

Social Security Experience Panels: Fraud investigation notifications

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming 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, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

**Department
for Work and
Pensions**



**Scottish
Government**



Over 2,400 people from across Scotland joined the Experience Panels in 2017. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.



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 gives the findings of the 'fraud investigation notifications' research.

The research took place in



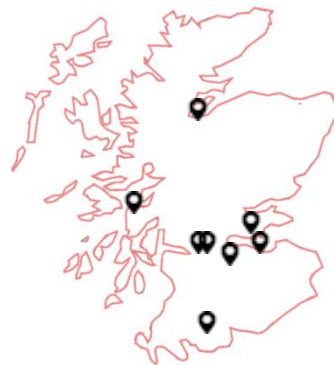
2020



19
Participants



8
Focus
groups



8
Locations



When fraud is suspected, the first stage is for Social Security Scotland to look at information they already have before speaking to the client about it.



Most of the time they will decide that there is no need for further investigation.



We asked Panel members if they thought Social Security Scotland should tell clients if they have been investigated for fraud and nothing was found.

Should Social Security Scotland tell people if they've been investigated for fraud and nothing was found?



Participants were split on whether Social Security Scotland should tell clients if they have been investigated for fraud and nothing was found.



Participants who thought that Social Security Scotland should not tell clients said that being told could be 'damaging' and 'devastating' for some people.



They thought being told would have a bad impact on people's mental health, even if the notification said that no fraud was found.

"If you send a letter to someone with learning difficulties or mental health issues that could set them off. If nothing is found...it needn't be passed on."

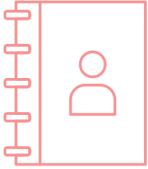
"If it's going nowhere then why would you? If I got a letter saying that I'd been investigated and they found nothing, I'd be panicking."

"It would be damaging for a lot of people."

"It could send you over the edge."



These participants felt that there was no need to tell people about a closed investigation.



Participants who thought that Social Security Scotland should tell said that people had 'a right' to know.

"I think you should be told if someone is investigating something against you."

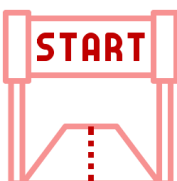


These participants said that clients should be told if it meant they were being checked more often or if there were any future impact because of the investigation.



Others said they value honesty and openness from Social Security Scotland.

"I think openness and honesty works best in all situations. Say there was a meeting and it comes up in the meeting and [you] know nothing about this report."



Some of these participants felt that clients should be told at the start of the investigation process.

Does the way the investigation was triggered affect your answer to whether people should be told?

There are two main ways that a fraud investigation can be triggered:



staff doing routine checks for things that look unusual



allegations by members of public

Responses were mixed when participants were asked if the way an investigation was triggered affected their views on whether a client should be told.



Some participants did not feel the trigger mattered.

“No. I think if it was a routine check it’s still going to freak you out.”

“No we still need to be told why the investigation took place.”





Others said it depended on the case.



Some participants wanted to know if the investigation was triggered by an allegation by a member of public but not because of staff doing routine checks.

“Think they’re entitled to know someone has reported them.”

“If it’s a general check then fair enough you don’t have to say but if you’re under suspicion, you have to say.”



Other participants felt the opposite. They said they would not want to know if the investigation was triggered by an allegation by a member of public.

“Think there is a difference if it comes from a member of the public and someone who has found something in financial records. There’s witch hunting and disputes... it comes down to each case needs to be investigated. You’ve got to have a pathway of saying, in this example, that sounds like yes the person should be informed. But if it was a nasty neighbour and there were no grounds I wouldn’t tell them.”

If you were told, what would you want to know?

If told about an investigation, most participants said they would want to know:



The facts of the case and what triggered the investigation



What information was gathered



Guidance on what they should do next, if anything



Contact information to talk to staff

“What the investigation is regarding and why.”

“Person should be notified of what measures you took to resolve the case.”



If the investigation was triggered by an allegation by a member of public, many participants said they would want to know who made the allegation.

It was explained that this would not be possible.

If you were told that you had been investigated and nothing was found, what impact would that have on you?



Participants generally said that they would feel annoyed, upset and stressed.



Participants felt that any notification should be done in a 'caring' or 'nice way' because of this.

"You would still feel really bad, does someone not like me, and it would drive you a bit...really unwell. It would be really stressful."

"It's a dangerous thing, some people handle it no problem at all, but other people would really struggle."





Some participants said being told would make them suspicious of those around them.

“I’d be very paranoid, like who hates me enough to report me? And you start to suspect everyone. There’s a whole network of people who you co-exist happily with, like neighbours, family and friends, and that gets destroyed.”



Only a few participants said that being told would not affect them, and only one said they would have a good reaction.

“I don’t think I’d feel angry. If they’re doing their job with me they’re doing it with other people too.”

“I would question it then put it to bed. If I’ve not done anything wrong, there’s nothing to worry about.”

“I’d feel good about that if that was me. I know I’m not doing anything wrong, maybe gives me a wee bit of extra confidence.”



At the end of the focus group, we asked participants a second time if Security Scotland should tell people if they've been investigated for fraud and nothing was found.

No one changed their answer having discussed the issue.

Next steps



The Scottish Government's draft rules for fraud investigations said that clients would only be told about a fraud investigation if it reached the stage of speaking to the client about it.



During consultation on the rules, some people disagreed with this. They thought that Social Security Scotland should tell all clients that an investigation had taken place. Even where no further action was to be taken.



This report has shown that panel members had mixed views on this question. However, the research confirms the potential negative impacts on clients of being told they had been investigated.



Participants said they would want to know details about the investigation that Social Security Scotland would not be able to tell them. They said that they would feel annoyed, upset and stressed if they could not be told who had made an allegation.



In view of this we have decided not to change the Code of Practice or Social Security Scotland's fraud processes. Social Security will not notify clients unless the investigation has got far enough that they want to speak to the client about it.



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