with their local authority, their local Citizen's Advice Bureau and in National Health Service locations (such as a GP surgery or hospital).

Focus group participants tended to not mind the agency co-locating either, so long as the building was accessible and the agency space was separated from the rest of the building.

'They have their own space, if it's separate what's the issue.'

Some focus group participants told us they would not like us to co-locate with local authorities:

'People have bad experiences with housing officers – they are as bad or worse than DWP. They have the same attitude. If we put local delivery staff in local authority buildings, we will be taking a step backwards...'

'Local authority staff are trained to do set things and they are targeted as not friendly [...] Local authorities are budget led, they are not looking at what you need, they are looking at what they can budget for. People do not want to go into local authorities and speak to people as they aren't friendly or helpful.'

Some participants told us sharing a building with a local authority could be acceptable if the agency had its own entrance and reception area.

Other participants **had concerns about co-locating in NHS facilities:**



'Don't use NHS buildings as parking is too difficult due to insufficient spaces.'

Overall, **few participants had strong objections to using NHS buildings.**

People were **least happy with the agency co-locating within a DWP building.**



Many focus group participants told us that they had negative associations with DWP buildings because of past interactions with the department.

They told us **if the agency co-located in a DWP building they would be reluctant to visit.**

How Social Security Scotland buildings should look

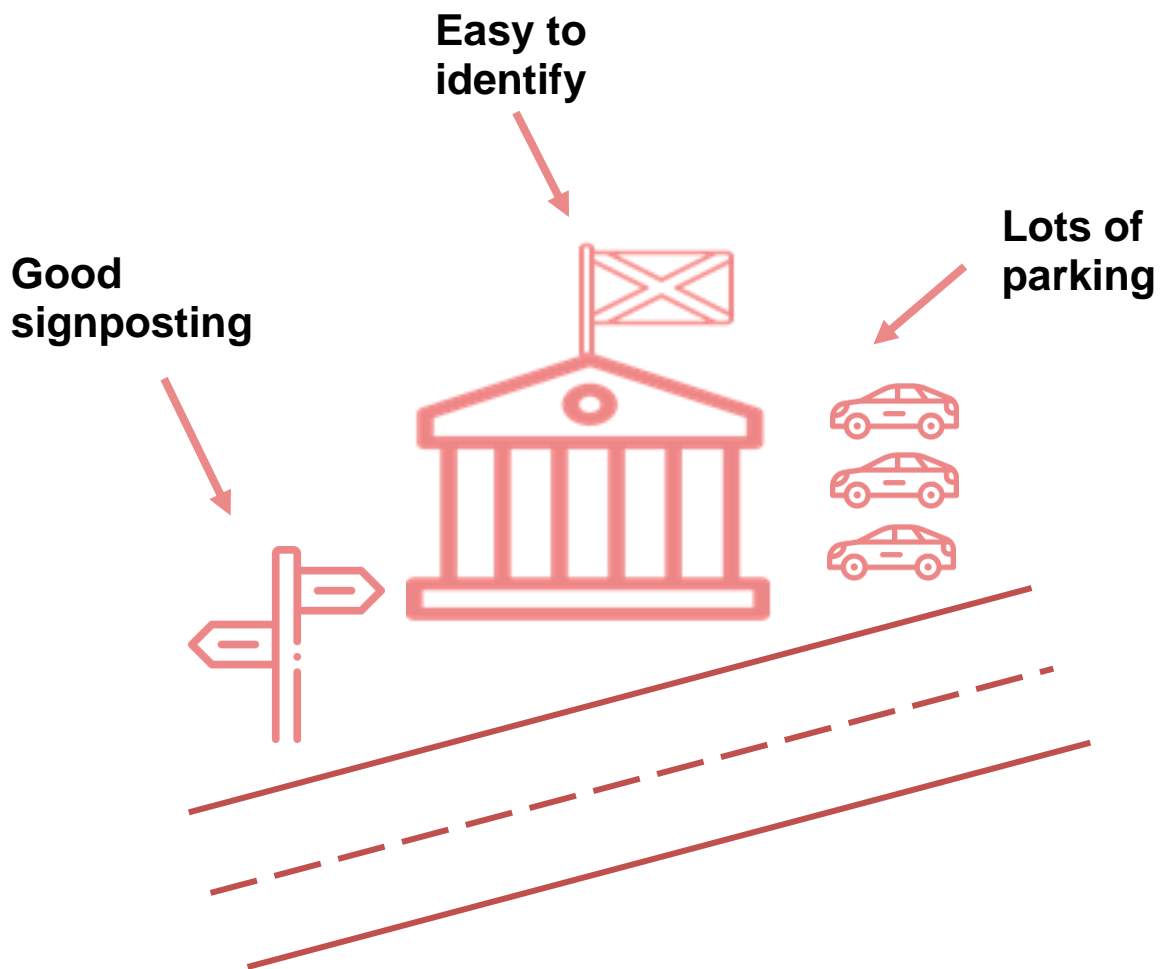
External look

Social Security Scotland **wants to make sure that it meets client expectations around how agency buildings should look.**

Participants told us that the **external look of the agency building was important** as it could influence their initial perceptions of the agency.

'The look of the building can affect you feeling as you approach.'

Few participants gave examples of what they thought buildings should look like, apart from that they be different from those used by DWP.



Interior look

Participants had mixed opinions on how the inside of agency buildings should look and feel.



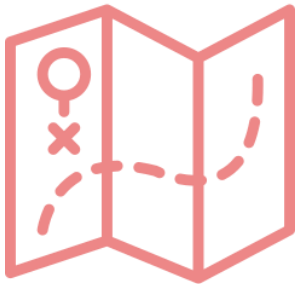
Most participants felt the general look and feel of the buildings should be 'relaxed' and 'friendly' with all areas being fully accessible.



Many participants told us that the current buildings used by DWP made them feel ‘under suspicion’:

‘I would want a more friendly and relax environment. The UK Government doesn’t provide none of this to you, and you are made to feel like a scrounger and put on suspicion.’

We also heard that **accessibility should be considered when designing the buildings**. This meant the buildings would:



be **easy to navigate**



have **clear signage**



have **staff on hand to help**



be in **neutral colours**



not be too **noisy**



not be too **bright**

Facilities of agency buildings

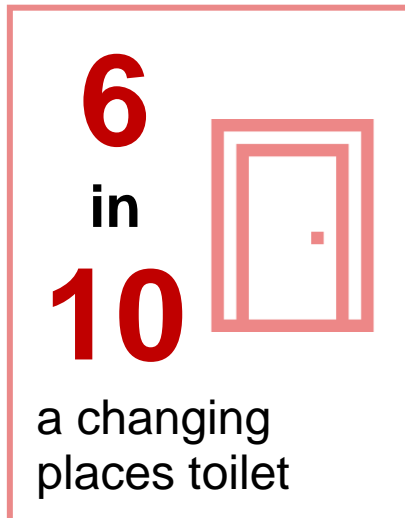
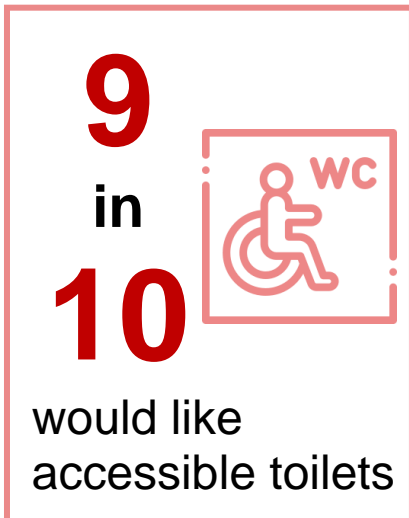
Social Security Scotland wants to make sure that people feel welcome and comfortable in agency buildings.

As part of this, a range of facilities may be offered to clients who visit.



Toilets and changing facilities

We asked survey respondents what types of toilet and changing facilities they would expect.

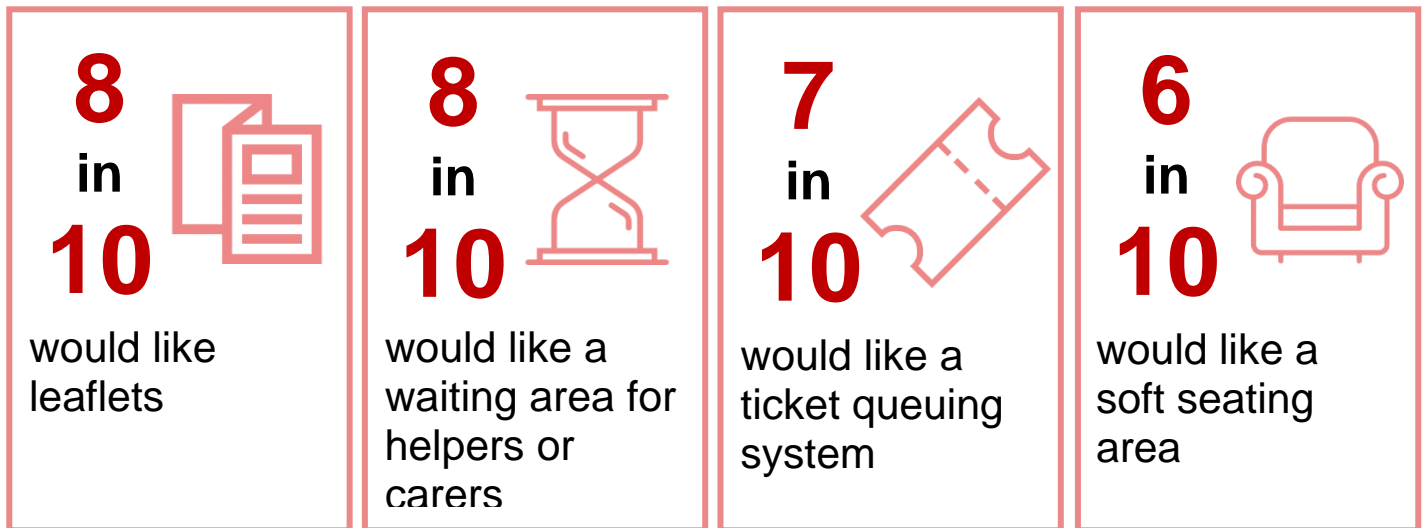


A quarter of survey respondents also told us they would like gender neutral toilets.



Waiting facilities

We also asked survey respondents what waiting facilities they would find useful.



Almost **six in ten survey respondents** also told us they would **like something to do whilst waiting, such as magazines to read.**

Focus group participants told us they expected the waiting area to be **quiet and comfortable:**

‘A quiet room to wait in, not too bright, not too warm, no radio or music playing in the waiting room.’

Some people told us they **would find a quiet room useful:**

‘I know people who don’t like it when a space is open, don’t like the noise. Doesn’t need to be bigger than a disabled toilet...’

Other facilities

We also asked survey respondents what other facilities they would find useful.



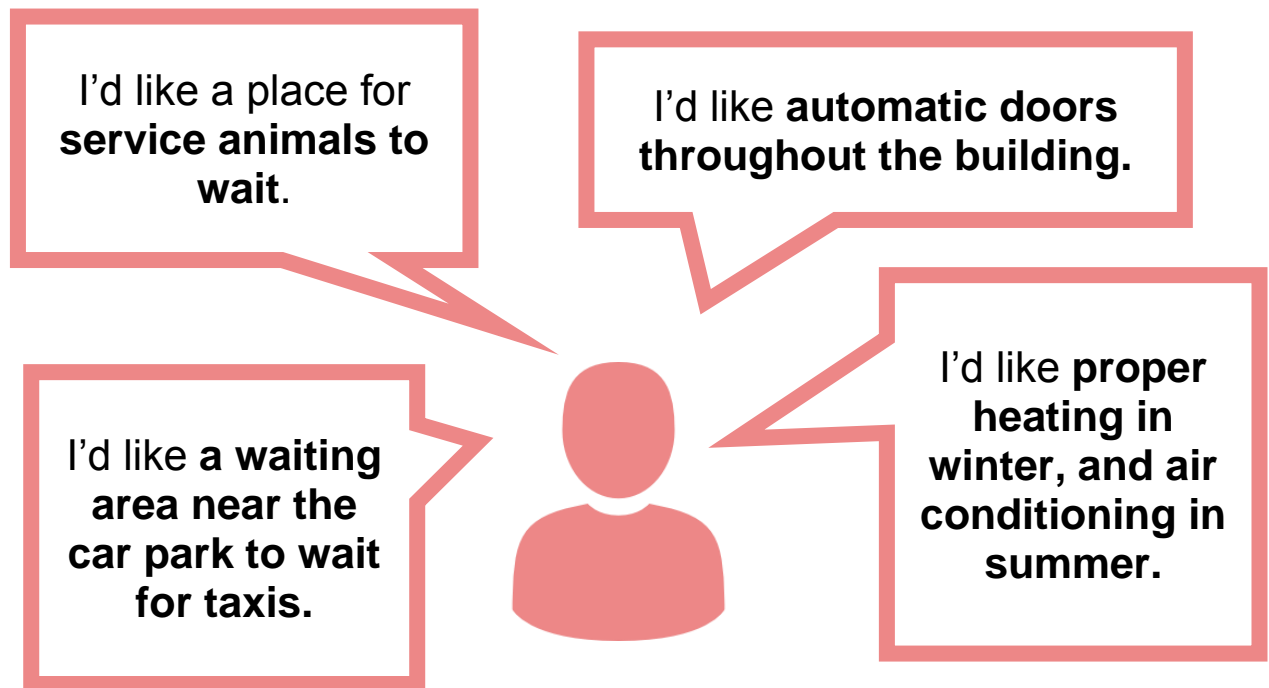
The **most popular** was private interview reviews, however most people also wanted a refreshment area.

We heard from focus group participants that **having a refreshment area could help keep people calm in a potentially stressful environment:**

‘I feel it needs food and drink, because you are already walking into a stressful situation. For a lot of people, eating and drinking is a way to calm their nerves. Having just a little bit here or there could be helpful.’

Some people disagreed with having an area for children to play, saying that **it was not Social Security Scotland’s job to do this, and that parents should bring toys for them.** Other participants worried that having play areas would create too much noise.

A few participants suggested other facilities that were not listed in the survey. These included:



People who lived in urban areas, rural areas and islands tended not to have different expectations as to what facilities were available.

Telling the agency your accessibility needs

In the future, **Social Security Scotland** may allow clients to state their accessibility needs in advance of visiting an agency building.

Over nine in ten survey respondents said they'd like to do this.

Most people wanted to tell Social Security Scotland their accessibility needs by **email** however **telephone, through an app or through an advocate** were also popular.

How long face to face meetings should last

We asked survey respondents **how long they would be able to speak to an agent when visiting an agency building.**



Less than one in ten said they could meet for **less than 15 minutes.**



Just under six in ten said they could meet for **more than 30 minutes.**

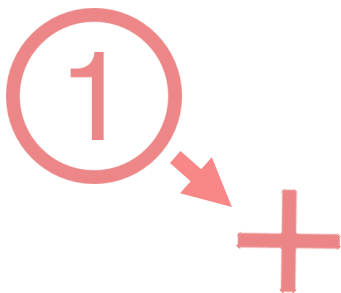


Just over four in ten said they could meet for **more than 45 minutes.**



Almost two in ten said they could meet for **more than 60 minutes.**

Sometimes a discussion may need to go on for longer than a client feels able to manage, so we wanted to understand **what people thought should happen in that situation.**



Three quarters wanted to arrange one meeting, then a follow-up if required



Around 1 in 10 wanted to arrange more than one meeting to start with



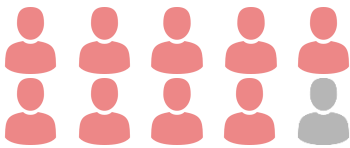
Around 1 in 10 wanted to finish the conversation as quickly as possible

Privacy

Experience Panel members have told us in the past that **privacy is important when discussing sensitive information such as their health status.**

We asked survey respondents **how important having a private space was when doing different things.** Most survey respondents wanted a private space to do most activities. **The activity least participants wanted a private space for was waiting to speak to a member of staff, and being signposted onto other services.**

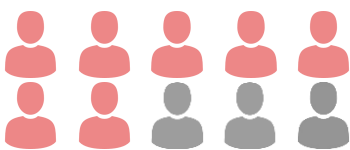
Almost everyone



wanted a private space for:

- Talking about their benefits
- Making complaints
- Asking for advice
- Getting updates on their application

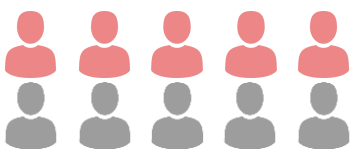
Over two thirds



wanted a private space for:

- Being signposted to other support services

Half



wanted a private space for:

- Waiting to speak to a member of staff in an agency building or venue

Most focus group participants felt that discussing general information and answering general queries did not need a private space. If the conversation started to include private information then they felt it should be moved to a private area.

‘For general advice in open space, but if health comes up move to a private space’

Most people felt that a private space was one where **you could not be overheard**.

‘Privacy means a space where you can speak without being overheard.’

However this meant different things to different people. Some focus group participants told us that they wanted 4 walls and a door. Other people were happy with a booth with high walls.

‘A booth might offer enough privacy if walls were high enough.’

What's Next?

The findings from this research will be used to help decide what the Social Security Scotland buildings and local offices will be like.



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The Scottish Government
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Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

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