



T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

To all MSP's

21 November 2018

Dear MSP,

I was delighted to announce yesterday that Social Security Scotland will begin accepting applications for the Best Start Grant (BSG) Pregnancy and Baby Payment from 10 December 2018. The Agency will be taking applications via its freephone helpline on 0800 182 2222, by post or online at mygov.scot/pregnancy-and-baby-grant.

This means the first payments of this new benefit will be made before Christmas 2018.

In light of this, I thought it would be useful to provide you with more information about the BSG and seek your support in increasing awareness and promoting take up.

The BSG Pregnancy and Baby Payment will replace and expand on the current Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) in Scotland, supporting families on low incomes with the costs of having a child. The BSG forms part of a programme of Scottish Government measures targeted at children's early years with the aim of tackling inequality, supporting parents, improving health outcomes and raising attainment. When fully implemented, there will be 3 payments available:

- A Pregnancy and Baby Payment of £600 for a first child and £300 for any subsequent child. This will help with expenses in pregnancy or of having a new child. There will be an extra £300 if you have a multiple birth;
- An Early Learning Payment of £250. This will help with costs with early learning at around the time a child may take up a nursery place, to support child development; and
- A School Age Payment of £250. This will help with the costs of preparing for primary school.

In addition, administration of Best Start Foods (BSF), the successor to Healthy Start Vouchers, will be integrated with the BSG once they have been devolved, so that they are applied for in a single application process.

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In keeping with good practice, the BSG will be implemented in stages, ensuring that we have a sound foundation to move on to the next stage. The Early Learning and School Age payments will be available by Summer 2019. **We will announce start dates once these have been confirmed.**

BSG provides a significant increase on the level of financial support available to families in Scotland. These payments take provision for the first child from £500 under SSMG up to a total of £1,100, over 3 payments. Second and subsequent children, who receive nothing from the UK Government, will receive up to a total of £800. In particular families who have a second or subsequent child under the age of six months on the 10th of December should be encouraged to apply as they will not have been eligible for an SSMG.

Promoting Awareness and Maximising Take-Up

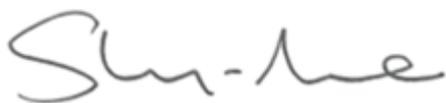
The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are committed to maximising take up for the Best Start Grant and will be working hard to promote the benefit to families who may qualify, so that as many children as possible can benefit from a payment.

I would, therefore, be grateful if you pass this letter to your local contacts to raise awareness among your constituents that applications can be made from 10 December for the BSG, and of how parents and carers can apply.

Social Security Scotland will deliver an integrated communications and marketing campaign to support the introduction of the Best Start Grant. This will build awareness with eligible clients, helping them understand how to apply. We have already had contact with many organisations prior to announcement of the start date, including a series of well attended stakeholder roadshows. Social Security Scotland is building on these by issuing a toolkit to help professionals raise awareness and answer any questions they receive, which you may find useful.

The toolkit is available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vHQ4Lv0OE6WOvIv3P0UfE22wj8Y3kF3Y/view?usp=sharing> and contains information on the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, designed to help you raise awareness of the new benefit.

Please contact the Social Security Scotland delivery team by email at localdelivery@socialsecurity.gov.scot with any questions or for more information



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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