Best Start Grant: Visual Summary of Research Findings

Background

The Scottish Government will become responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), including Best Start Grant. As part of work to prepare for this change, Scottish Government have set up the Social Security Experience Panels and have also spoken to other user groups to help design the new system.

Department for Work and Pensions → **Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government will work with people who have experience of the current benefit system to design a new social security system with the people of Scotland.
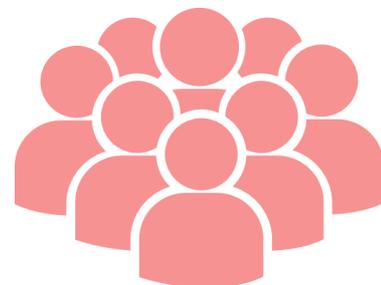
2,400+ people

What is Best Start Grant?

Best Start Grants will replace Sure Start Maternity Grant and Healthy Start Food Vouchers.

It will provide money to help families on lower incomes to keep their children healthy and ready to learn in early years.

It has four parts:

Best Start Foods: a payment card to help mothers and children get the healthy food they need.

Pregnancy and new baby grant: to help families to buy the things they need for their new baby.

Early learning grant: to help with costs of early learning around the age of 2 or 3.

School age grant: to help with the costs of starting school.

About the research

This report summarises the results of research with Experience Panel members and other user groups for the initial design of the new Best Start Grant.

We invited all Experience Panel members to take part in an interview about Best Start Grant if they:

- Have experience of receiving Sure Start Maternity Grant or Healthy Start vouchers

- Have young children (under 5) in their household

- Are expecting a baby
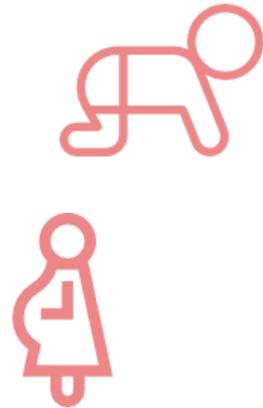
We also spoke to other users who we invited through:

- Parenting and community groups

- Scottish Government partner organisations

- Recruitment organisations

We have spoken to:

- **58 parents and expecting parents who might use the system**

- **10 of these people were Experience panel members**

- **21 staff who might work with the new system**

The information we got from these meetings was looked at by Scottish Government researchers. This helped us to understand what different people need to be able to apply for a Best Start Grant. The information is being used to help design the new system.

Overall, we spoke to:

21 single parents

9 kinship carers who were looking after their grandchildren, nephews or nieces

5 people who need help using technology

3 people who use screen readers and similar technology to access the internet

6 people who are disabled or have a long term health condition

This research aimed to find out:

About who you are

About your experiences
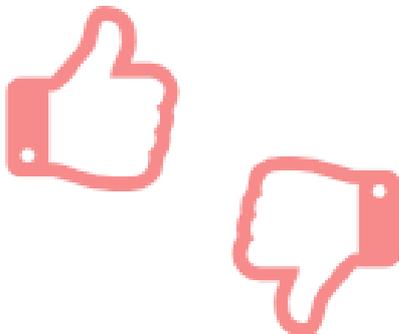
What you need

In this report we talk about the key themes that came out across these topics. This includes some of the areas that people told us are important to get right and what we are going to do.

Across these areas the most important things were to make it simple for people to apply and to give people choices.

Summary of findings and what we will do

1. Finding out about the grant

People told us that they would look for information about the grant:

- Online

- From health profesionals, usually midwives

- In the Birth Book/ Ready Steady Baby

- From family and friends

Some people said they would be nervous applying for the first time.

Some said they wouldn't feel comfortable talking to their midwife about applying.

We are using these findings to think about how we can best make people aware of Best Start Grant.

2. How you apply for the grant

Some people said it would be easier to be able to apply online. Reasons included:

- It is easier

- You don't need to post anything

- You can go back and make changes

- Their health condition makes speaking to people on the phone or writing applications by hand more difficult

Others told us that they find this difficult and would prefer to apply by phone or on paper. Reasons included:

- Not being able to use or access a computer

- A telephone conversation might make you more confident you have done everything right

Some people would like to be able to speak to a staff member face to face. Others wanted to be able to get support from an independent organisation.

Some said that they would do the form a little bit at a time and come back to it, and like to be able to check their answers.

> It is important to go back and look at answers as I have a memory issue, I will always second guess myself and need to check things.

Experience Panel member

We are working towards making sure that you can apply using:

Phone ✓   **Paper form** ✓   **In person** ✓   **Online** ✓

3. When you would do the application

People said that it could be difficult to find time to do the application. They were more likely to do it:

- In the evening when children are in bed

- During lunch hour at work

- When they have childcare

- When they are feeling well enough

We are looking at how to make sure people have a choice about when to apply.

4. Providing evidence

People said that it can be difficult to get health professionals to sign paper forms, for example to prove you are pregnant.

Others said that providing important documents or certificates can be difficult, or they worry about sending them by post.

> It seems like when you want people to share information they don't and when you don't want them to, they do

Experience Panel member

We are looking at how to limit the amount of evidence that you need to provide and making this as easy as possible.

5. Time to do the application

Some people told us that 3 months from the birth of the baby was not enough time to apply for the grant. Reasons include:

- If they were unwell or their baby was unwell

- It takes time to get all the evidence

- If they needed to wait for other benefits to come through first – i.e. Child Tax Credit

> When you are pregnant and got so many appointments, it will be more stress having a deadline.

Experience Panel member

**We will give people 6 months to apply after the baby is born**

6. Keeping up to date with your application

People said that it took a long time to hear back when they made an application.

Some people said this made them feel anxious.

Some people said that they paid for recorded delivery so that they could see that their application had been delivered.

We will send people a text message when we receive their application.

7. People with particular experiences

People who are kinship carers, single parents or who have dyslexia said that they need the agency to have an awareness of the sorts of difficulties they have.

- A single parent may feel reluctant to ask for help in case this is seen as not being able to look after their child by themselves.

- A kinship carer may delay seeking help right away because they are so busy looking after a new child.

- Someone with dyslexia may feel very anxious when faced with reading a web page.

They wanted to avoid the stress and frustration that comes with having to explain their situation over and over again each time they interact with a government department.

We are working with the new social security agency to help them understand the range of difficulties faced by different groups who will contact them, and how to respond in a helpful and empathic way.

Next Steps

We are continuing to work with the Experience Panel and other user groups who will use and deliver the system. This includes asking people to help test our new application process.

Please get in touch if you would like to be involved in this work by contacting socialsecurityexperience@gov.scot.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

☐ are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>

☒ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact catherine.henry@gov.scot for further information.

☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

This report is available on the Scottish Government Publications Website
(http://www.gov.scot/Publications/Recent)