

Omnibus Survey

SEPTEMBER /OCTOBER 2015



Reader Information

Purpose

This publication presents the results of the Social Security Agency (SSA) module in the September/October 2015 Omnibus Survey. The main themes explored in the survey are awareness of and attitudes to Welfare Reform, unemployment benefits and barriers to work, changes to the State Pension, internet usage and accessing government services.

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Statistical Quality

Data provided by the Central Survey Unit (CSU) was validated and subjected to appropriate quality assurance procedures.

Target Audience

DSD, Social Security Agency, benefit claimants, academics, general public, media and community group stakeholders.

Price

Free

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About Analytical Services Unit

Analytical Services Unit (ASU) provides an independent statistical and research service to the Department for Social Development (DSD). The work of ASU informs policy, planning and decision making in the areas of social security, child maintenance and pensions, as well as housing, urban regeneration, community development and voluntary activity. The statisticians within ASU are seconded from the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) and our statistics are produced in accordance with the principles and protocols set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

This report has been produced by Customer Insight, a team within ASU, whose role is to undertake research and statistical analysis of the customer base of the Social Security Agency (SSA) to inform the development and continuous improvement of DSD's customer policies, processes, services and communications.

Introduction

This bulletin presents results on Social Security Agency (SSA) questions from the September/October 2015 Omnibus Survey. The survey includes a range of topics including awareness of and attitudes to Welfare Reform, the benefits system and unemployment, changes to the state pension, accessing government services and internet usage; and benefit uptake. Full tabulated results from the SSA module of the September/October 2015 Omnibus Survey analysed by age group, gender, religion, disability status and employment status can be accessed on the DSD website.

Notes

Percentages quoted have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

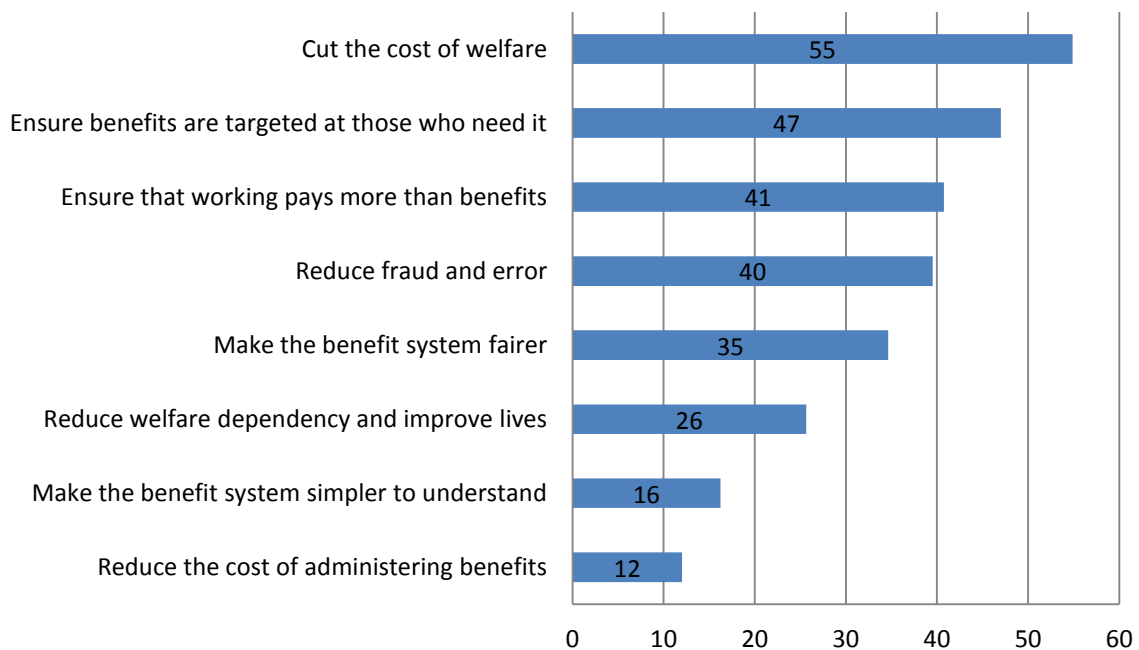
Percentages may not always sum to 100 due to the effect of rounding or where respondents could give more than one answer.

Rationale for Welfare Reform

Respondents were asked if the current welfare system is working. Over half (57%) agreed with the following statement 'no, too many people or the wrong people are receiving benefits'. Over a quarter (29%) agreed with the statement 'no, it's not providing enough financial support to the people who need it'. A further 12% of respondents felt that the current welfare system is working and were in agreement with the following statement 'yes, it's giving financial support to the right people'. The remainder (3%) provided a response of 'don't know'.

Respondents were asked what the main reasons for making changes to the benefit system are (Figure 1). The main reasons provided were to cut the cost of welfare (55%) and to ensure benefits are targeted at those who need it (47%). Other popular responses provided were to ensure working pays more than benefits (41%), to reduce fraud and error (40%), and to make the benefit system fairer (35%).

Figure 1: Main Reasons for Benefit System Changes*



*Percentages may add to more than 100% due to multiple responses

Awareness of Welfare Reform

When asked about their general awareness of the proposed changes to the welfare system in Northern Ireland, over four-fifths of respondents (83%) were aware of the proposed changes. Of the 83% who were aware of the changes, 39% didn't know any details about the changes, 40% knew a little, and 5% knew a great deal. The remaining 17% of respondents hadn't heard of the changes at all.

Specific questions in relation to awareness of key Welfare Reform changes were asked.

- Just under a fifth of all respondents (19%) were aware that Universal Credit will simplify the benefits system and 20% knew that Universal Credit will mean that if a person works more hours they will always take home more money.
- A quarter of respondents (25%) were aware that the Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance as the new form of support for working age claimants with a disability.
- In relation to housing, a quarter of respondents (25%) were aware that Welfare Reform will introduce size criteria for social housing tenants and around a third (34%) knew that Welfare Reform will introduce a limit to the amount of benefit any household can claim.
- A minority of respondents were aware that Employment and Support (contribution based) will be limited to one year for some customers (7%), that Discretionary Support will provide financial help for people with low incomes in times of crisis (9%) and that Welfare Reform will make it mandatory that a person must request an internal review of a disputed benefit decision (7%).
- About two in five respondents (39%) were not aware of any of the above Welfare Reform changes.

Respondents were also asked a number of questions on their awareness of proposed changes to specific aspects of the benefits system.

Assessing the work capability of benefit claimants claiming sickness benefits

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (67%) had heard of the changes to assessing the work capability of benefit claimants claiming sickness benefits. Of those, 38% didn't know any details about the changes, 25% knew a little, and 4% knew a great deal. A third of respondents (33%) hadn't heard of the changes at all.

Making the system simpler and providing a clear incentive to work

Over three-fifths of respondents (61%) had heard of the changes to make the benefit system simpler and providing a clear incentive to work. Of those, 37% didn't know any details about the changes, 21% knew a little, and 3% knew a great deal. Nearly two-fifths of respondents (38%) hadn't heard of the changes at all.

Changes to how entitlement to a disability benefit will be assessed

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) had heard of the changes to how entitlement to a disability benefit will be assessed. Of those, 41% didn't know any details about the changes, 23% knew a little, and 3% knew a great deal. About a third of respondents (33%) hadn't heard of the changes at all.

Changes to housing benefit in the private rented and social rented sectors

Over three-fifths of respondents (61%) had heard of the changes to housing benefit in the private rented and social rented sectors. Of those, 39% didn't know any details about the changes, 19% knew a little and 3% knew a great deal. Nearly two-fifths of respondents (39%) hadn't heard of the changes at all.

The Benefits System and Employment

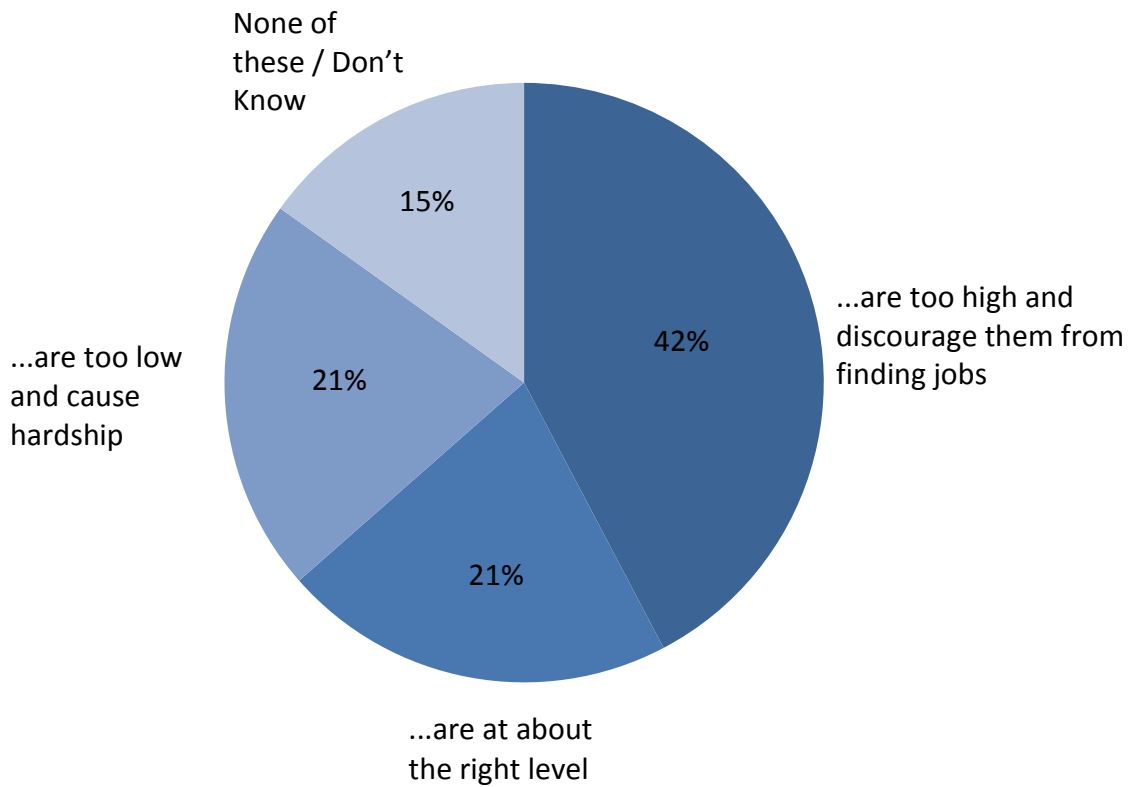
A number of questions were asked on the effectiveness of the benefits system in encouraging people to work and on barriers to employment.

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the current benefit system in encouraging people to work. Just under three-quarters (74%) believed that the current benefits system was not very effective or not effective at all in encouraging people to work. Under a quarter (23%) held the view that the existing benefit system was very effective or fairly effective in encouraging people to work. The remainder (3%) provided a response of 'don't know'.

Respondents who indicated that the current benefits system is 'not very effective' or 'not effective at all' were asked why they believed the system is not effective. The most frequently reported reasons provided for an ineffective benefits system were that 'benefits can provide more money than working' (78%), that 'the system allows people to remain on benefits and avoid work' (68%), and that 'there is a culture of not working in some places/households' (67%). Other reported reasons were that 'there are no jobs available' (25%), that 'the system is complex so people do not know if working will provide more money than benefits' (23%) and that 'people don't have the skills to fill the jobs that are available' (18%).

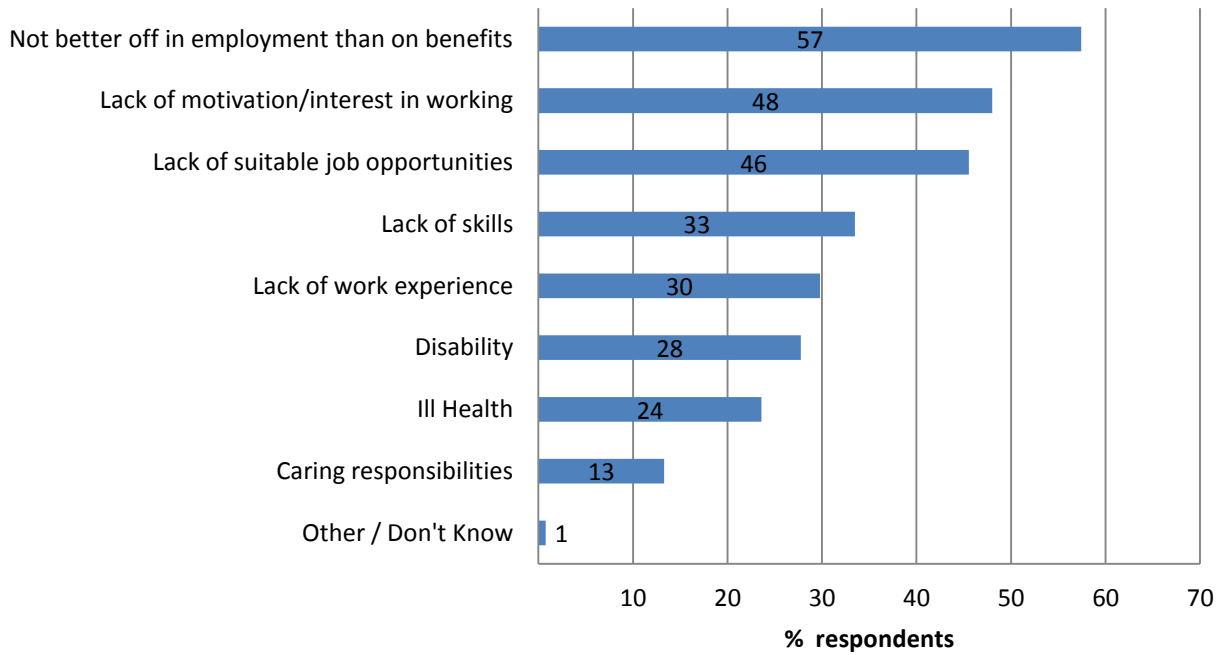
When asked their views on unemployment benefits available to people who are out of work (Figure 2), 42% of respondents held the view that benefits for unemployed people are too high and are a disincentive to find work. Just over a fifth of respondents believed that unemployment benefits are at the right level (21%) while a similar proportion believed that unemployment benefits are too low and cause hardship (21%).

Figure 2: Views on Unemployment Benefits Available



Respondents were asked their views on the main barriers to people entering employment (Figure 3). Over half of respondents (57%) held the view that not being better off in employment compared with being on benefits was a barrier to work. Under half of respondents believed that a lack of motivation/interest in working (48%) and a lack of suitable job opportunities (46%) were barriers to work. A lack of skills (33%) and a lack of work experience (30%) were also identified as barriers to people entering employment. Other less frequently reported barriers to people entering employment were disability (28%), ill-health (24%), and caring responsibilities (13%).

Figure 3: Main Barriers to People Entering Employment in Northern Ireland*



*Percentages may add to more than 100% due to multiple responses

Respondents were asked if unemployed benefit claimants should be required to take a job if it becomes available even if it is not the kind of job that they are looking for. Just under three-fifths of respondents (57%) felt that unemployment claimants in this scenario should definitely take the available job and continue to look for more suitable employment. A third of respondents (33%) felt that they should probably take the available job while continuing to look for alternative employment. The remainder felt that the unemployment claimant should probably remain on benefits while continuing to look for employment (6%), definitely remain on benefits while continuing to look for work (2%) or that it depended on the circumstances (2%).

State Pension

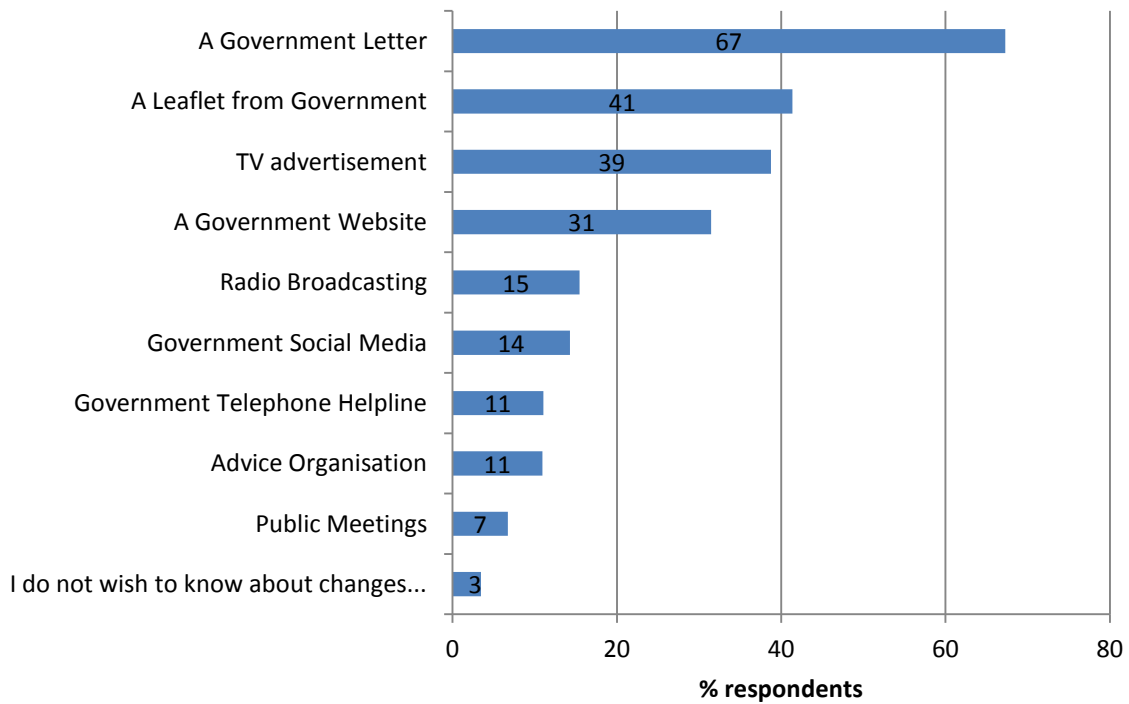
A number of questions were asked on the proposed changes to State Pension and, on how financially prepared respondents are/were for retirement.

When asked how much they know about the other proposed changes to State Pension, aside from the increase in age from which people will be able to claim State Pension, over two-thirds of respondents (68%) had heard of the other changes to State Pension. Of those, 32% didn't know any details about the changes, 30% knew a little, and 5% knew a great deal. Just under a third of respondents (32%) hadn't heard of the changes at all.

Respondents were asked how important it was that they understood all the changes to their State Pension. Four-fifths (80%) reported that it was very important or fairly important to them. Under a fifth of respondents (19%) felt that it wasn't very important or not important at all. The remainder gave an answer of 'don't know' (1%).

Respondents were asked about their preferred method of receiving information on the proposed changes to the State Pension (Figure 4). The preferred methods were a Government letter (67%), a Government leaflet (41%), a TV advertisement (39%) and a Government website (31%). Other less preferred methods of receiving information on changes to the State Pension were Radio Broadcasting (15%), Government Social Media (14%), Government Telephone Helpline (11%), an Advice Organisation (11%) and Public Meetings (7%). A total of 3% of respondents did not wish to know about changes to State Pension.

Figure 4: Preferred Methods of Receiving Information on State Pension Changes*



*Percentages may add to more than 100% due to multiple responses

Finances & Retirement

Respondents were asked how financially prepared they are/were for retirement. A third of respondents (33%) felt that they were prepared with a further 9% believing they were very prepared. Over two-fifths of respondents (43%) felt that they were not adequately prepared or not prepared at all. The remaining respondents (16%) indicated that they hadn't thought about being financially prepared for retirement.

Accessing Government Services and Internet Usage

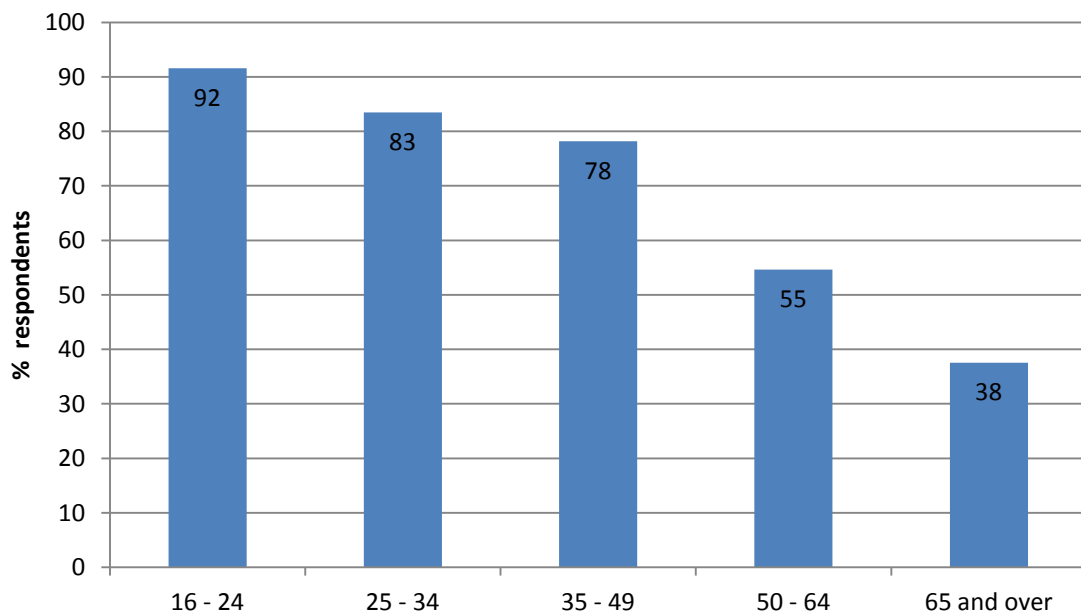
Over two-fifths of respondents (42%) accessed government services online and a third (32%) accessed services via telephone. Under a fifth of respondents (16%) accessed government services using 'face to face' methods. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) reported not accessing any government services.

Respondents were asked if they were to make an online claim for Universal Credit or any other Social Security benefit, how they would most likely access the internet. About three-fifths of respondents (59%) stated they would use a home computer. Other responses included by smartphone (11%) and by tablet (7%). Less popular means of accessing the internet to claim for Universal Credit were via Advice Services e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau (5%), another provider e.g. Post Office (3%), computers in the local Jobs and Benefits Office (2%), at Work (1%) and Libraries computer suites (1%). The remaining responses were categorised as 'other' (10%) and 'don't know' (2%). Respondents who responded 'other' were asked to indicate the other method of access they would use. Of those that did offer feedback, a number of individuals indicated that they would receive help from a family member or friend. Others indicated that they have no access to the internet or they would not be prepared to use the internet.

Respondents were questioned on the frequency of their general internet usage. The majority of respondents (78%) used the internet with nearly two thirds of respondents (65%) using the internet 'every day or nearly every day', 9% using the internet 'at least once a week', 2% using the internet 'at least once a month' and 2% using the internet 'less often than once a month'. Under a tenth of respondents (7%) never use the internet and 15% reported that they did not know how to use the internet.

Internet usage was related to age (Figure 5) with decreasing usage evident with increasing age. Respondents in the youngest age groups (16-24 & 25-34 years) were more likely to be using the internet 'every day or nearly every day' (92% & 83% respectively) compared to respondents in the oldest (65 and over) age group (38%).

Figure 5: Respondents Using the Internet Every Day, or Nearly Every Day by Agegroup



Respondents who indicated that they use the internet were then asked what they use the internet for. The most popular responses were email (81%), shopping websites (74%), online banking (65%) and social media e.g. Facebook/Twitter (64%). Around a third of respondents reported using the internet for Government services, e.g. NI Direct (34%) and for job searches, e.g. Recruit NI (29%). The remaining responses (6%) were categorised as 'Other'. Respondents who answered 'other' were asked to indicate what service they used the internet for. The most popular responses were to source news updates, for general knowledge and for gaming or online betting.

Respondents were asked if they had to use telephone services to make a claim for a Social Security benefit, what time would this most likely occur. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they would use telephone services during office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm). A quarter of respondents (25%) indicated that they would use telephone services during the evening (Monday to Friday after 5pm). A further 7% reported that they would use telephone services during Saturday or Sunday.

Respondents were also asked if they had to use face-to-face services to make a claim for a Social Security benefit, what time would they be most likely to use them. Under three quarters of respondents (71%) reported that they would use face-to-face services during office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm). Under a fifth of respondents (19%) reported that they would use face-to-face services during the evening (Monday to Friday after 5pm). A further 9% indicated that they would use face-to-face services during Saturday or Sunday.

Respondents were further asked about appropriate times to receive calls from the Social Security Agency. Under two-thirds of respondents (65%) felt that office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm) would be appropriate. Over two-fifths of respondents (43%) felt that during the Evenings (Monday to Friday after 5pm) would be appropriate. A further 15% reported that it would be appropriate to receive calls from the SSA on a Saturday or Sunday.

Benefit Uptake

Respondents were asked about using the 'Make the Call' advice line to determine if they are entitled to any/more benefits. The majority of respondents (94%) reported that they had never used 'Make the Call'. The remaining 6% had used the 'Make the Call' advice line.

Those who indicated that they had used 'Make the Call' were asked if they were comfortable in dealing directly with the Social Security Agency. The majority of respondents (85%) reported that they were comfortable in dealing directly with the SSA while 15% indicated that they were not comfortable.

Appendix 1 – Additional Technical Notes

Sample

The sample for the September/October survey consisted of a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Pointer database of private addresses. This is the most up-to-date listing of private households and is made available to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for research purposes. People living in institutions (though not in private households in such institutions) are excluded. A total of 2,200 addresses were selected for interview.

The Pointer database provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but contains no information about the number of people living at an address. Further selection stages were therefore required to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of individuals from which one person (the 'selected respondent') is chosen to complete the questionnaire.

Interviewers are instructed to call at each address issued in their assignments. At the first stage of the survey, they have to identify the number of households resident at the address and, where necessary, select one using a selection table (Table 1.1).

Number of households	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Household selected	1	1	2	3	4	4	2	7	6	8	6	6

The interviewers then list all members of the household who are eligible for inclusion in the sample: that is, all persons currently aged 16 or over living at the address. From this listing of eligible adults, the interviewer's computer randomly selects one adult. This person, the selected respondent, is then asked to complete the interview.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was spread over two months. Addresses were issued to a panel of 174 interviewers in September and 153 interviewers in October 2015. The fieldwork periods were Tuesday 1st September - Saturday 3rd October 2015 and Monday 5th October – Saturday 7th November 2015.

	Number	Percent
Set sample of addresses	2200	
- Ineligible known	259	
- Ineligible unknown (pre-adjustment)	14	
- Eligible known (pre-adjustment)	1927	
- Ineligible (after adjustment)	261	
Eligible (after adjustment) ¹	1939	100
Fully co-operating	1108	57
Partially co-operating	1	0
Total co-operating	1109	57
Refusal to co-operate	598	31
Non-contact	220	11

1 The adjusted eligible households include all pre-adjustment eligible households and a proportion of the pre-adjustment “eligibility unknown” households. The proportion of the pre-adjustment ‘eligibility unknown’ households reclassified as eligible is set at the proportion of pre-adjustment eligible households in the set sample of households: 88%.

Representativeness of the Sample

In any survey there is a possibility of non-response bias. Non-response bias arises if the characteristics of non-respondents differ from those of respondents in such a way that they are reflected in the responses given in the survey. Accurate estimates of non-response bias can be obtained by comparing characteristics of the achieved sample with the distribution of the same characteristics in the population at the time of sampling. Such comparisons are usually made to the current Census of Population data.

To assess how accurately the Omnibus Survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland the sample has been compared with characteristics of the Northern Ireland population from Mid Year Population Estimates (Table 1.3). The Omnibus Sample has also been compared to the achieved sample of the Continuous Household Survey (CHS).

Table 1.3 Representativeness of the Sample				
	Mid Year Population Estimates 2014	CHS 2013/14 (all members of household 16+)	Omnibus (all members of household 16+)	Omnibus Selected Respondent
Age				
16-24	15	13	12	10
25-34	17	16	15	13
35-49	26	25	25	27
50-64	23	24	25	27
65 and over	19	21	23	23
Gender				
Male	49	48	46	46
Female	51	52	54	54
Base=100%	1,456,715	4,810	2,051	1,109

Weighting

Selecting only one individual for interview at each sampled address means that the probability of selection for the survey is inversely related to the size of the household. In other words individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals in small households.

Before analysis, all households which provided a selected respondent are examined and the data are weighted in relation to the number of eligible adults at the address derived from the details of household structure recorded by interviewers on the questionnaire. This weighting process adjusts the results to those that would have been achieved if the sample had been drawn as a random sample of adults rather than of addresses. In this sample 39% of households consisted of one adult, while 45% of households consisted of two adults. 11% of households contained three adults, while 5% of households consisted of four or more adults.

Note: on occasions, in tables showing weighted data, the sum of column totals does not equal the grand total. This is due to the rounding process associated with weighting. The percentages in the tables are based on weighted data but the totals are unweighted.

Table 1.4 Weighting of the Sample

Number of adults 16 and over	Number	Household Size x Number	Relative Scaled Weight (R)
1	431	431	0.5407118479
2	501	1002	1.0814236958
3	117	351	1.6221355436
4	40	160	2.1628473915
5	15	75	2.7035592394
6	3	18	3.2442710873
7	2	14	3.7849829352

$$R = \frac{\text{Total number of Selected Respondents}}{\text{Total Number in Household}}$$

$$\frac{1109}{2051} = 0.5407118479$$