

Social Security Experience Panels: Recruitment Research

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**.

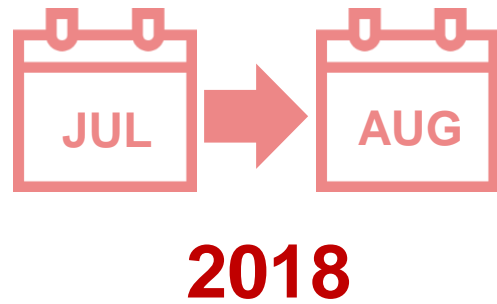
The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design Scotland's new social security system.

About the research

This report details the findings of the 'Agency Recruitment' research carried out with Experience Panel members.



The research took place in



The research explored:



Barriers faced by respondents when looking and applying for jobs



How recruitment processes can be made more accessible



Respondent's views on the Civil Service, and whether they would apply for a Civil Service job

Respondents were between

25 – 79

years old



40%

Man or boy



60%

Woman or girl



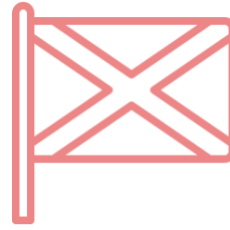
67%

lived in an urban location



19%

lived in an rural location



Respondents took part in

28

out of

32

local authority areas

Over three quarters of 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

Over one in four survey respondents were:



a carer due to **old age**,




a carer to a **child**, or



a carer to an **adult**.

Looking for jobs

 Respondents were asked if they had previously looked for a job.

Over nine in ten survey respondents had looked for a job at some point in their lives, with just under a third having looked in the last five years.



Looked for a job at some point in their lives



Looked for a job in last five years

We asked survey respondents where they had looked for jobs.



The most popular places to look for a job tended to be online. Most respondents had looked at an online recruitment website or an organisation's own website



Looking offline was still popular – almost seven in ten had visited a JobCentre Plus. Others asked friends and family for recommendations, looked in newspapers or volunteered.

Other ways of applying, such as looking at window adverts, getting help through a support organisation or going to a job fair were less popular with respondents.



When asked **what websites they used**, survey respondents listed 36 websites, mentioned a total of 111 times.

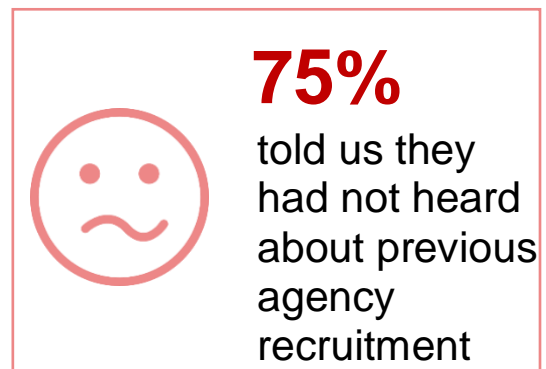
The websites were grouped into 7 categories by the research team. The **most common type of website mentioned was online recruitment websites** (such as S1 Jobs or Indeed.co.uk).

The **least common types of website mentioned was professional networking sites** (such as LinkedIn).

Awareness of agency recruitment



We asked survey respondents if they had **heard about previous Social Security Scotland** recruitment drives.

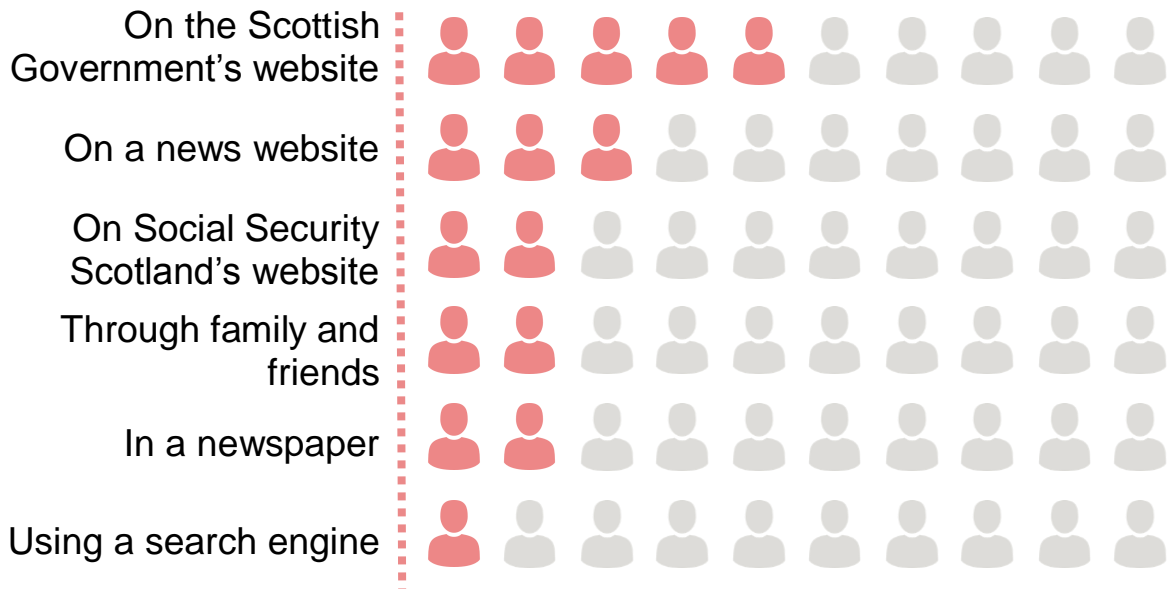


Most survey respondents who had heard about the agency's recruitment **found out online**.


We also asked respondents **if they had heard about past Social Security Scotland recruitment drives**.

Around half of respondents had heard about agency recruitment on the Scottish Government’s website. Around a third heard from news websites and around two in ten heard from the agency’s own website.

Where did survey respondents hear about agency recruitment?*



When asked **where they would like to see Social Security Scotland jobs advertised in the future**, survey respondents gave a wide range of suggestions, including:



Social Media



In newspapers and magazines



In hospitals and GP surgeries



Public sector job websites



In schools, colleges and universities

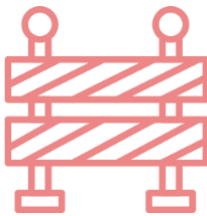


On the Social Security Scotland website

Other suggestions included advertising at job fairs, on buses and trains, at JobCentre Plus and through third sector organisations.

Making the recruitment process accessible

Social Security Scotland wants to make sure that their recruitment process is accessible to everyone. We asked survey and focus group respondents to tell us about the barriers they faced applying for job.



More than half

of survey respondents had experienced barriers when looking for jobs

Job Adverts



Participants felt that **existing job adverts, including a sample advert they were shown, were generally fit for purpose.**

However, **adverts did lack some information that would make disabled participants feel more confident to apply.**



In the sample job advert, participants said there should be a statement at the top of the advert saying **applications from particular groups, such as disabled people would be particularly welcome.**



Participant told us that having a **clear, precise list of job duties was highly important**. Some participants said they would **prefer a bulleted list rather than the paragraphs of text** that were in the sample advert.



Participants told us that the descriptions of the interview and recruitment process should be in plain English, easy to read and understand.



The sample advert encouraged applicants to use the 'STAR' process of responding to interview questions, which **some participants thought was unclear**.

Many participants felt that more could be done in the sample advert to emphasise that the agency would consider candidates based on character as well as experience.

'I've seen adverts that say it's more important to be flexible as opposed to skilled or whatever, where that puts people at their ease...'

Participants said that the sample advert could be made better if more information was included, such as:



Information on **when people will find out about their application**



Easy to find contact details to discuss accessibility requirements and a way to request the advert in a different format



Include an option to **receive feedback**, or explain that **feedback cannot be given**.



Be explicit as to whether the job is **full-time, part-time or flexible**.



Include information on the organisation's **flexible working and accessibility policies** (such as whether home working is available).



Participants felt that the **language used in the sample advert was mostly positive**. They felt words like 'rapport' and 'inclusive' were **the right kind of words to use**.



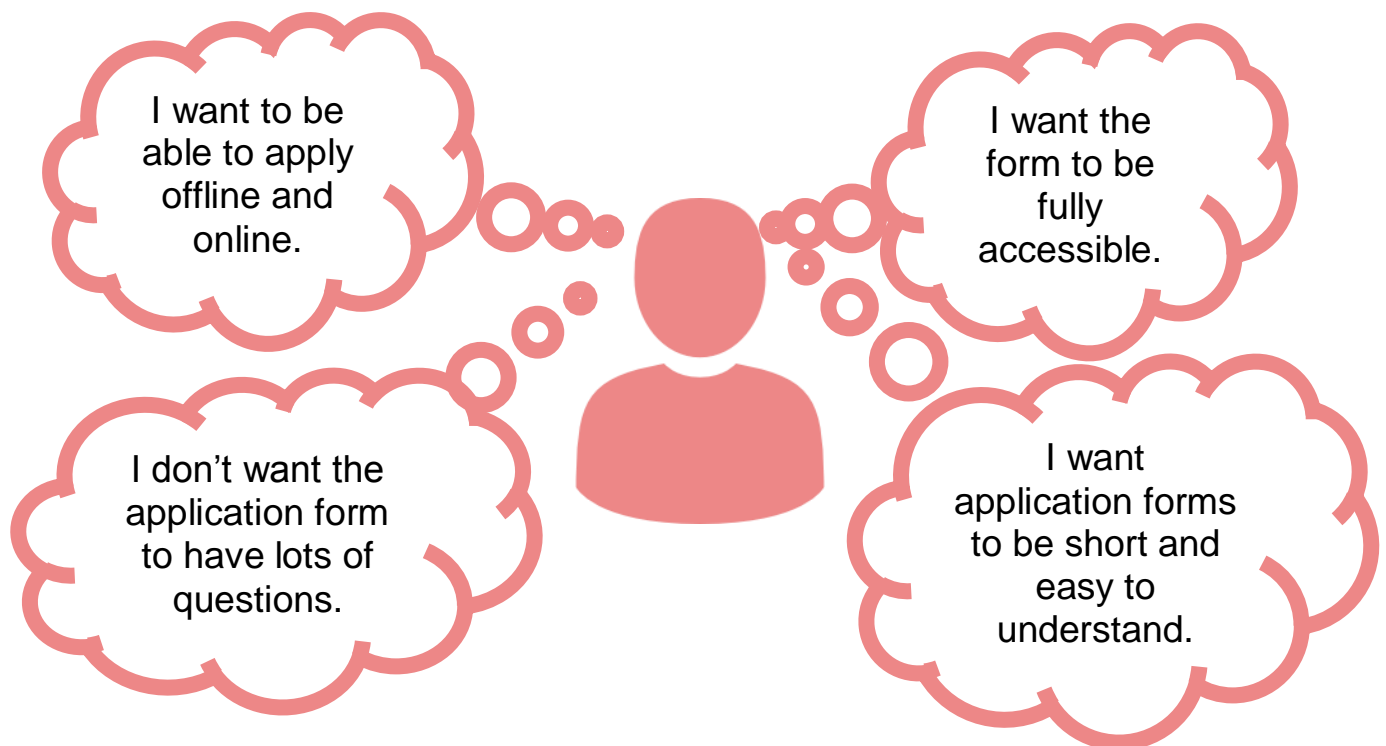
The **language used in some parts of the sample advert** (such as that describing minimum time in post and the competency system) **was said to be 'confusing' and 'civil service speak'**.

Participants tended to **not like using percentages** as part of the instructions in the advert. Most participants said they would prefer text.

Accessible Application Forms

We asked focus group participants how we could make the next stages of the application process more accessible.

Participants told us they wanted application forms to be **fully accessible, available in multiple formats and be short and easy to understand.**



Accessible Interviews

We heard that **having someone with a disability on the interview panel could improve candidate confidence.**

'Always have someone with a learning disability on the panel.'

When attending an interview, participants said **it was important to not judge candidates on their appearance.**

‘A lot of people are on benefits and disabled, they neglect how they look’



Participants were split on what clothing they felt interviewers should wear. Some participants felt they should not dress in overly formal clothing. Others felt that **wearing clothes that were too casual gave a bad impression.**

‘If I came along for a job interview and people were wearing a t-shirt and shorts, I’d walk out and say this interview is over.’

Most participants felt the clothing worn should reflect the position being applied for – smart-casual for lower level positions and more formal wear for more senior roles.

Employer policy and reasonable adjustments

Many participants said that **inclusive employment policies and a willingness to make reasonable adjustments** were essential in reducing the barriers faced by disabled people.

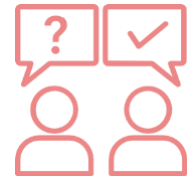
Participants told us the types of adjustments and policies they'd like to see:



Flexible start and finish times



Being able to take medical leave as needed



Making time to understand employee needs



Flexible working locations



Take into account carers' needs



Disability training for all employees

Wider factors

Participants also told us about many wider factors that were perceived to be barriers to employment. These aren't typically within the control of a single employer.



Many participants felt the **complexity of the social security system as a whole** put people off work. Many were unsure as to whether they'd be better or worse off by working.

'Contradictory policies make people afraid to work or volunteer. Just because you have the ability on a good day to do a couple of hours of work doesn't mean you can do full employment ...'

Participants also told us that **reporting a change of circumstances to DWP** (for example, changing hours) **could be difficult**. Directing people to information as to how employment could affect their benefits could be useful for some candidates.

‘Some people would be really worried about how it would affect your benefits. People will want to know, if it’s just one day a week, if there was advice on how it would affect your benefits so you’re not penalised.’

Other issues participants said they faced included:



Finding it hard to travel to interviews



Not having any previous references



Not having money to buy work clothes

Working for the Civil Service

We wanted to understand their perceptions of the Civil Service and whether this would influence their decision to apply for roles in Social Security Scotland.

Perceptions of the Civil Service

Participants had both positive and negative perceptions of the Civil Service.



'well paid'

'a job for life'

'a good place to work;

'proud'

'has a good pension'



'robotic'

'wasteful'

'above you, talking down'

'inflexible'

'bureaucratic'

'opinionated'

Some participants told us about positive experiences they had in the past:

"You do occasionally get ones who go out of their way [to help], but they tend to be the older, long term protected workers..."

Where do perceptions come from?

Participants told us **their perceptions came from different places**. This included **the media, friends and family and interactions with civil servants themselves**.



'My dealings with DVLA – quite difficult to deal with. [I was] passed from pillar to post...'



Some participants felt that **Scottish civil servants were different from those from the Westminster departments.**

'I think there's a two-pronged Civil Service – Scottish and Westminster and they're different. Scottish Government is more open and transparent, I don't trust anything from Westminster,,,'

Participants were mixed as to whether their perceptions would influence a decision to apply for a job.

Some participants said they would want to apply to make a difference. However for many participants, things like accessibility were more important in deciding whether or not to apply.

What's Next

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Social Security Experience Panels to design and implement Scotland's new social security system.

This research will be used to inform future Social Security Scotland recruitment to ensure that everyone feels able to apply for jobs within the agency.



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This publication is available at www.gov.scot

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78781-748-7 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, April 2019

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS573430 (04/19)

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