

BEST START GRANT Q&A – ROADSHOWS

About the payment

1. What is the Best Start Grant (BSG)?

The BSG provides financial support to families on low incomes – people who work and those who don't – at transition points during a child's early years. It aims to help reduce financial pressure by helping people buy, for example, equipment like a pram or a cot that they'll need for a baby, or the costs when starting school.

BSG will be made up of 3 separate payments:

- Pregnancy and baby payment
- Early learning payment
- School-age payment

2. When will it be available?

- We can take applications for the Pregnancy and Baby payment from 8am on 10 December.
- The Early Learning and School Age Payments will be available before Summer 2019.

3. How much are the payments?

- The Pregnancy and Baby payment will be £600 for a first baby and £300 for a new baby if there are older children under the age of 16 who the applicant is getting Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or UC Child for. There will be an extra £300 supplement paid for any multiple birth.
- The Early Learning Payment will be £250 per child.
- The School Age Payment will be £250 per child.

4. What are the application windows?

Pregnancy and Baby Payment – between the mother reaching 24 weeks of pregnancy to 6 months after the birth of the child. Applications will also be taken where a baby is born prematurely under 24 weeks. Where there is a change of responsibility for the child during the first year of life (ie, it is not the mother or her partner applying), the window is extended to 12 months.

Early Learning Payment – from the day of the child's 2nd birthday to 6 months after his or her 3rd birthday.

School Age Payment – from 1st of June in the year that the child would normally start school until 28 February in the year following the date of normally starting school. If you plan to defer your child's starting date, you cannot defer the payment.

You do not need to take up a place at nursery or school to receive the payments

5. Why are you not putting stipulations on how the money is used: some people will abuse it and not spend it on their children?

We are very clear that the BSG is intended to give a child the best start in life. It will be up to the family to decide what is most important to spend the money on as they will know best on what is required for their child.

Examples of how the money could be spent include:

- The Pregnancy And Baby Payment – could help with expenses in pregnancy or of having a new child, for example a pram or additional heating. This lessens the financial burden on lower income families when they are expecting a child.
- The Early Learning Payment – could help with costs during nursery and early learning years to support child development, for example travel costs, changes of clothes for messy play, trips out and toys for home learning.
- The School Age Payment – could help with the costs of preparing for school, for example a school bag, educational toys, after school activities such as swimming or football, or helping with the cost of school milk or school trips.

About who will get the payment

6. Who is eligible for BSG?

People may be eligible if they or their partner or someone they care for is more than 24 weeks pregnant or has had a baby in the last 6 months

or/

If they have started to care for a child under 1, i.e. they get child benefit, child tax credit or Universal Credit Child element for them, or have a legal order in place.

They will also need to be on one of these benefits:

- income support
- income based job seekers allowance
- income related employment support allowance
- pension credit
- any tax credit
- housing benefit
- universal credit

Mothers under the age of 18 do not need to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Mothers who are 18 or 19 and in full time education or training, do not need to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit if their parent or carer still receives benefits for them (ie, CTC, UC child or child benefit).

7. Can someone get the second and third payments if they didn't get the first?

Yes. We know that circumstances change, so someone may not be eligible for the first payment but may be eligible when their child turns 2 or starts school.

Each of the 3 payments needs a separate application. Where we know that someone has had a payment for a child before, we plan to get in touch and let them know that they may qualify for another payment when one is due.

8. Will families still be entitled to the multiple birth payment if it was a multiple birth in a second or subsequent pregnancy?

Yes, the payment is to provide for the additional costs associated with a multiple birth such as a twin buggy. As none of the children is a first child, the payment for twins as a second birth would be £900 - £300 for the first child, £300 for the second child and £300 for the multi birth supplement.

9. What if someone has a stillbirth or loses their baby?

We recognise the impact of a stillbirth on a family. They will qualify for a BSG payment if they have been 24 weeks pregnant or apply within 6 months of the day their baby is born.

10. If a family experiences a stillbirth after they have claimed the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment will they have to notify you to avoid being prompted for future payments?

Yes, we would want parents to let us know if their baby has died, so that they don't have further unwanted contact from us. Understandably, some parents will not do this so we are considering how we can minimise the impact of any follow up contact on parents who have experienced the death of a child. We have worked with a group of parents who have experienced still birth to find out how they would want to be communicated with in this situation.

11. If someone claims BSG for a stillborn child and then go on to have a child what amount would they receive for the second pregnancy?

They would receive £600 as there would be no other child under 16 in the household.

12. Will young parents be able to access BSG themselves?

There is a choice for young parents:

- A young parent who is under 18 or 18 or 19 and still in full time education or training and dependent on their parent or carer, can be the qualifying person.

Or

- The grandparent/carers can be the responsible person and qualify for the payment on the basis that they have someone dependent on them who is having a baby.

13. How will young parents who often come from more chaotic backgrounds with difficult relationships with their parents be able to apply?

Parents under the age of 18 and those ages 18/19 still in full time education or training and dependent on someone who is receiving child benefit, child tax credit or UC child element for them, will not need to be on a qualifying benefit to get the grant.

We are aware that pregnancy can have a disruptive effect on family relationships at younger ages, and these young parents may be in transition when they need to apply for a BSG. Equally, some will want to

have support from their family. So young parents, including under 16s have a choice of how they can access the BSG; the young parent can qualify and apply in their own right, or their parent/carer can qualify.

14. Will kinship carers/adoptive parents get the BSG?

Yes. Kinship carers can qualify if they have been awarded Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit child element, which tells us that they care for the child that lives with them. If a kinship carer or adoptive parent does not receive one of these benefits but does have a legal order from a court or children's hearing to say that they care for the child, they can also qualify.

The local authority will already be paying for the items the BSG is for where the child is in residential accommodation or foster care. In these situations, we will not pay a BSG.

15. It can take a long time to get a legal order like a kinship care order how will kinship carers be able to apply in the interim? Are there any circumstances where a kinship carer will not be eligible?

A kinship carer who does not either:

- get child tax credit, child benefit or UC child element for the child, or
- have a legal order to show that they care for the child,

will not be eligible for BSG. This is because we have set these as our tests for responsibility for a child.

16. How will you be able to assess if someone is responsible for a child if there are already 2 children in the household and so they are not included in UC or tax credit claims?

HMRC and DWP systems hold information on all children in a household, not just the 2 children on a UC / tax credit benefit claim. Therefore, we are able to access this information to see how many children an applicant is has listed on their claim. There is no limit on the number of children receiving child benefit.

17. How will you ensure the BSG is claimed/used by the women in cases where there is a risk of financial abuse?

We are verifying that the bank details belong to the client, and if not there are additional checks in place to ensure the client genuinely wants the payment to be paid into another person's account.

Where women are in this situation we will need help from the organisations that support them to ensure that they take up their entitlement. Agency staff will be trained to understand the challenges they face.

18. If someone already has a child but hadn't claimed Sure Start Maternity Grant for this child as they were out with the timescales for a claim, if they were due to have a second child would this child be classed as a first child and entitled to the £600?

No, the £600 payment is only payable where there is no-one under 16 years of age living in the same household that the applicant is responsible for. There are some exceptions to this, for example, where a grandparent is applying because their child is pregnant and the young parent has a brother or sister in the house who is under 16.

19. Are asylum seekers eligible?

- Our policy intent is to be as generous as we can be without jeopardising people's ability to remain in the UK.
- We have not explicitly excluded people with no recourse to public funds (including asylum seekers) in the BSG regulations. But how this interacts with reserved immigration and asylum law is unclear.
- We are seeking to persuade the Home Office that there are strong human rights reasons for not restricting access to BSG. But ultimately this is a matter of reserved immigration policy and we will have little option but to abide by the Home Office's decision.
- We cannot gamble with people's immigration status and ability to remain in the UK. So we will not pay the BSG where there is a risk it will do more harm than good. We are working to clarify the position as soon as possible.

Applications

20. How will applications be taken?

Social Security Scotland will be taking applications via their Freephone helpline on 0800 182 222, in paper form or online at mygov.scot/pregnancy-and-baby-grant. The online application can be completed from a mobile.

21. Is there a supply of paper claim forms that advice agencies can keep in stock?

Applicants can phone the Freephone helpline and ask for a form to be posted to them. There will also be a PDF version of the form online which can be downloaded from mygov.scot.

22. Can the form be filled out by someone else on the client's behalf?

An advice worker may help a client fill out an application, however the client is responsible for ensuring the details are correct and must sign the form themselves. If a client is not capable of acting on their own, someone else can apply to become their appointee, and take on the responsibility of managing the benefit. Or if someone already has the legal right to do this, such as a Guardian or Power of Attorney then they can fill out the form on behalf of the client.

23. How will assessing people for the different payments be managed? Will people be required to re-apply?

At the point of application if a parent has children who are entitled to different parts of BSG, they only have to fill in one application form. However, as children become eligible for different parts of the BSG, applicants will be required to reapply.

We are looking at ways to minimise the reapplication process making it as easy as possible for applicants, this includes invitations to claim.

24. Does the applicant have to formally accept the award before the payment is released or is the payment automatically released to the account details supplied in the application?

No, where a claim is successful, the award will be paid into the applicant's chosen bank account. We will always send out a letter to let people know the Agency's decision, the reason for it and their rights to re-determination and appeal.

First Child

25. Will a midwife need to sign the application form?

No. With permission, we will use the information from the baby box registration to confirm pregnancy. For people who have not had a baby box, we will ask for other evidence such as a MATB1 form or a birth certificate.

26. Is the grant still £300 if the older child is not the claimant's own birth child?

Yes – all children who are not first children will receive a £300 grant. A first child is the oldest child in the household under the age of 16 that the applicant receives Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit Child for.

Handover from Sure Start Maternity Grant

27. Can I withdraw an SSMG claim and apply for a BSG instead?

You can withdraw an SSMG application up to the point where a decision is made. However once the decision has been made to award an SSMG the application cannot be withdraw and a BSG cannot be awarded for the same child.

28. What stops people claiming a SSMG after receiving a BSG?

DWP and Social Security Scotland will have access to data that lets them know if there has been a previous SSMG or BSG application. Before a new application is decided, a check will be done to see if an award has already been made of either grant for that child.

29. If they claim a SSMG by mistake, can the claim or date of claim be automatically accepted for a BSG?

No. An SSMG application date will not be counted for BSG. DWP will write to any Scottish applicants to give them details of how to apply for a BSG.

Timescales

30. What should someone do if they are still waiting to hear about a qualifying benefit and it is approaching 6 months since birth of child?

They do not need to make an application to BSG until they have been told that they have been awarded the qualifying benefit. However they must apply for BSG within 3 months of being notified of the qualifying benefit award.

31. Is it too late to claim a BSG if I have not applied for a qualifying benefit within six months of the birth?

Not necessarily. There is a limited provision for "late awards of qualifying benefit". If an applicant applies for a qualifying benefit within working 20

days of the end of the BSG application window, and that qualifying benefit is awarded from a date within the application window, a BSG award can be made. An application to BSG must be made within 3 months of the applicant being notified of the qualifying benefit award for this provision to apply.

32. How long will it take from the person making an application to the money being received in their bank account?

Clients should receive their money within 5-10 days of Social Security Scotland receiving a correctly completed application form, along with any supportive evidence that is needed.

Redeterminations

33. What is the redetermination / appeal process?

Each first decision letter will include a form for clients to send back to Social Security Scotland, stating their request for a redetermination to be carried out. This form will include clear guidance and timescales. Alternatively, clients can contact the agency to request a redetermination by phone.

Each redetermination decision letter will include an appeal form with clear guidance and timescales on how to complete if they wish to pursue an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (FtT). The agency will receive the appeal form from the client and pass that along with the documentation used in making the determination to the FtT on the client's behalf. The FtT will validate the appeal request and initiate the scheduling of the tribunal hearing.

34. What are the deadlines for redeterminations?

A redetermination can be requested within 31 days of being notified of the determination or up to 1 year after receipt of the original determination if there are 'good reasons' for being late.

The redetermination will be made within 16 days of the redetermination request. Social Security Scotland will take a pro-active role in ensuring that it has the necessary evidence to make a new decision.

Universal Credit

35. If someone was receiving Universal Credit but had elected to have their housing element paid directly to their landlord resulting in their headline award being £0 would they still be eligible to claim BSG?

Yes, the applicant will still qualify for BSG if their UC award was more than £0 to start with but their housing element has been paid direct to their landlord.

Where there is any deduction from a UC award for a payment to another person which takes the money to £0 we would look at the UC sum awarded before the deduction when assessing eligibility.

36. What if someone is on Universal Credit and gets some short term work that takes them over the earnings threshold at the time they are looking to apply for BSG but ordinarily they would be in receipt of an award?

We recognise that fluctuating income will have an effect on UC award levels and have included the month before the application is made in eligibility criteria. This means that the applicant will know whether their award is more than £0 at the time when they apply. In combination with long application windows, this gives applicants the option to choose when they apply so that they can qualify.

Miscellaneous

37. Will money received from Best Start Grant be counted as income by AIB in the event of sequestration procedures?

No. As this payment is a grant and not income, a trustee has no entitlement to take any part of this grant as an income contribution. The debtor will not be required to make any payment of the grant towards a Debt Arrangement Scheme Payment Programme.

38. Why do people need to apply for Best Start Grant: can we not just use existing information and pay them without the need to specifically apply?

Our priority initially is safe and secure transition from the SSMG, ensuring that a robust service is established for the BSG. We do not plan to automate payments but will prompt applications where we have reason to believe that

a child is eligible. Best Start Grant eligibility, rules and processes have been designed to improve access to the BSG.

39. Will you check with the Local Authority to see if the child is in care as part of the eligibility assessment?

No, we won't check this for each application. Only those with responsibility for the child on the day of application are eligible to apply, which means that they must either be getting child benefit, child tax credit or UC child element for the child, or have a legal order placing the child with them.

We understand that in some cases the carer won't get Child Benefit as it remains with the parent. We will also work with advice organisations to ensure that carers who have taken on responsibility for a child know they are entitled to the payment.

40. When will there be a review of uptake/eligibility by local authority area? 6 months?

We will be reviewing our data on uptake on an ongoing basis to inform our awareness raising and engagement activity. At this stage we are planning for a full review after 6 months of operation but we will work with partners to agree what would be the best timeframe.

41. What provision have you made to ensure the service is fully accessible?

We've worked with clients with a variety of needs to ensure that the service works for them, on their channel of choice (telephony, online or paper). The digital application form has also been tested by users of assistive technology, and externally audited for accessibility.

Best Start Foods

42. What is happening with the vitamins?

Scotland already provides vitamins to all pregnant women, and has done so since April 2017. As a minimum, we will continue to provide healthy start vitamins to all eligible children who are entitled to the new BSF scheme.

43. Some areas such as Glasgow have problems having enough suitable funded early learning places. Reducing the age to 4 will mean some of the most vulnerable 3 years are missing out. What are you doing about this?

Based on the SG ELC census registrations data 99% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds were taking up their funded entitlement in September 2017. However our statistics clearly state that the 99% registration for funded ELC is likely to be an overestimate due to children being registered at more than one setting to receive their funded hours and that some children access their funded hours before their statutory entitlement is due to start.

Other sources also suggest that uptake for funded ELC for this age range is high. More recent evidence from our 2017 parent survey found that around 90% use some form of funded provision. And the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) report published in November 2017 indicated that around 98% of children in the most recent cohort accessed ELC provision since their 3rd birthday.

The SG ELC Data Transformation Project is looking to introduce an individual level ELC census which will remove these issues around double counting, and provide more robust uptake figures.

44. How will the joint BSG/BSF application process work given women are eligible for BSF before the eligibility period for the Pregnancy and Baby Payment. Will people then have to re-apply for BSG once they reach the window or will you carry an application forward?

Best Start Foods allows for an expectant mother to apply for BSF payments as soon as they know they are pregnant. This enables us to provide the opportunity for additional nutritional support from the earliest time. BSF can continue for the mother if still in receipt of the qualifying benefits when the baby is born.

As the Best Start Grant payments are standalone grants, a new 'application' will need to be made for BSG payments once an applicant reaches the dedicated application window. Applications are capturing details of all children in the family so that we can contact individuals at the right time, and lead them through a streamlined application for all payments they may be eligible for.

45. What provision have you made to ensure the service is fully accessible?

We've worked with clients with a variety of needs to ensure that the service works for them, on their channel of choice (telephony, online or paper). The digital application form has also been tested by users of assistive technology, and externally audited for accessibility.