

Citizens Advice Scotland

Impact of COVID-19 on the advice sought from the Scottish Citizens Advice network. October 2021

This is the latest monthly summary of data from the Citizens Advice network in Scotland since the COVID-19 outbreak and covers October 2021.

It shows data from the 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland and our online advice site.

Month in focus

In October 2021 the Citizens Advice network helped 20,318 clients, while the Advice for Scotland website had over 200,000 users.

There are several areas highlighted in October's data that stand out as being of particular importance and which CAS will continue to monitor.

Firstly, the 8% rise from September in demand for advice in utility related areas indicates that as we move into the winter period and with measures such as the end of furlough, the removal of £20 a week from Universal Credit and the raising of the energy price cap consumers appear to continue to struggle. This is of particular concern given the rise follows on from previous months showing an increase even before these circumstances occurred.

Another area of concern is that the significant increase in demand for advice for food banks since May 2021, with demand now close to pre-pandemic levels.

Finally, the 138% rise in traffic to advice pages around failure to obtain the higher rate of PIP mobility payment for a mental health condition is stark and should this trend continue is something that will need to be addressed and monitored closely.

Advice for Scotland website

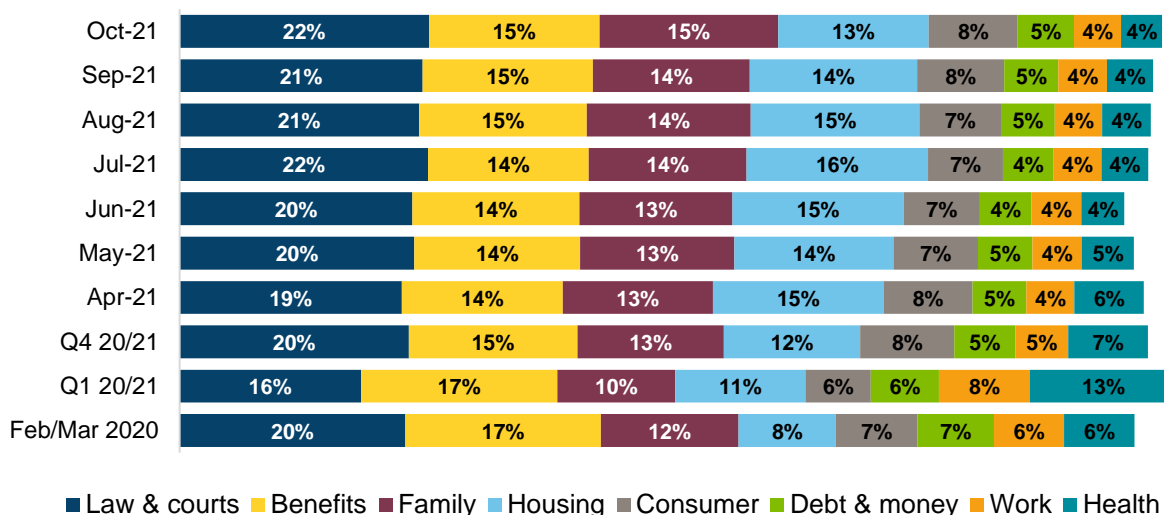
367,597 Unique Page Views (increase of 5% from September)

213,058 users, 82% new (up 5% from September)

Trend data for visits to the Advice for Scotland website, as a proportion of all unique page views on the site, shows little variation between September and October 2021 other than an increase

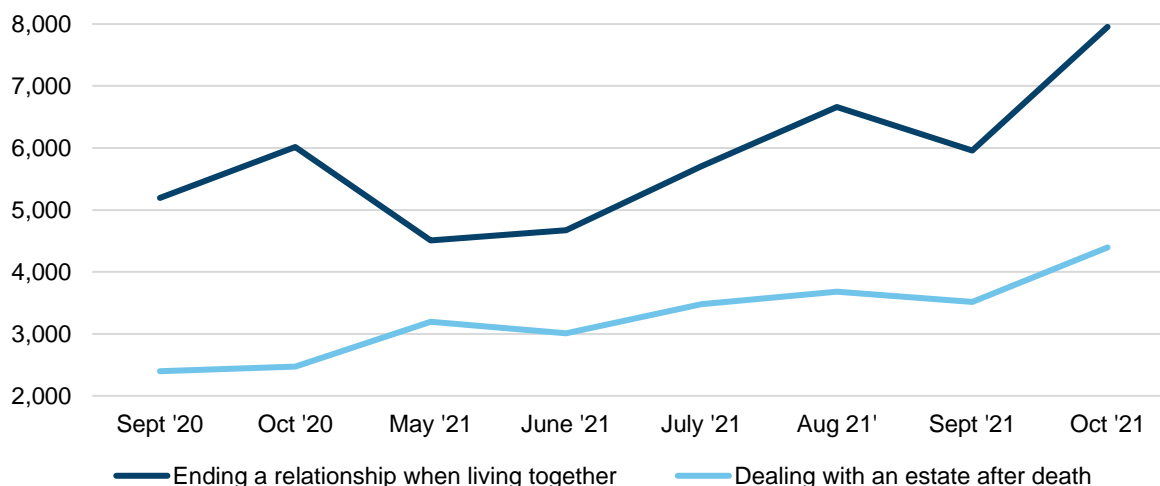
in the unique page views of pages relating to family issues (up 14%), and small decreases in the unique page views of pages relating to health (down 11%) and housing (down 10%).

Advice sought on the 'Advice for Scotland' website, as a proportion of all advice



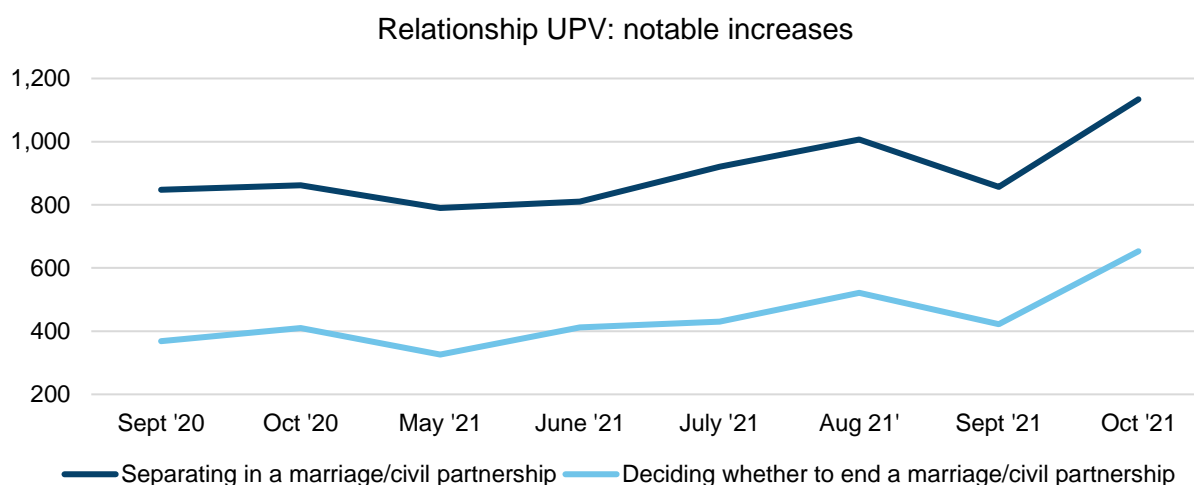
The increase in UPV of 'family' pages appears to have been primarily driven by numerical increases in page views around ending a relationship (up by 30%) and dealing with an estate after death (22%).

Relationship UPV: pages with largest numerical increases

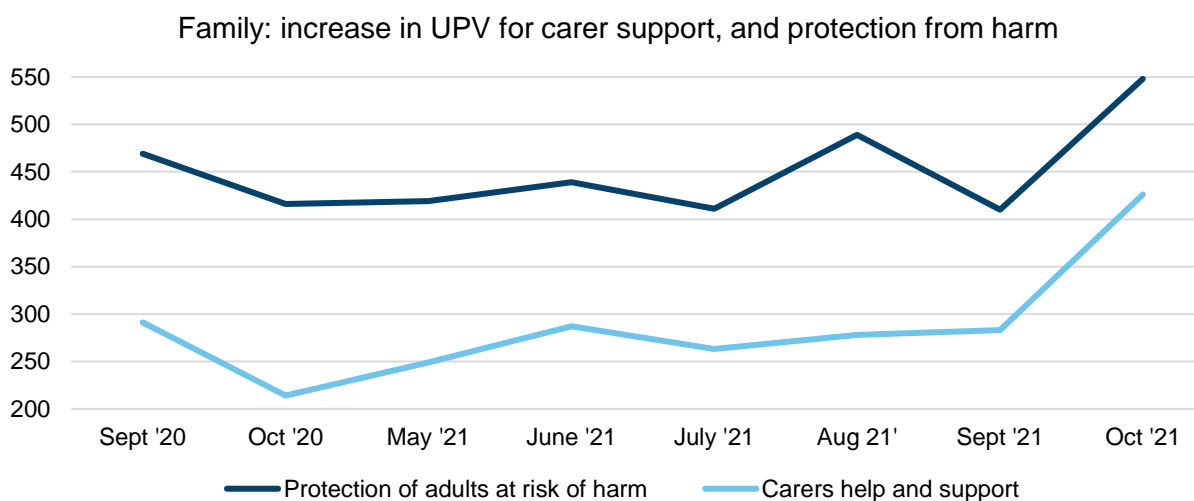


Other relationship-related pages also saw increases, with 'separating in a marriage/civil partnership' increasing by 29% between September and October 2021, and 'deciding whether to

end a marriage/civil partnership' increasing the most, by 51% across the same time period. All four of these pages show higher UPV than for the same period in 2020.

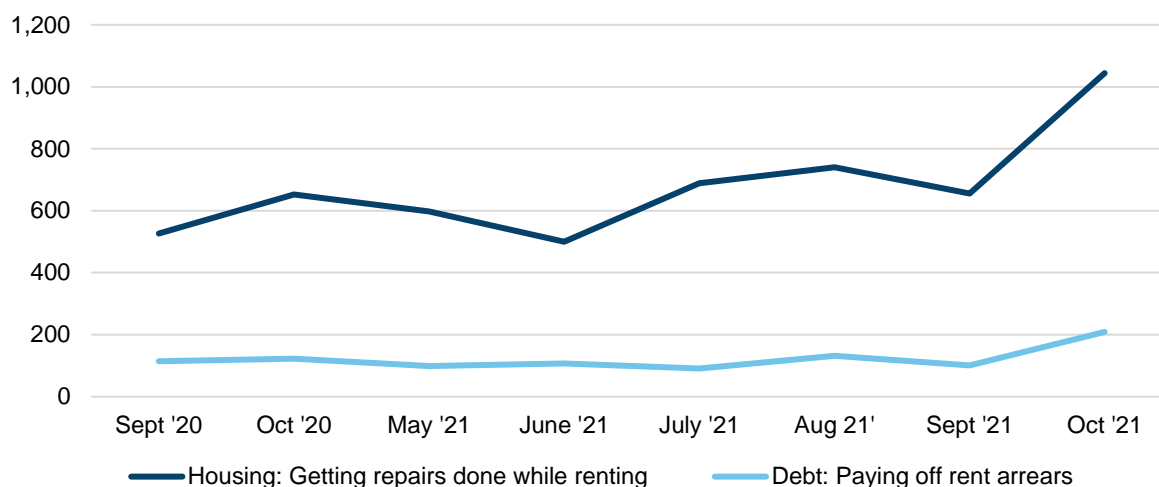


Also under 'family', pages relating to help and support for carers (up 47%) and 'protection of adults at risk of harm (up 30%) increased in October 2021 and far exceeded the page views recorded for the same period in 2020.



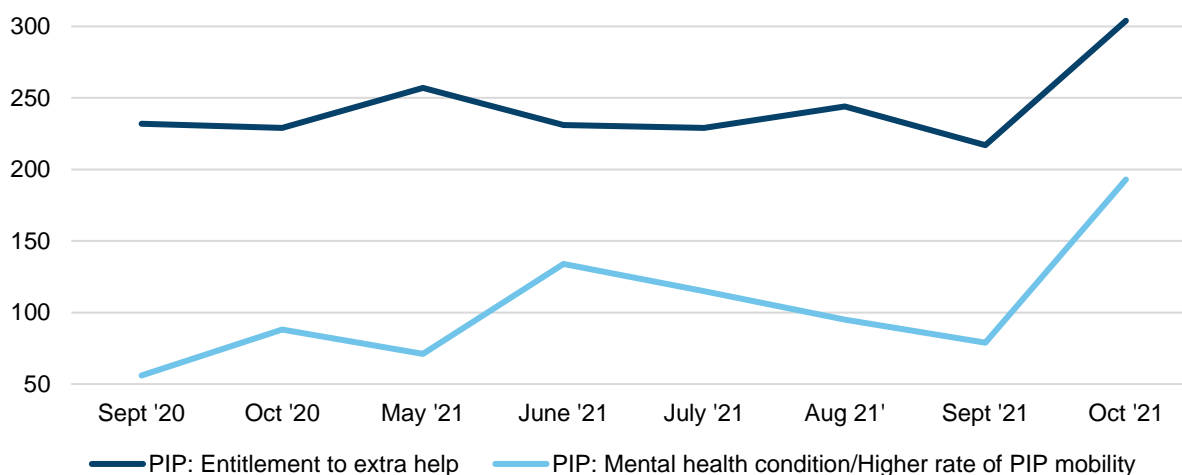
Although the overall page views in relation to housing decreased by 7% between September and October 2021 those relating to debt actually increased by 6%. There were also notable increases evident in relation to rental properties with 'getting repairs done while renting' up by 55% and 'paying off rent arrears' up by 37%.

Increases in UPV related to rental properties



Similarly, although unique views for benefits-related pages increased by only 3%, a higher volume of traffic was evident in relation to pages providing information on certain aspects of the Personal Independence Payment. For example, although numbers are small the page providing advice on 'entitlement to extra help' saw UPV increasing by 37%, and that relating to failure to obtain the higher rate of PIP mobility payment for a mental health condition increasing by 138%.

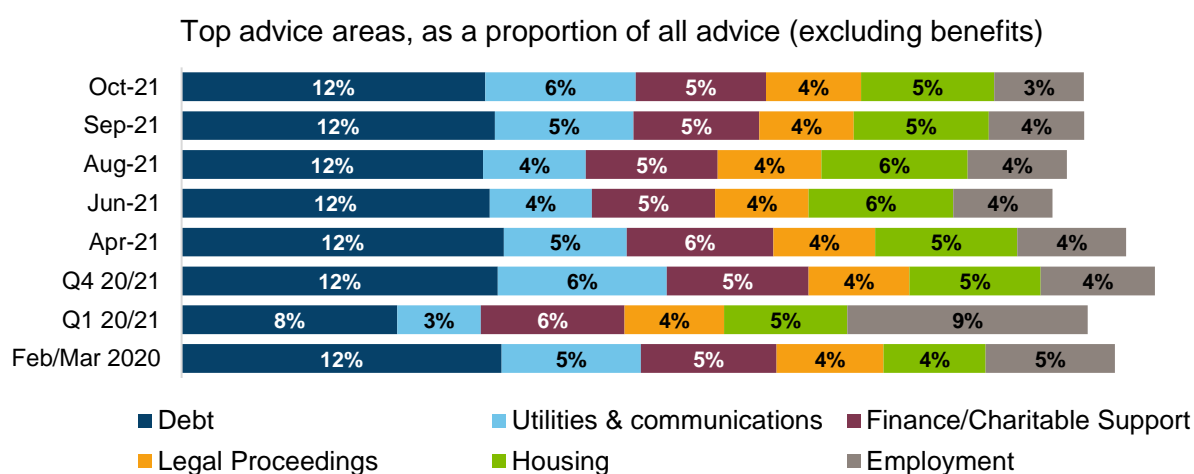
Personal Independence Payment: examples of increased UPV



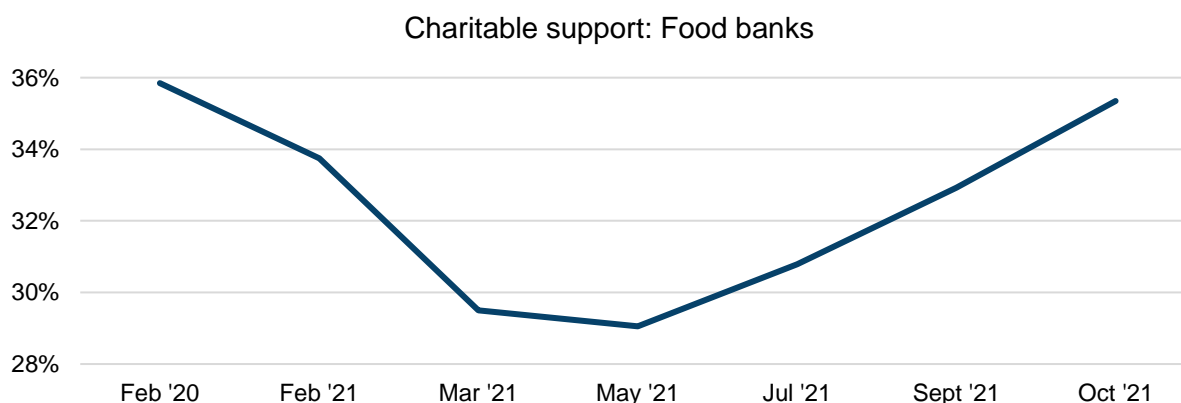
The CAB network

20,318 clients
82,439 pieces of advice

Benefits remained the top advice area in October 2021 at 49% of all advice. Small changes from September 2021 were evident in relation to Utilities and Communications (up 8%) and Employment (down 6%).

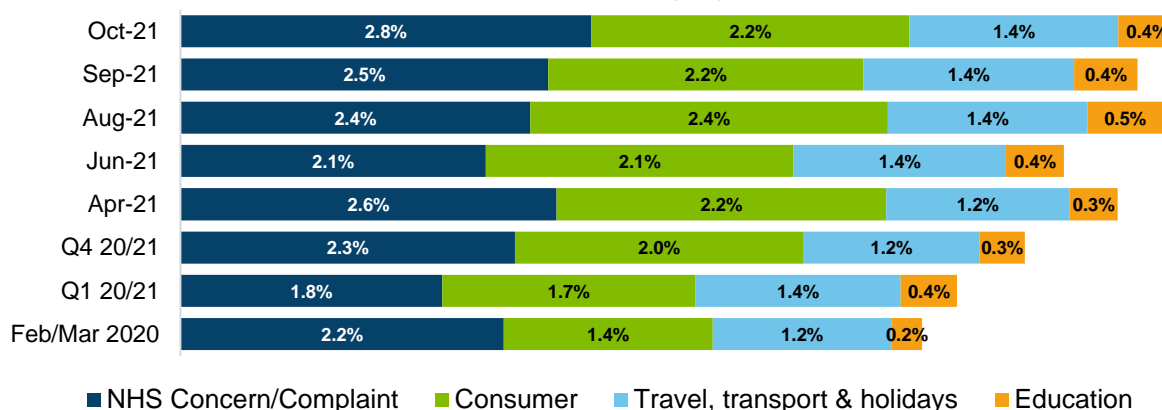


Although Finance/Charitable Support decreased by 8% between September and October 2021, advice in relation to food banks nevertheless increased by 7% across this period. Advice in this area is now close to pre-pandemic levels, in spite of a change in procedures where some food banks no longer require a voucher to be presented (which CAB often supplied).



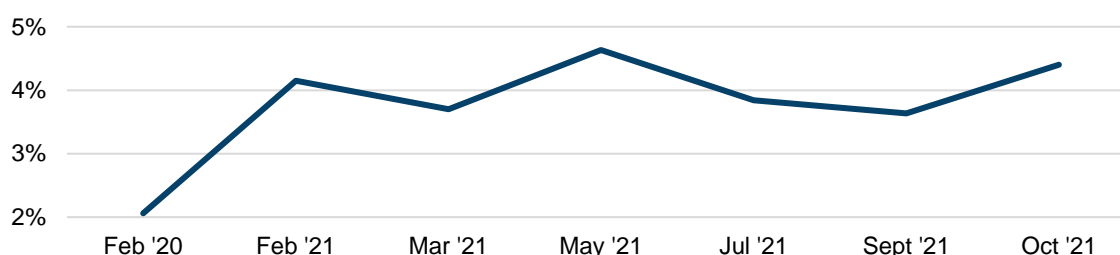
Change is also evident in some of the smaller advice areas (i.e., in terms of proportion of all advice), with increases of between 17% and 89% in Consumer; Education; NHS concern/complaint; and Travel/Transport advice being seen since the pre-pandemic period.

Other notable advice areas, as a proportion of all advice



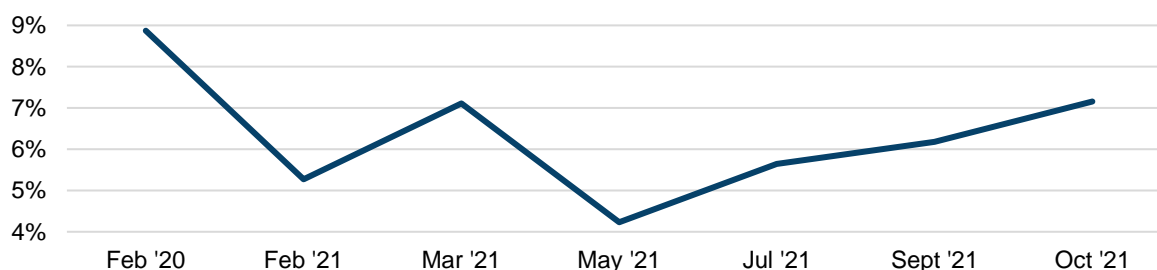
Advice in relation to NHS concerns/complaints increased by 27% from the pre-pandemic period to October 2021. One of the most notable recent increases is in relation to oral communication by NHS staff, which increased by 22% between September and October 2021.

NHS: Staff communication (oral)

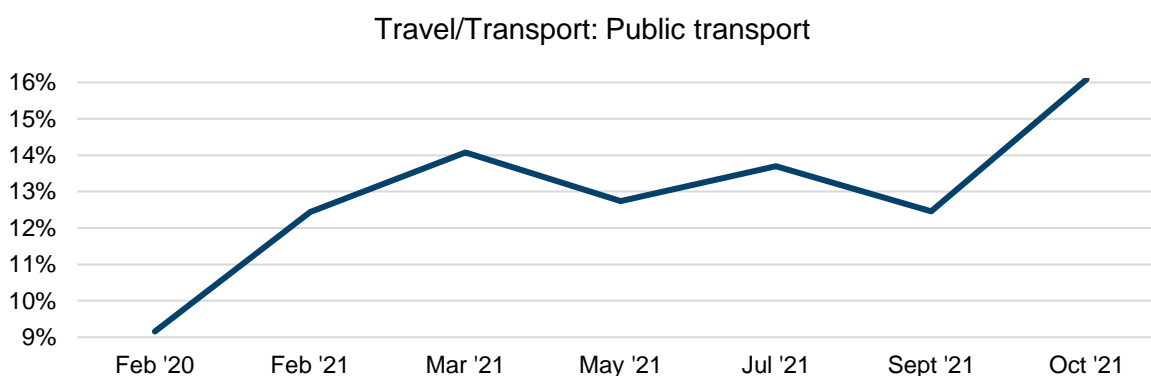


Consumer-related advice has seen an increase of 52% overall since the pre-pandemic period, with the area of vehicle repairs and servicing demonstrating a steady increase in demand since May 2021, and a rise of 16% between September and October 2021.

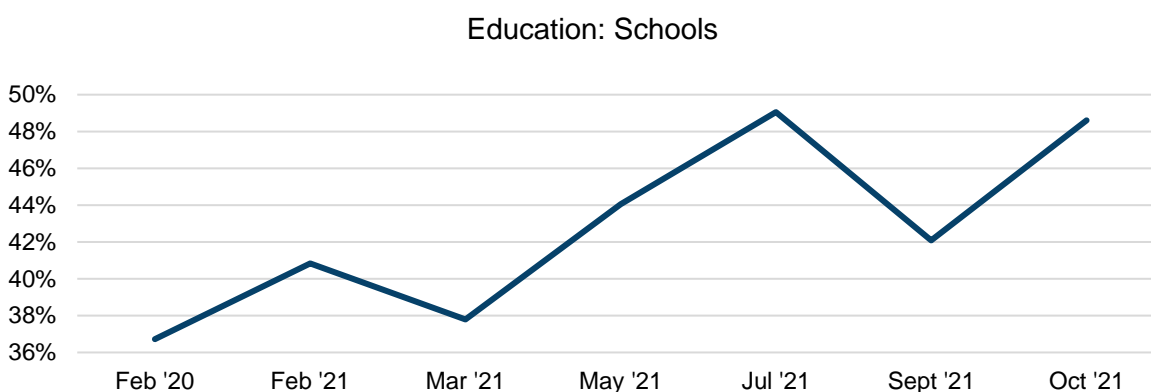
Consumer: Vehicle repairs/servicing



Advice in relation to travel, transport and holidays is currently 17% higher than it was pre-pandemic, with that related to public transport showing one of the most notable increases overall and a rise of 22% from September to October 2021.



Although the numbers are small, Education-related advice has seen the largest increase in demand having risen by 89% since the pre-pandemic period. Advice in relation to schools rose by 15% from September to October 2021.



The proportion of face-to-face contacts increased by 6% between September and October 2021, with those seeking advice in relation to Immigration (22%) or Travel/Transport (16%) most likely to use this method of contact.

During October 2021:

- Those seeking advice in relation Health; Education; and Relationships were most likely to do so through direct contact with bureaux (either telephone or email).
- Those seeking advice in relation to Consumer; Employment; and Immigration were most likely to use the Scottish Citizens Advice Helpline.