



# Social Security Experience Panels: Agency Buildings



**EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

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# Introduction

In July and August 2018, the Scottish Government carried out a survey and focus groups with Experience Panel members to understand what facilities they expected from agency buildings, their views on co-locating with other organisations and their thoughts on privacy. This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panel programme of research.

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

## Summary

### Reasons for visiting an agency building

Over eight in ten survey respondents said they would want some form of face to face interaction with the agency at one point, with just over two thirds saying they would visit an agency building to do so. Participants had various reasons for wanting face to face interaction. Some participants felt using the phone was difficult due to their health condition, others told us that they valued face to face contact. There was a recurring perception amongst participants that face to face meetings were a good way to get advice, reassurance or an immediate answer to their queries.

A small number of participants said they would not want any face to face interaction. This was typically due to their disability making travel or social situations difficult to manage however some simply preferred doing things online.

The most common reason for wanting to visit an agency building was to get advice on eligibility, or to make an application. Just under two thirds would also visit to get information about other support available to them. Less than half of survey respondents said they would visit the agency in person to check the status of an application.

There was no significant association between respondent location and their desire for face to face contact, suggesting respondents in urban and rural locations have similar expectations for the level of face to face contact they would want with the agency.

### The location of agency buildings

Survey and focus group participants told us that they wanted a centrally located building with a large car park. Many participants said they expected there to be drop-off spaces in front of the building to cater to mobility-impaired clients. Participants could recall times where visiting an office had been made more difficult due to lack of parking or the building being in a remote location.

A small number of participants requested buildings be near public transport, however many said they could not, or did not want to rely on public transport as it was stressful, unreliable and took too long.

Participants told us that having benches on the route from the car park to the building would allow them to rest as they walked to the front door. This was seen to be particularly important if there was an uphill walk to the entrance.

## **Co-location**

Social Security Scotland will have a local presence throughout Scotland. To achieve this, the agency may have to co-locate within the buildings of other organisations. Survey respondents were mostly happy for the agency to co-locate with their local authority, Citizen's Advice Bureau or at a local NHS site. Around two thirds of survey respondents said they would be very happy or happy with these locations.

Focus group participants tended to not have strong opinions around co-location, however some had strong views about certain buildings. Some participants said that local authority staff were perceived as 'unfriendly' and that sharing a building with them would be 'problematic'. Others told us that local authority buildings tended to be old and therefore may not be the most accessible. Co-locating in specific NHS sites was said to be unwise by some participants due to a lack of space and poor parking provision.

Co-locating within DWP buildings was the most contentious proposal, with less than half of survey respondents being very happy or happy for this to happen.

## **How agency buildings should look**

Focus group participants told us the external look of the building was important, as it could influence their initial perceptions of the agency. Few participants gave specific examples of what buildings should look like, with most saying they should be different from those used by DWP.

Participants were split on how easy it should be to identify the buildings, with some pointing out that people may not want others to know why they were visiting. However others were happy for the building to be easily identified, pointing out that local people would know what the building was irrespective of how it was signed. Many participants felt that the building should be signposted from public transport and the car park, with signs displaying the walking distance to the building.

## **The interior of agency buildings**

Focus group participants felt the interior of the buildings should be 'relaxed' and 'friendly' however they had different interpretations of this in practice.

For some, open plan spaces were a negative as they were noisy and risked people overhearing them when they talked. Other people felt that a bright open space could be refreshing.

A number of participants gave accessibility related reasons for their views. For example, one participant did not want white walls as they caused glare in his eyes. Another suggested bright lighting could cause difficulties for people with autism.

Participants felt the accoustics of the building were important, wanting noise levels to be kept relatively low.

In terms of furniture, participants told us that having varied and sufficient seating was critical to them being able to navigate the building easily. They felt that barriers, such as screens between clients and staff were not needed and did not create a welcoming atmosphere. Furniture should cater to client's accessibility needs, such as having a lowered reception desk for wheelchair users.

## **Facilities of agency buildings**

Focus group and survey participants told us that providing the right facilities would help make clients feel 'safe and comfortable'.

Nine in ten survey respondents wanted accessible toilets, and six in ten wanted a changing places toilet. There was moderate demand for baby changing facilities and a gender neutral toilet (around a quarter).

In terms of the waiting area, almost eight in ten participants said they would like leaflets and information on support services and a suitable waiting area for their helper, carer or advocate. A ticket queuing system, something to do whilst waiting and a soft seating area were also supported by more than half of participants.

Other facilities participants expected included private interview rooms, supported by nine in ten and a refreshment area. Participants were less interested in the agency providing an area for children to play, with some pointing out that should be the parents' job. Other participants said that having things for children to do may manage noise levels and make the area more pleasant.

## **Telling the agency your needs**

In the future, Social Security Scotland may allow clients to state their accessibility needs in advance of visiting an agency venue. Over nine in ten respondents told us they wanted to be able to do this. The most popular option for telling the agency about accessibility needs was by email, with more than eight in ten respondents preferring this method. Telephone and through an app were also popular, with over six in ten saying they would like to tell the agency this way. The least popular methods were through a third party and face to face, with less than three in ten respondents opting for this.

The most popular accessible way of telling the agency about accessibility needs was through the BSL Scotland line (an online video relay interpreting service).

## **Duration of visit**

We asked survey respondents how long they would be able to speak to a member of agency staff if they did come to a building for a meeting. Just over nine in ten respondents said they could speak for more than 15 minutes, and two thirds for more than 30 minutes. Just under two in ten said they could speak for more than 60 minutes.

We asked respondents what they would want to happen if a conversation had to go on for longer than they felt able to talk. Three quarters of respondents wanted the ability to arrange a follow-up meeting. Just over one in ten wanted to arrange more than one meeting to start with or wanted to finish the conversation as quickly as possible.

## **Privacy**

Respondents told us that having a private space when talking about their health or other personal information was important. Almost all respondents said it was also important to be in a private space when getting advice on eligibility, making complaints or getting advice for someone else.

Participants told us that a private space was somewhere you couldn't be overheard, but this didn't necessarily mean a separate room. Some participants told us that a booth with high walls could be acceptable if it was private enough. Participants advised against using screens to separate spaces, as they felt they did little to stop people overhearing conversations.

## **Paper Applications**

Four in ten survey respondents said they would always apply for their benefits by paper, and just under a third said they would apply by paper sometimes. A quarter of respondents said they would never want to apply by paper, preferring to do so online.

## **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. The Experience Panels are made up of over 2,400 people from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland.

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. As part of the development of the new agency, we have worked with Experience Panel members to understand what they expect from agency buildings and their views on co-location and privacy.

This report details the findings and themes which emerged from a survey and nine focus groups which took place in July and August 2018. The research considered:

- Why participants would visit an agency building;

- What facilities participants would want when visiting agency buildings;
- Participants' views on co-locating with other organisations; and
- Participant's views on privacy, including what a 'private space' looked like.

Participants were recruited from the Scottish Government Experience Panels (2,456 people). All Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey and focus groups.

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 will be devolved to Scotland. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the participants only, and are not indicative of the wider Scottish population. The number of responses for the survey was small and this should be kept in mind when considering the results. Percentages are given only to give a broad sense of the balance of opinion across participants.

## Focus Groups

9 focus groups were held in locations across Scotland<sup>1</sup>. Focus groups were facilitated by Scottish Government social researchers. To ensure the anonymity of participants was preserved, focus groups were not audio or video recorded. The content of focus groups was detailed by notetakers in attendance.

## 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 184 people chose to complete the survey (a response rate of 7.49 per cent). It should be noted that given the title of the survey 'Help us communicate with you face-to-face', it is likely that Panel members who chose to respond had a greater interest in face to face communication, including visiting buildings, than that of the typical Experience Panel member. Similarly, Experience Panel members who are not interested in face to face contact with the agency, or do not feel it is likely they will ever need face to face contact, may have been less inclined to respond.

Information from the survey was added to information from the 'About Your Benefits and You'<sup>2</sup> and 'Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far'<sup>3</sup> surveys. The demographic data collected in these surveys was linked to the information supplied by respondents of this survey as part of the longitudinal data set for the wider Experience Panels project.

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<sup>1</sup> Castle Douglas, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Fort William, Glasgow, Irvine and Kirkcaldy

<sup>2</sup> 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/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/7769/)

<sup>3</sup> 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/](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083/)

Almost four in ten survey respondents identified as ‘man or boy’ (37 per cent) and just over six in ten (63 per cent) as ‘woman or girl’.

**Table 1: Gender of survey respondents (n=142)**

Gender	%
Man or boy	37
Woman or girl	63
Total	100

Almost nine in ten survey respondents were aged 45 or over (87 per cent) with just over one in ten aged between 25 and 44 (13 per cent). No survey respondents were under the age of 25 or over the age of 79.

**Table 2: Age of survey respondents (n=144)**

Age	%
Under 25	0
25 – 44	13
45 – 59	49
60 – 79	38
80 or over	0
Total	100

Almost seven in ten survey respondents (68 per cent) had a physical disability. A large number of respondents also reported having chronic pain (66 per cent) or another type of long term health condition (68 per cent).

Over one in ten respondents had a severe hearing impairment (15 per cent), and less than one in twenty respondents had a severe visual impairment (3 per cent).

**Table 3: Disability types of survey respondents (n=140-145)<sup>4</sup>**

Disability Type	%
Has a physical disability	68
Has chronic pain	66
Has a mental health condition	32

<sup>4</sup> The percentage is of total respondents. Respondents were able to select multiple disability types.



Has a severe hearing impairment	15
Has a severe visual impairment	3
Has a learning disability	11
Has another kind of disability or long term health condition	68

Just under four in ten respondents were carers of some sort (39 per cent). Respondents most commonly cared for an adult friend or relative (30 per cent) and around a fifth were a carer due to old age (20 per cent).

**Table 4: Who do survey respondents care for (n=145)<sup>5</sup>**

Person who they care for	%
Cares for an adult	30
Cares for a child	10
Carer due to old age	20

Survey respondents took part from thirty of the thirty-two local authorities, with the majority living in an urban area (64 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

**Table 5: Location of survey respondents (n=144)**

Location	%
Urban	64
Rural	23
Prefer not to say	13
Total	100

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 (68 per cent) and Disability Living Allowance (66 per cent). The least common benefits claimed were Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit (0 per cent) and Funeral Expenses (6 per cent).

<sup>5</sup> Percentages include all respondents who took part. Respondents were able to select multiple boxes.

<sup>6</sup> 17% of the Scottish population lives in a rural area.

Scottish Government (2018). *Rural Scotland Key Facts 2018*. [Online] Available at: [www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00541327.pdf](http://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0054/00541327.pdf)

**Table 6: Respondents benefit experience <sup>7</sup>(n=132)**

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>%</b>
Personal Independence Payment	68
Disability Living Allowance	66
Winter Fuel Payment	32
Carer's Allowance	33
Cold Weather Payment	32
Discretionary Housing Payment	21
Universal Credit	20
Attendance Allowance	20
Scottish Welfare Fund	18
Severe Disablement Allowance	17
Funeral Expenses	6
Sure Start Maternity Grant	7
Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit	0

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'<sup>8</sup>.

## **Reasons for visiting an agency building**

Social Security Scotland wants to ensure that visiting an agency building is as easy as possible for clients and that when they arrive, they are able to access the facilities and services they require.

To begin, we asked survey respondents if they would ever want to speak to Social Security Scotland in person. Over eight in ten respondents (85 per cent) said they would want to speak to Social Security Scotland in person, and over two thirds (67 per cent) told us they want want to visit an agency building at one point.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/10/3083)

Around one in five respondents would always visit an agency building (21 per cent) or would always need a home visit (18 per cent), with just under half saying they would need both at different times (46 per cent).

Just over one in ten (14 per cent) told us they would never want to speak to the agency in person.

**Table 7: Would you ever want to speak to the agency in person? (n=182)**

	%
Yes – I would visit an agency office	21
Yes – I would need a home visit	18
Sometimes I would visit an agency office and sometimes I would need a home visit	46
No	14

To better understand the profile of clients who would want face to face contact, a series of chi-square tests were carried out.

A chi-square test of association revealed no significant associations between wanting any type of face to face contact<sup>9</sup> and gender<sup>10</sup>. There was also no significant associations with wanting any type of face to face contact and participant age<sup>11, 12</sup>.

A further chi-square test of association revealed no significant differences between respondents in urban and rural areas, and their desire for face to face contact in some form<sup>13</sup>. The lack of variance between respondents in urban and more remote locations suggests clients may have similar expectations as to the level and frequency of face to face contact available with the agency irrespective of their location, however further work is required to fully evaluate this claim.

We asked focus group participants why they would want to speak to the agency in person. Some participants said they found using the phone difficult, so a face to face appointment was preferable:

‘I find using the phone very difficult, so a non-threatening face to face appointment can help sort things out.’

<sup>9</sup> Participants who responded with ‘Yes – I would visit an agency office’, ‘Yes – I would need a home visit’ or ‘Sometimes I would visit an agency office and sometimes I would need a home visit’ were classed as wanting to speak to the agency face to face at some point.

<sup>10</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=141) = 0.190$ , exact  $p=.663$

<sup>11</sup> Age variables were dichotomized into ‘under 60’ and ‘aged 60 and over’.

<sup>12</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=142) = 0.962$ , exact  $p=.327$

<sup>13</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=125) = 0.024$ , exact  $p=.877$

'As a person with hearing loss, I sometimes find it difficult to hear on the telephone. I am confident in completing forms and accessing information online, but sometimes I want more information and clarification.'

Some participants told us that they found face to face interactions more 'personal' or that they thought it was easier to talk about their issues in person:

'Face to face allows a personal view to be created.'

'One can tell one's story more effectively face to face, provided SSS [Social Security Scotland] staff have listening skills...'

Some participants felt that doing things face to face meant they were more likely to get a faster service or that applications would be 'right first time' as an employee was there to check it for them:

'Much easier to get help face to face rather than trying to do it yourself. Saves time getting your application approved if all the information is correct from the start.'

A recurring theme was that a face to face appointment offered more than doing something online – for example, participants suggested a face to face appointment could offer additional assistance, signposting to other services, document checking and the added re-assurance that nothing would go wrong:

'People need the re-assurance of a face to face appointment...'

However not all participants were keen on face to face appointments. Some participants told us that they would only come into an office when absolutely necessary, as they found travelling difficult, did not like being in public places, or just preferred doing things online:

'I would only require it if absolutely necessary, like for an assessment. Personally I prefer online or email contact.'

'I would prefer not to do face to face as I don't have enough energy for social interactions with strangers...'

For participants who lived in rural and remote locations, the time spent travelling to an office was often too much to deal with:

'I live on an island and it is not always possible for me to travel to an office.'

In these circumstances, some participants told us they would prefer home visits rather than visiting an agency building, or to just do everything by phone or online.

We wanted to find out the reasons participants would visit an agency building, so we asked them what tasks they would like to do in person.

Around three quarters of survey respondents said they would contact the agency in person to get advice on their eligibility for certain benefits (75 per cent) or to make a benefit application (73 per cent). Almost seven in ten would want help with an application (68 per cent) and just under two thirds would want to get information about other support and services available (61 per cent).

Less than half of survey respondents (46 per cent) would contact the agency in person to check the status of an existing application.

**Table 8: Reasons for face to face contact (n=105-138)**

	%
Advice on eligibility	75
To make an application	73
To get help with an application	68
To get information about other support and services	61
To make a complaint or provide feedback	57
To check the status of my application	46

A number of significant associations were observed between respondents' age and their reasons for wanting face to face contact, particularly in relation to seeking information (for example, information about support organisations or eligibility). Respondents aged over 60 tended to say they wanted to get this information face to face, with respondents aged under 60 less likely to want this.

A chi-square test of association revealed a significant association between age and desire to get information on other services or support groups through face to face contact<sup>14</sup>. Almost eight in ten respondents aged 60 and over said they would want to get advice on other services and support available to them at an agency building. Less than half of respondents aged under 60 (46 per cent) said they would want to do this.

Another chi-square test of association revealed a significant association between age and desire to get information on eligibility through face-to-face contact<sup>15</sup>. Over a third of respondents aged under 60 (34 per cent) would not want to get face to face advice on benefits, where as only 15 per cent of people aged 60 and over would not want this.

<sup>14</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=105) = 9.525, p < .01$

<sup>15</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=112) = 4.870, p < .05$

That an association between age and the reasons for face to face exists for only a few reasons suggests that further work is needed to determine whether there is a substantive difference between client age groups and their reasons for face to face contact.

## Location of agency buildings

Previous research with Experience Panel members has suggested that the locations of physical sites are highly important for people who interact with the agency<sup>16</sup>. This is particularly true for disabled clients, who may struggle to reach a building if it is situated without consideration of their access requirements.

### Getting to the building

When discussing agency buildings, a well-located and sufficiently large car park was a recurring theme amongst respondents. Participants spoke of the need for car parking not just when talking about the location of agency buildings, but also when discussing co-location and accessibility.

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

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

Some participants also said a drop-off zone at the very front was useful for people who struggled to walk longer distances:

‘Building needs to have a drop-off process near the main entrance to the building...’

Many participants gave examples of times where a lack of parking made their journey more 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 that they could not, or did not want to rely on 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 told us that the area around the building should not be too hilly or uneven, that people should not have to walk up a hill to enter the building and that

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2018). *Social Security Experience Panels: Personal Independence Payment Discovery – Visual Summary*. [Online] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-personal-independence-payment-discovery-visual-summary>

the entrance to the building should not involve stairs. Participants expected the route from the car park to the building to be on level ground and clearly signposted.

Some participants said that having benches on the route to the building would be useful:

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

Others suggested railings would help clients who had difficulty walking:

‘I’ll say that from when I injured my hip, rails become my new best friend. But if you have crutches or not, rails can be so much easier to hold onto...’

## Co-locating with other organisations

Social Security Scotland will have a local presence across the country, with clients able to speak with the agency in person in their local area. To do this, the agency may have to co-locate with other organisations.

We asked survey respondents how they would feel if the agency co-located with a number of different organisations. The organisations presented to respondents represent potential ideas and may not be representative of where the agency co-locates in the future.

Respondents were most happy for the agency to co-locate with their local authority, with two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) saying they were ‘very happy’ or ‘happy’ for this to happen. Similar numbers of respondents felt the same about co-locating with their local Citizen’s Advice Bureau or at a National Health Service location (63 per cent).

The most contentious place to co-locate was at Department for Work and Pensions buildings, such as a JobCentre Plus. Just less than half of respondents (47 per cent) were ‘very happy’ or ‘happy’ with this, and just under a third were ‘unhappy’ and ‘very unhappy’.

**Table 9: Respondents views on co-location (n=172-177)**

Organisation	Very happy and Happy (%)	Neutral (%)	Unhappy and Very unhappy (%)
Your local authority	66	22	12
Your local Citizen’s Advice Bureau	63	27	10
At a National Health Service location (such as a hospital or GP surgery)	63	26	11
At a Department for Work and Pensions building (such as a JobCentre Plus)	47	22	31

Focus group participants were also asked their views on co-locating with other organisations. Some participants did not have strong opinions around co-location, so long as the building was accessible.

‘They have their own space [...], if it’s separate, what’s the issue.’

However other participants did have strong views over the use of local authority, NHS and other government buildings.

## Local authorities

Whilst two thirds of survey respondents said they would be very happy or happy with the agency co-locating with a local authority, focus group participants had mixed views.

Some participants had negative experiences of interacting with their local authority or their employees:

‘People have had 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’re 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.’

Other participants felt that local authority buildings were not as accessible as they should be, or were of poor quality:

‘If using council buildings, be aware that they vary – some are inaccessible and have barriers between staff and customers...’

‘Local authority buildings can be unclean and have “odours”.’

Some participants suggested that sharing a building could be acceptable if the agency had its own entrance, reception area, as sharing reception areas was seen to be problematic by some:

‘Sharing the main reception area is not good – local authority reception staff would need to be trained in agency values.’



## NHS Buildings

Just under two thirds of survey respondents (63 per cent) said they would be very happy or happy with the agency co-locating with the NHS. Focus group participants raised few objections to the idea in principle, however some did feel it was an unrealistic goal as they felt NHS buildings would not have the space or resources to accommodate the agency:

‘Here that would be no use – I know in [location] there’s no space in the hospital anyway.’

Some participants also perceived NHS buildings to be hard to travel to due to limited parking:

‘Don’t use NHS buildings as parking is difficult due to insufficient spaces.’

Overall, few participants had strong objections to the use of NHS buildings, however those that were raised represented practical barriers to attending such sites for participants with mobility issues.

## Other government buildings

Survey respondents were least happy with the agency co-locating within a DWP building, such as a JobCentre Plus. Many focus group participants told us they had negative associations with DWP buildings as a result of past interactions with the agency. They told us that if the agency co-located within DWP buildings, they would be reluctant to visit.

‘...you’d never get anyone going in the building.’

## How agency buildings should look

Social Security Scotland wants to ensure that it meets client’s expectations around how agency buildings should look. Focus group participants started by considering how agency buildings should look externally.

### Exterior look of agency buildings

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

‘The look of the building can affect your feeling as you approach.’

Few participants gave specific examples of how buildings should look externally, however many requested that they look different to those used by DWP:

‘Have buildings that look different from stereotypical DWP buildings.’

Participants discussed whether the exterior of the building should be easily identifiable, with some participants pointing out that people may not want others to know they were visiting the agency. They felt that clear, but subtle signage would allow visitors to identify the building without making the building stand out:

‘Buildings should have clear signage done in a subtle way’.

However other participants were happy for the building to be clearly associated with the agency, with one commenting that local people would know the function of the building irrespective of how it was signed:

‘[There] needs to be big signs. Even if they weren’t there, everyone would know what it is, so have signs. [...] Locals would know, new people to the area wouldn’t.’

## Interior look of agency buildings

Participants had mixed opinions on the specific aspects of how the agency’s buildings should look and feel internally, however there were several areas of widespread agreement. Most participants felt the general look and feel of the buildings should be ‘relaxed’ and ‘friendly’ with all areas being fully accessible. We heard from several participants how the current system made them feel under ‘suspicion’:

‘I would want a more friendly and relaxed 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. People should not have to feel this way.’

Participants told us that accessibility should be considered at every point when designing the interior of agency buildings. Participants expected the interior of agency buildings to be easy to navigate and have clear signage.

‘Clear and concise signage that isn’t vague...’

Some participants told us that it was important to have distances on the sign to allow disabled participants to judge if they could walk that far.

‘One thing I’d like to see inside and outside is having the distance on the sign – how far away are things.’

In terms of colours, participants felt that white walls were problematic and would ‘glare’ on a bright day. It was suggested more neutral colours with beige were preferable.

‘Colour of the walls is one thing. When very bright, bright white walls glare a lot in my good eye. Beige would be okay, when you’ve got white walls with bright lights it can be overwhelming.’

Some participants requested 'dementia friendly' design features, such as walls and furniture not being particular colours or patterns:

'Certain colours are not okay for people with dementia – e.g. black and white tiles – people with dementia think that the floors are moving.'

Participants also suggested care be taken when choosing the type of flooring. Flat surfaces were said to be highly important. Certain floorings such as polished wood and carpets were seen to be hard to move around on for people with accessibility aids such as walking sticks or scooters.

Many participants told us that the acoustics of the building were important to them, with overly loud environments being overwhelming or hard to manage. They felt that care had to be taken in large rooms to manage noise levels.

For lighting, participants told us that bright lights could be difficult to deal with, particularly for people with autism. It was suggested that there should be an option for appointment rooms to be dimmed if needed to accommodate these clients.

A small number of participants said they had difficulty with certain types of lighting, such as newer 'energy saving' lightbulbs.

'Going to the JobCentre with my son would be impossible because he would hear the lights buzzing. [...] The new energy saving ones buzz.'

Many participants commented on glass screens and barriers being used, particularly in reception areas. Participants told us that they felt barriers and glass screens were unhelpful and would prefer they were not used.

'I feel reception areas should be welcoming and non-confrontational. For me, this means no glass screens.'

Participants generally felt the building should be on a single floor, however it was recognised that in some locations (such as city centres), this was unlikely to be possible. In these cases, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring lifts were reliable and operational.

'Buildings where everything is on the one level. No point having a building with lifts if they don't work...'

Participants told us they expected furniture to be accessible and easy to use. Having sufficient seats available was seen to be particularly important, as was having a variety of seating to choose from. Participants said that being able to sit down at all stages of their visit would be useful. Some participants said that seats with backs and armrests were 'essential' for them, whilst others preferred more relaxed and 'softer' seating.

‘Seating should be suitable for clients with a variety of options for different conditions...’

## Facilities of agency buildings

Social Security Scotland wants to make sure clients feel welcome and comfortable in agency buildings. As part of this, a range of facilities may be offered to clients who visit. This may include refreshments, guidance on other support available, computer and internet access and public telephones.

We heard from focus group participants that offering good facilities would improve their perception of the agency and would make the system feel more ‘humane’.

‘People should feel safe and comfortable. Decent facilities would make the system more humane and less of an ordeal.’

In order to understand the facilities clients expected of agency buildings, we asked survey participants what facilities they would find useful.

Almost nine in ten survey respondents (89 per cent) said they would find accessible toilets useful, and six in ten (60 per cent) said they would like a changing places toilet. Less than a third of respondents wanted baby changing facilities (28 per cent) or a gender neutral toilet (24 per cent).

**Table 10: Facilities respondents would find useful – toilets and changing facilities (n=107-145)**

Facility	%
Accessible toilets	89
A changing places toilet (i.e. changing facilities for disabled people) <sup>17</sup>	60
Baby changing facilities	28
A gender neutral toilet	24

Participants told us that the toilets should be clearly signposted and there should be sufficient numbers of disabled toilets.

Survey respondents were also asked what waiting facilities they would find useful. Almost eight in ten (77 per cent) told us they would like leaflets and information on what other support services were available.

<sup>17</sup> A changing places toilet is a larger, accessible toilet with specific adaption to meet the needs of people with disabilities, such as an adult changing bench and a tracking hoist system.

Over three quarters (76 per cent) wanted a suitable area for their helper, carer, advocate or family member and over two thirds (68 per cent) wanted a ticket queuing system. Just over half wanted something to do whilst waiting (56 per cent) and a soft seating area (55 per cent).

**Table 11: Facilities respondents would find useful – waiting (n=107-145)**

Facility	%
Leaflets and information on support services	77
A suitable waiting area for my helper, carer, advocate or family member	76
A ticket queuing system	68
Something to do whilst waiting (e.g. magazines)	56
A soft seating area	55

Focus group participants also told us that they expected a quiet, comfortable waiting area.

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

Some focus group participants also told us that they would find a separate 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, just them and a person and security such as a panic button.’

We also asked respondents what other facilities they would find useful, such as refreshment areas and access to a computer or public phone.

The most popular was private interview rooms, with nine in ten respondents (90 per cent) saying they would like this. Over two thirds of respondents (67 per cent) said they would like a refreshment area to get tea, coffee or water and over a third said they would like access to a computer (42 per cent) or a public phone (39 per cent). Just over one in four said they would like an area for their children to play (26 per cent).

**Table 12: Facilities respondents would find useful – interior (n=107-145)**

Facility	%
Private interview rooms	90
A refreshment area	67
An area for my children to play	26
A computer terminal	42
A public phone	39

Participants told us that facilities such as refreshments could potentially help keep clients calm in potentially stressful situations:

‘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.’

When thinking about facilities for children, some participants felt this was not the agency’s job and that the parents of the children should bring toys for them. Other participants voiced concerns that having play areas for children would create too much noise:

‘Unfortunately, and I hate to say this, but I find having an open plan office can be very distracting, and having kids play and cry and scream is also very distracting.’

Some participants disagreed, and felt that a small area to occupy children whilst their parents were talking would be a good idea:

‘Children...people often bring them to JobCentres. There are no facilities to amuse them. There should at least be a toy corner or books...’

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

- Places for service animals to wait;
- An area within sight of the car park for people leaving the building to wait for taxis in shelter;
- Automatic doors;
- A visual and audible ticketing system; and
- Proper heating in winter, and air conditioning in summer.

In general, there was little difference in expectations for facilities based on participant location. Almost all respondents from rural areas said a car park was important (96 per cent) however just over four in five respondents in urban areas expected one (83 per cent). A chi-square test of association on this variable suggested the association was not significant<sup>18</sup>.

## 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 site. Over nine in ten respondents (92 per cent) wanted to be able to do this.

**Table 13: Views on telling the agency accessibility needs before visiting an agency site (n=177)**

Preference	%
Yes	92
No	8
Total	100

The most popular option for telling the agency about accessibility needs was email, with more than eight in ten respondents (82 per cent) preferring this method. Telephone (64 per cent) and online or through an app (59 per cent) were also popular with respondents. The least popular methods were via a third party (24 per cent) and face to face (30 per cent).

**Table 14: Respondents preference for telling the agency about accessibility needs (n=129-177)**

Channel	%
By email	82
By telephone	64
Online or through an app	59
Via someone acting on your behalf (such as an advocate or carer)	40
In writing	31
Face to face	30
Via a third party (such as Citizen's Advice Bureau)	24

<sup>18</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=99) = 2.893$ , exact  $p=.089$

The most popular accessible means of telling the agency was through the BSL Scotland Line (15 per cent). A small number of respondents also wanted to tell the agency by textphone (8 per cent) and language line (6 per cent).

**Table 15: Accessible means of telling the agency about accessibility needs (n=129-177)**

Accessible communication method	%
BSL Scotland Line	15
By textphone	8
By language line	6

## Duration of meetings

We asked respondents how long they would be able to speak to a member of staff when visiting an agency building. Just over nine in ten respondents (91 per cent) said they would be able to speak to a staff member for more than 15 minutes.

Almost two thirds (58 per cent) said they could speak for more than 30 minutes and just over four in ten (42 per cent) said they could speak for more than 45 minutes. Just under two in ten (18 per cent) said they could speak for more than 60 minutes.

**Table 16: How long respondents can interact with agency staff (n=180)**

Duration	%
Less than 15 minutes	8
Up to 30 minutes	33
Up to 45 minutes	16
Up to 60 minutes	24
More than 60 minutes	18
Total	99

Sometimes the discussion may need to go on for longer than a client felt able to manage, so we wanted to understand what respondents would like to happen in that situation.

Three quarters of respondents (75 per cent) wanted the ability to arrange a follow-up meeting if not everything was covered in the first meeting. Just over one in ten wanted to either arrange more than one meeting to start (14 per cent) or to finish the conversation as quickly as possible (11 per cent).



**Table 17: What should happen if a conversation lasts longer than you can manage (n=167)**

Preference	%
Arrange one meeting, and arrange follow-up meetings if required	75
Arrange more than one meeting to start with	14
Finish the conversation as quickly as possible	11

## Privacy

Past research has highlighted privacy is an important consideration for Experience Panel members, particularly when discussing sensitive information such as their health status<sup>19</sup>.

We asked survey respondents how important having a private space was when interacting with the agency in person. Respondents tended to feel that having a private space was very important or important when doing most tasks in agency buildings.

Almost all respondents (98 per cent) said it was very important or important to have a private space when talking about an existing benefit they were receiving. More than nine in ten respondents (92 per cent) said it was very important or important to get advice on eligibility, make complaints or ask for advice for someone else in a private space.

The situation where least respondents felt it was important to have privacy was waiting to speak to a member of staff, however half of respondents (50 per cent) still felt that privacy in this situation was very important or important.

**Table 18: Respondents views on privacy (n=166=181)**

Organisation	Very important and important (%)	Not that important (%)	Not important at all (%)
Talking about an existing benefit	98	2	0
Getting advice on eligibility	92	7	1
Making complaints or giving feedback	92	8	0
When asking for advice for another person	92	8	0
Applying for a benefit	89	11	1

<sup>19</sup> Scottish Government (2018). *Social Security Experience Panels: Award Duration and Automatic Entitlement*. p.15 [Online] Available: [www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-award-duration-automatic-entitlement](http://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-award-duration-automatic-entitlement)

Getting updates on the status of your application	87	12	1
Being signposted to other services	68	25	8
Waiting to speak to a member of staff	50	36	15

Most focus group participants felt that discussing general information and answering general enquiries did not require a private space. However if the discussion started to include private information such as health details, then they felt the client should be given the option to take the conversation to a private area.

‘For just general advice in open space, but if health came up, could go to private space.’

‘If someone is coming in off the street to the front desk, and the agency is just giving the client general information then this is okay at reception, but if any personal information needs to be spoken about then a private room should always be offered.’

Some participants pointed out that they, or others, could be too intimidated or nervous to ask for a private space even if they wanted one, and suggested that staff proactively offer to take clients to private spaces if talking about sensitive information.

‘People may be intimidated and may not feel comfortable to ask for a private space, they may have the intention of doing this before arrival but feel too scared to do this...’

When participants were asked what a private space looked like, participants said it was a space where they could speak without risk of being overheard:

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

In practice, this meant a space that ‘had walls on 4 sides’, however this did not necessarily mean a separate room:

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

‘Pods which are sound proof are okay, but there should be a room in case people are not comfortable with this.’

Participants were generally happy with glass walls:

‘Glass walls are okay, but should have blinds so there is an option to close them’.

Participants also told us what a private space should not be like. Many participants did not like screens being used to separate spaces, as they did little to stop people overhearing conversations:

‘Screens don’t make a difference. If two desks are together staff at one desk can hear the other.’

## Paper applications

Finally, we asked survey respondents if they would ever want to apply for a benefit using a paper application form.

Over four in ten said they would always apply by paper (44 per cent) and just under a third said they would apply by paper sometimes (32 per cent). A quarter of respondents (25 per cent) said they would never want to apply by paper.

**Table 19: Respondent preferences on applying by paper (n=143)**

Preference	%
Would always by paper	44
Would sometimes apply by paper	32
Would never apply by paper	25
Total	101

A chi-square test of association revealed that age<sup>20</sup> and desire to apply using a paper based form were significantly associated<sup>21</sup>.

Just under a third of respondents under the age of 60 (32 per cent) said they would never want to apply with a paper form, however less than one in ten respondents aged over 60 said this (9 per cent).

The cross-tabulation of the data<sup>22</sup> as presented in Table 20 gives a broad indication of the the direction of association of age and desire to communicate through paper-based means, with the desire weakest amongst respondents aged between 25-44, and increasing with age.

<sup>20</sup> Age variables were split into ‘aged under 60’ and ‘aged 60 and over’.

<sup>21</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=118) = 8.071, p < .01$

<sup>22</sup> It was not possible to run a chi-square test on the non-aggregated age data as there was insufficient representation of certain age groups within the data.

**Table 20: Cross-tabulation of age and desire to use paper-based applications**

Age range	% within age group	
	Wants to use paper-based applications	Does not want to use paper-based applications
25 – 44	53	47
45 – 59	72	28
60 - 79	91	9

## What's Next?

The Scottish Government will continue to engage with Experience Panel members in the design of Scotland's new social security system.

The findings from this research will be used to guide and inform the design and facilities available in Social Security Scotland buildings and local offices.



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