



Social Security Experience Panels - Paying benefits into different bank accounts



**EQUALITY AND WELFARE to EQUALITY,
POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

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Introduction

In March 2020, the Scottish Government carried out a survey with Experience Panel members on paying benefits into different bank accounts.

This work was part of the Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels programme of research. In total, 234 Experience Panel members took part in this survey (a response rate of 10 per cent). The findings of this survey reflect the views of the respondents only. This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this work.

Summary

Two thirds of respondents (65 per cent) said they had experience of being paid two or more benefit payments at the same time.

Of those respondents, just under nine in ten (88 per cent) said they have always had all their benefits paid into the same bank or building society account. 9 per cent said they have sometimes arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different bank or building society accounts and 3 per cent said they always arranged this.

Of the small number of respondents who said they sometimes or always arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different accounts, over half said they do this to keep payments separate if they are for different purposes. Around one in five said they did it to split payments between themselves and their partner. The remainder of respondents said they had other reasons but did not specify.

Of those same respondents, half said it was very important for them to be able to pay different benefits into separate bank accounts. Over a quarter said it was mildly important and under a quarter said unimportant.

We asked all other respondents the same question. Over eight in ten (85 per cent) said that it was unimportant for them to be able to pay different benefits into separate bank accounts. Combined, 15 per cent said it was mildly or very important to them, with 8 per cent saying it was very important.

We asked those who said it was important for them to split payments into different bank accounts to tell us why. The most common reason given by respondents was that the ability to have benefits paid into separate accounts allowed for the management of money in terms of budgeting, ensuring all bills are paid and putting money into savings accounts.

The other reasons why respondents said it is or would be important to them to split payments into different accounts can be grouped into the following broad themes:

- Practical reasons such as struggling to access local banking services.

- Multiple accounts providing a degree of financial protection to vulnerable people such as those lacking capacity or in a domestic abuse situation.
- The money being for another person, for example, benefits being paid to another person.
- Security concerns, for example, the possibility of sole bank account being hacked.

Overall, a majority of respondents stated a personal preference for having only one bank or building society account. This is because they only have one account, feared that having different benefits paid into different accounts would confuse matters or be a complicated process, or they did not see the need. Other respondents reiterated the reasons why they personally would find it important, whilst a few acknowledged there were situations where multiple bank accounts would be appropriate for other people, even if they did not want the option themselves.

Background and research methods

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently 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. People from across Scotland who have recent experience of at least one of the benefits coming to Scotland were eligible to join. Over 2,400 people registered as Experience Panel members when it was launched in 2017. 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.

In this research project, we sought Experience Panel members' views on paying benefits into different bank accounts, including:

- Experiences of using multiple bank accounts to receive benefits
- Importance of having multiple bank accounts

This report details the findings and key themes that emerged from this survey with Experience Panel members.

Respondents were recruited from the Scottish Government Experience Panels. All Experience Panel members were invited to take part in the survey. The Social Security Experience Panels are a longitudinal research project. The panels are made up of volunteers from the Scottish population who have relevant experience. The results of this work should be regarded as being reflective of the experience and views of the respondents only, and are not indicative of the views of a wider Scottish population. Percentages are given only to show a broad sense of the balance of opinion across respondents.

Survey method

Information from the survey was added to information from the ‘*About Your Benefits and You*¹’ and ‘*Social Security Experience Panels: Who is in the panels and their experiences so far*²’ 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. Demographic data was only available for around half of survey respondents. This is because demographic information for newly registered Experience Panel members was not yet available at the time of writing. The following demographic information is given to provide context to the findings from the survey.

Three in ten respondents who we have demographic information for identified as ‘man or boy’ (38 per cent) and six in ten (62 per cent) identified as ‘woman or girl’.

Table 1: Gender of survey respondents (n=134)

Gender	%
Woman or girl	62
Man or boy	38
Total	100

Half of respondents were aged 45 to 59 (50 per cent) and over one third were aged 60 to 79 (36 per cent). 13 per cent of respondents were aged between 25 and 44.

Table 2: Age of survey respondents (n=134)

Age	%
Under 25	0
25 – 44	13
45 – 59	50
60 – 79	37
80 or over	0
Total	100

¹ 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/

² 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/

Just under nine in ten respondents (89 per cent) had a disability or long term health condition.

Table 3: Disability status of respondents (n=135)

Disability status	
Disabled	89
Not disabled	11
Total	100

Around six in ten respondents had a physical disability (66 per cent) or chronic pain (64 per cent). One third had a mental health condition (36 per cent) and around one in ten had a severe hearing impairment (13 per cent). Under one in ten had a severe visual impairment (four per cent) or a learning disability (seven per cent). Six in ten told us they had some other kind of disability or long term health condition (63 per cent).

Table 4: Disability types of respondents (n=135)³

Disability Types	%
Has a physical disability	66
Has chronic pain	64
Has a mental health condition	36
Has a severe hearing impairment	13
Has a severe visual impairment	4
Has a learning disability	7
Has another kind of disability or long term health condition	63

³ The percentage is of total respondents, not disabled respondents. Respondents were able to select multiple disability types.

Around four in ten respondents (43 per cent) said they were a carer.

Table 5: Caring status of respondents (n=134)

Caring status	%
Carer	43
Not a carer	56
Prefer not to say	1
Total	101

Of survey respondents who said they were a carer, 70 per cent cared for an adult friend or relative. One in three were a carer due to old age (32 per cent). Two in ten cared for a disabled child (21 per cent).

Table 6: Who respondents care for (n=57)

Care status	%
Cares for an adult	70
Cares for a child	21
Carer due to old age	32

Survey respondents took part from 28 of 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The majority lived in an urban area (82 per cent).⁴

Table 7: Location of respondents (n=128)

Location	%
Urban	82
Rural	18
Total	100

Survey respondents who took part had experience of claiming or helping someone else to claim a wide range of benefits. The most common benefits claimed by survey respondents were Personal Independence Payment (62 per cent) and Disability Living Allowance (68 per cent). The least common benefits claimed were

⁴ 17 per cent 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

for Funeral Expenses (eight per cent) and Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit (three per cent).

Table 8: Respondents' benefit experience (n=158)⁵

Benefit	%
Personal Independence Payment	62
Disability Living Allowance	68
Carer's Allowance	39
Cold Weather Payment	36
Winter Fuel Payment	37
Discretionary Housing Payment	26
Sure Start Maternity Grant	22
Scottish Welfare Fund	19
Attendance Allowance	17
Universal Credit	17
Severe Disablement Allowance	17
Funeral Expenses	8
Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit	3

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.*'⁶

Using Multiple Bank Accounts

Experience of using multiple bank accounts

We asked respondents if they have ever been paid two or more benefit payments at the same time. Two thirds of respondents (65 per cent) said yes.

⁵ Respondents had experience of applying for (themselves or someone else) or receiving these benefits within the last three years, but were not necessarily in receipt of the benefit at the time of the survey.

⁶ 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

Table 9: Have you ever been paid two or more benefit payments at the same time? (n=233)

	%
Yes	65
No	35
Total	100

For those respondents who said they have received different benefit payments at the same time, we asked how they have arranged for the benefits to be paid. Just under nine in ten (88 per cent) said they have always had all their benefits paid into the same bank or building society account. 9 per cent said they have sometimes arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different bank or building society accounts and 3 per cent said they always arranged this.

Table 10: When you have received different benefit payments at the same time, how have you arranged for them to be paid to you? (n=149)

	%
I have always had all my benefits paid into the same bank or building society account	88
I have sometimes arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different bank or building society accounts	9
I have always arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different bank or building society accounts	3
Total	100

Reasons for using multiple bank accounts

We asked the small number of respondents who said they sometimes or always arranged for separate benefits to be paid into different accounts to tell us why they made this arrangement. Over half said they do this to keep payments separate if they are for different purposes. Around one in five said they split payments between themselves and their partner. No respondents said this was to pay a benefit to someone else. The remainder of respondents gave other reasons.

Table 11: Why did you arrange for different benefits to be paid into different accounts? (n=18)

	%
To keep payments separate if they are for different purposes	61
Other	22
To split payments between myself and my partner	17
To pay a benefit to someone else if that person had already helped me out with money	0
Total	100

Importance of Paying to Multiple Accounts

We asked those same respondents who used separate bank accounts how important is it for them to be able to pay different benefits into separate bank accounts. Half (50 per cent) said it was very important. Over a quarter said it was mildly important and under a quarter said unimportant.

Table 12: How important is it for you to be able to pay different benefits that you receive at the same time into separate bank accounts? (n=18)

	%
Very important – it would be a big problem for me not to be able to pay different benefits into separate accounts.	50
Mildly important – it would be inconvenient for me not to be able to pay different benefits into separate accounts.	28
Unimportant – it would be fine for me if I had to pay all the benefits I receive into the same account.	22
Total	100

We asked all other respondents the same question. Over eight in ten (85 per cent) said that it was unimportant for them to be able to pay different benefits into separate bank accounts in the future. Combined, 15 per cent said it was mildly or very important to them, with 8 per cent saying it was very important.

Table 13: If, in the future, you were being paid two or more benefits at the same time, how important would it be for you to be able to pay those different benefits into separate bank accounts? (n=210)

	%
Very important – it would be a big problem for me not to be able to pay different benefits into separate accounts.	8
Mildly important – it would be inconvenient for me not to be able to pay different benefits into separate accounts.	7
Unimportant – it would be fine for me if I had to pay all the benefits I receive into the same account.	85
Total	100

Reasons for wanting to use multiple bank accounts

Using open text questions, we asked those who said it was mildly or very important for them both at present and in the future to pay different benefits into different bank accounts to tell us why.⁷ The most common reason given by respondents was that the ability to have benefits paid into separate accounts allowed for the management of money in terms of budgeting, ensuring all bills are paid and putting money into savings accounts.

“I can budget better.”

“One is my own personal allowance and spending money, the rest are for household/family expenses.”

“It means that I have more control, I can decide what I am using each payment for. For instance save Child Benefit, use universal credit for everyday stuff, use PIP for additional needs, like clothing, additional costs, travel, care, etc.”

Respondents also talked about practical considerations, such as struggling to access local banking services, or that the money was for another person.

“I do not do internet banking so it’s important that someone can get/collect my money on my behalf if I desire at a local branch. Some banks have closed down their branches.”

⁷ N=40

Some respondents also felt that being able to have payments put into different accounts could be important for vulnerable people. For example, multiple accounts could provide a degree of financial protection to those lacking capacity or in a domestic abuse situation.

“If someone was being controlled by a partner, it would be useful to split the benefit so the control eases.”

The last reason mentioned by respondents was security concerns, for example, the possibility of sole bank account being hacked.

“It’s worrying to have only one account. These days accounts can be hacked and if I only have one then it would cause problems with access to money, direct debits etc. which I would find very difficult to deal with.”

Other comments

Finally, we asked all respondents if there was anything else they would like to say about benefits being paid into different bank accounts. Similar to the previous closed questions, most stated a personal preference for having only one bank or building society account. This is because they only have one account, feared that having different benefits paid into different accounts would confuse matters or be a complicated process, or they did not see the need.

Other respondents reiterated the reasons why they personally would find it important, whilst a few acknowledged there were situations where multiple bank accounts would be appropriate for other people, even if they did not want the option themselves. This included the practical reasons set out above, such as wanting to split money between partners; protecting vulnerable people, with coercive control being a concern for those in a domestic abuse situation.

“If it suits other people better to help them budget then they should be allowed to have their benefits paid into different accounts.”

“While I’m perfectly happy to have my benefits paid directly to my bank account I know there are people who this would be a massive problem for. I understand that to have the facility to have different payments made to different accounts has been the first step on the ladder to escaping domestic violence/abuse. So I’d hope this would always be available to anyone that needs it for whatever reason.”

What's next?

This research was designed to help decide whether Social Security Scotland systems should allow additional bank accounts to be added to a client's account. This is instead of new bank account details having to 'over-write' the one that's there.

The research found that multiple bank accounts are important to some people. It has been decided to introduce this option for increased flexibility at a time when clients are likely to be receiving more than one Social Security Scotland benefit. It is therefore hoped that it will be introduced alongside one of the disability benefits.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- Are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- May be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialsecurityexperience@gov.scot further information.
- Cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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